

A Conversation with Greg Mastroianni *Director of Client Relations, Winston Flowers*

Greg Mastroianni, Director of Client Relations at Winston Flowers, has thirteen years of experience and a unique passion for five-star, world-class service. Under Greg's leadership, the concierge staff of Winston Flowers provides a large menu of services that includes personal shopping, custom floral design and gourmet gifts. Greg is an expert at creating distinctive, one-of-a-kind client experiences that surpass expectations.

Riverview Capital Advisors is a regular customer of Winston Flowers, so we have directly experienced their superb products and services. Alan and Melysa sat down with Greg at Winston's Boston Distribution Center to learn more about client relations.

Greg begins by giving us a brief history of Concierge Services:

Special Services Concierge started around 10 years ago. Paul, who started the program, began with a list of 200 clients whom he cultivated relationships with, and simply worked his way into every aspect of their lives. Paul was the outside face of the company. And what I mean by that is, he would go to clients' events and supply Winston services and network.

I took over about 5 years ago, and realized there were two components needed for Special Services: an outside face who attends events and special gatherings to network and an internal group of people who were always on-call to put in orders, answer questions, etc. I've now built a team of four at Special Services. There are a total of 15 workers in the Client Relations Department.

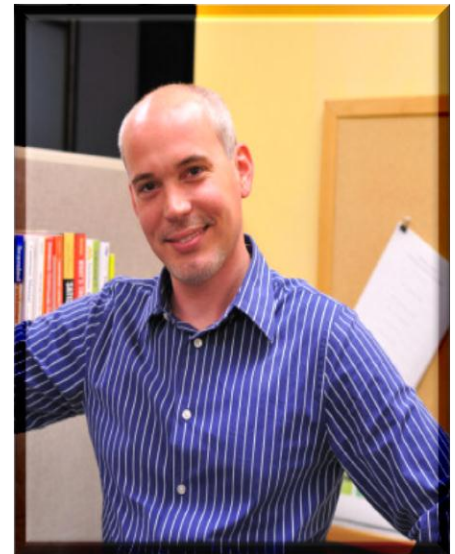
A huge portion of our job is to research, cultivate relationships, and ask meaningful questions; taking an ordinary customer experience and making it something worthwhile.

Passion is often at the heart of quality service, and it's no different at Winston. Greg reveals his passion for Concierge Services throughout our conversation. We asked where his enthusiasm stems from. Greg explains:

Way back when, I studied hospitality management. When I was 20 years old I worked at the Four Seasons, at that time there were only fifty-two 5-star hotels. I was really young, and living in that world had a huge influence on me. I had to follow standards, wear a tuxedo and carry myself properly. This is where my passion for working for the best started, and this is what shaped me into the enthusiast I am today. At Winston, I was able to apply my past experience and expertise and bring more to the table, eventually making my way into the position I am in today.

Greg tells us how the Concierge Services group works with the company's other groups such as Special Events, Garden Design and Residential Services:

There's an outside sales team whom I regularly partner with, and each is the head of different service areas such as gardening, residential, commercial, retail etc. Working with them saves me a lot of time, because I am grounded at the design studios with my team, and am available to my clients at all times. Today, the outside face of Winston is Tim Stancell-Condron, Residential Client



Manager, who goes to residents' homes and provides services. There is an outside sales team of 5 people, and they split up all the accounts so that each is responsible for certain areas.

Greg details the hiring and training process, briefly touching upon Winston's company culture:

There is a 7-step Client Relationship Program that was created 12 years ago and is still used to train every new hire today. The entire company, all departments, uses this training system.

There is no set-in-stone curriculum for the Special Services Concierge. I hire from within; the people in this group were personally selected by me, and people I keenly watched train and work; people that "get it."

What I look for is an innate ability or intuition to discern right and wrong, there is no teaching that. That is the Winston culture, and anyone who works here must reflect those same values.

“ That's what makes the work great; everyone aims to exceed client expectations in any way they deem fit. ”

Accountability of employees in the workplace enhances the quality of company culture. Greg describes the flexibility given to frontline Winston employees, and how that improves service and delivery:

What I love the most about Special Services is the latitude we all have to solve customer issues by finding the best possible solution for each client. The solution may differ throughout the group depending on the employee. That's what makes the work great; everyone aims to exceed client expectations in any way they deem fit.

Step 7 of the Client Relationship training program is to follow through and follow up; if the client experience wasn't positive, we do our best to rectify the situation. Feedback is immediate, and social media has been a great asset for that reason. Customers are able to leave comments on our pictures on Facebook, or tweet us on Twitter about our products and services. We have an operative who runs those channels, and is there to answer, accommodate and fulfill all needs of our customers. The client holds the key, and we're constantly working to keep them satisfied, and we love it.

Rewards programs are common in service centered companies. We asked what makes the rewards program at Winston Flowers stand out. Greg explains:

We have a Preferred Customer Card program (PCC) and every client has access to it. I don't want my employees to sound like typical sales associates, or drone-robots, reading a script. We send the PCC in the mail to all customers. Even if the customer throws it away, they are automatically entered into the program. With this eligibility, customers are able to have complimentary upgrades, free deliveries, cash-carry bouquet, all after a certain amount of purchases. The more customers spend, the more we give them in return.

Whenever Riverview sends a flower arrangement to a client, Special Services is always an email or phone call away for a speedy delivery. Greg touches upon the virtual aspect of Special Services, and face-to-face interaction with clients:

In Special Services, we all have the ability to build relationships with clients without having to meet them face-to-face; this doesn't take away from client interactions because deep relationships are still built! It's not a necessary factor. I think it shows how great of a job Winston does with its products and services.

We cultivate relationships with clients, and through consistent, high-class service, we build trust and loyalty. That's what is most important. Our goal is to connect the dots, and to form genuine relationships with clients in order to foster long-term relationships and add value to their lives in some way; it all takes time and patience.

Co-branding is a popular subject at Riverview. We discussed Winston's co-branding strategies, and asked Greg how these partnerships leverage brand equity. He says:

I think it's essential to partner with high-end companies that match Winston's brand in order to maintain the quality image. However, this also depends on the client. I often find myself in Target, picking up products for clients who have children, in order to fulfill the need of that particular demographic. You have to think about what the client wants, and that's ultimately what we seek to accomplish at Special Services. Some of the high-end companies include Neiman Marcus, Nordstrom, Lord & Taylor, Tiffany's, and local company Beacon Hill Chocolates.



Maintaining a quality brand is an ongoing process. Greg Mastroianni highlights the importance of quality starting from within the company – through the employees and culture. Special Services focuses on learning about clients and ensuring that their experience is top notch. By fostering meaningful relationships with customers, Winston Flowers upholds the core values originally instilled by the founders, Robert and Maynard Winston.

Contributors: Alan Arcadipane is a business analyst at Riverview Capital's Business Advisory Group who helps clients grow revenue and enhance efficiencies. Melysa Latham, Marketing & Communications, is a member of Riverview Capital's Business Advisory Group.