

5 KEYS TO THE HIGH LEVEL OF CUSTOMER SERVICE THAT SETS REGIONAL GROUP APART



The Regional Group's Property Management and Commercial Leasing team: From left, Sender Gordon, director of Commercial Leasing; Jeff Gould, senior vice-president; Tal Scher, director of Property Management. Photos by Ashley Fraser

An elegant marble bowl of Hot Tamales on the stately conference room table at the Regional Group's headquarters is an apt metaphor for this Ottawa real estate powerhouse – grounded in tradition but with a little spice.

This juxtaposition illustrates how Regional defines customer service, which is at the core of what this full-service company provides – a commitment to excellence backed up by years of experience, with the ability and vision to provide the unexpected. And in no area does that come through more than in the company's founding department – Property Management – and its sister, Commercial Leasing.

"There's a reason why after 60 years, we're more active than we ever were, in more areas," says senior vice-president Jeff Gould, a 37-year veteran of the company who oversees Property Management.

Regional has earned this longevity because it has continually evolved to meet the needs of its clients while never straying from its roots – weathering market cycles and trends, and planning for the needs and expectations for tomorrow's clients.

Director of Property Management Tal Scher points to five key elements required to maintain the high level of customer service that truly sets Regional apart.

Key #1: Communication and Relationships

"Communication is paramount," Scher says, both for owners and tenants.

Regional's style is highly communicative, continually updating and tailoring information reporting to the needs of the client, meeting with them regularly, and advising them on strategic property decisions.

"When an owner entrusts us with the responsibility to manage their biggest investment, we provide turn-key management and give them complete peace of mind. They can transfer the burden of their ownership to us."

"Everything in real estate is about relationships," says Sender Gordon, who heads up Commercial Leasing. "Every aspect of our business revolves around how we treat our clients and enable them to make the best, most informed decision. We continually ask ourselves, what would we do if this was ours? I think that's really at the core of the reputation we've built."



Sender Gordon, director of Investment and Commercial Leasing, and Tal Scher, director of Property Management. (Ashley Fraser)

Key #2: Accessibility

"Both owners and tenants have access to all levels of the company," Scher says. "We have an open-door management style. When we say that we will treat your property as we would our own, we back that up."

From a tenant perspective, that means being highly visible. It means property managers, including senior management, going on site, talking with tenants, listening to their concerns and trying to find solutions. It includes an accelerated management-tenant meeting schedule, to ensure that their current space fits their needs.

Scher tells the story of a retail property Regional took over not long ago, where the previous management firm was not visible, not responsive and not attentive to the property. More than 50 per cent of the tenants told Regional they planned to leave at the end of their term because no one ever answered their questions or responded to their maintenance requests, creating too much of a distraction on their business.

"By showing them within the first few months that we were responsive, and by taking care of their needs, they all ended up staying," Scher says. "We rebuilt the tenants trust in the owner and the property."

Key #3: A full suite of options

"When we're thinking about your property, we're not just thinking about the operational side or maintenance side," Scher says. "We're thinking about all aspects of the real estate."

Regional's full complement of real estate services is unparalleled in the region and brings with it the ability to fully maximize the value of their client's assets. That means consulting Regional's Tax & Valuation division to make sure a client is paying the right amount of property tax or walking down the hall to consult with their Land Development team to explore zoning and development options. If there is a way to maximize a property's potential, Regional can find it.

"That's a huge differentiator between us and many other firms," Scher says. "There are so many components that we bring to the table. With Regional you aren't just getting a property manager with a great level of customer service, you are also getting a complete team of real estate experts."

Key #4: Regional knows Ottawa

One of the biggest things that sets Regional apart is its unsurpassed knowledge of the National Capital Region, and its extensive network of relationships.

"There are so many components that affect real estate in this city because it's a government town. And our having such deep local knowledge is important. We understand every aspect," Scher says.

Key #5: Innovation

"Did you know that we were the first computerized real estate company in Canada?" Gould asks. It's just one example among many of the company's ahead-of-the-curve approach, which has included taking calculated risks like enticing Mountain Equipment Co-op to set up shop in Westboro before it was a go-to destination, embracing technology, and anticipating the needs of today's landlords and tenants.

Today's commercial buildings, for instance, need to be close to mass transit, feature sustainable elements such as LED lighting, and offer space for what Scher refers to as Office 2.0.

"It's about transforming what the office space looks like," he explains. "We're focusing on open concepts that foster collaboration in the workplace – open cubicles with shorter walls that will efficiently use space. That's part of where we're having to think ahead and be prepared. If, or when, part of the building becomes vacant, how do we best adapt the space to quickly find other tenants, long-term tenants, and ensure it's always occupied."

That ability to identify and quickly adapt to change is a hallmark of the company. "You can't rest on your laurels. You have to be able to recognize change and answer the challenge," says Gould.

For Scher and Gould in Property Management, that means adopting emerging technology that helps Regional to be as accessible as possible to tenants and landlords, to analyse assets and to communicate with clients in the ways that work best for them.

For Gordon in Commercial Leasing, it's recognizing what both landlords and tenants will need in a building as work and lifestyle cultures change and anticipating where new opportunities will arise.

In Quartier Vanier, for instance, Gordon has been at the forefront of taking a calculated risk to affect positive change in an underappreciated area, having acquired several properties along Montreal Road.

"We looked at an area that is challenged but has great potential for the future. Vanier is a community where we want to influence positive change with mixed-use development. We love to see animated public spaces, and our vision is to generate more employment with great new buildings and public spaces where people can live and work."

"We are fully invested in acting as the force behind that change, and we are confident it's going to happen. It's going to happen together with the community, with our partners, and our tenants," he explains.

"We don't want a business or a resident to come into a building just to pay rent. We want them to come into a building because they share the same goals we have. We want them to say, 'You know what, I see the vision, let me be buy in and be a part of it,'" Gordon says, as he reaches for another Hot Tamale.

For more information call 613-706-1663 or visit <http://regionalgroup.com>

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