



The Secret to Our Success: Heart Work That Lasts

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I retired.

It still feels strange to say those words. Time flew by, and suddenly, at age 63, it was clear it was time to pass the baton. In my head, I still feel 40, but the reality of packing up my office reminded me of all the years gone by.

Looking back, I feel proud and grateful. My partners and I built something special—from three employees to 550, serving over 16,000 households across our properties. Sure, there were mistakes (plenty of them), but what I cherish most is the culture we created—what we call **Heart Work**. It’s why our company has achieved incredible results, not just in numbers, but in the kind of workplace where people want to stay, grow, and thrive.

In an industry where employee turnover often soars above 55%, we’ve consistently stayed well below that. Last year, our turnover rate was just 26%, and out of 550 positions, only five are open today. That kind of consistency doesn’t happen by accident. It’s the result of care, intention, and keeping things simple.

The Journey That Shaped Me

When I graduated college, I had no clue what to do next. I landed a job at a bank, and honestly, I loved it. I was proud of having the fastest teller line and making sure everyone left with a smile. One day, after helping a customer with a deposit error, I got a call from a stranger. He told me his best friend, Ken Wheat, was starting a company and looking for an assistant. “I think this is the job you’ll retire from,” he said.

At 22 years old, all I had to offer was that I could type 130 words per minute and desperately needed a paycheck. That was it. But Ken saw something in me that I didn’t see in myself. Over the years, he taught me everything—slowly, through experience. He didn’t hand me answers; I had to ask questions and figure things out. Those lessons shaped my career and, ultimately, our company.

Why Heart Work Matters

One of the biggest lessons Ken taught me was that our **site staff are the heart of the company**. He knew their names, their stories, and what made them tick. He had personally worn the hats



for every position in a property management company. Yes, he painted apartments, cleaned pools, cleared sewer lines, and collected rent.

One day while at lunch, Ken tipped a waitress \$10 on a \$20 lunch bill because, as he put it, “Always take care of those who take care of you.” I saw him pull cash from his wallet to thank a maintenance technician who brought us produce from his farm. I also witnessed the care in which Ken prepared year end bonuses placed in hand-signed holiday cards and mailed to the homes of every employee regardless of tenure or position. Those moments stuck with me, and became the foundation of how we treat our team—with respect, care, and appreciation.

Over the years, this philosophy grew into what we call *Heart Work*. It’s about leading with genuine love for the people around you—employees, residents, everyone. It’s about showing up, listening, and making connections. When someone’s struggling, we ask why and figure out how to help. It’s simple, and it works.

Keeping It Simple

We also believe in the power of simplicity. A lot of companies drown their teams in rules, reports, and red tape, but we’ve always avoided that. We keep processes streamlined so everyone can focus on what really matters—keeping properties full, residents happy, and compliance spotless.

We’ve also invested in practical tools, like company cars for regional managers, which make their jobs easier. Because our portfolio is geographically concentrated in the southeast, most regional managers don’t have to travel more than two hours from home. That means fewer overnights and more time with family.

High Standards, Higher Results

Our motto has always been simple: *Do your best*. We set high expectations and don’t settle for less. That’s how we’ve maintained a 98.5% economic occupancy rate across our large LIHTC portfolio. It’s not magic—it’s daily effort. We watch the vacancy report like hawks and pick up the phone when something’s off. Sometimes, all it takes is a quick call to figure out what’s slowing down leasing and fix it. It’s this kind of hands-on leadership that keeps us ahead. Those calls aren’t just about performance—they’re touchpoints that strengthen relationships and build trust.

The Legacy We’ve Built

One of the things I’m most proud of is how we’ve grown people from within. Most of our senior leaders started in entry-level roles, just like I did. We’ve always believed in giving people



opportunities to rise and shine. That's why so many of our team members stay with us for decades.

And it's not just about work. When someone's going through a tough time, the whole team steps up. If a property manager needs extra hands during a busy season, help is on the way. If someone faces a personal crisis, coworkers show up with meals, encouragement, or just a shoulder to lean on.

Work, for us, has always been an extension of life. That's why I don't believe in "work-life balance." You can't turn off one when you walk through the door. Instead, we've built a culture where both can thrive together.

Closing a Chapter with Love

Selling our company to CAHEC was one of the hardest decisions we ever made, but it was the right one. It ensures everything we've built—the culture, the care, the legacy—continues long after we're gone.

Packing up my office brought bittersweet moments, but I leave with a full heart. Heart Work has been the secret to our success, and I hope it inspires others to lead with care and purpose. When you invest in people, the results speak for themselves—in loyalty, excellence, longevity, and a team that feels like family.

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