

and you are?

MARK MALERBA

the stats

Born: London, 1979
Education: honours business administration degree, University of Western Ontario
Family: wife Catarina, son Luca
Other jobs: analyst with Ivey Business Consulting, cleaner, inventory control, started electronic-device cleaning service

either/or

Ski or sun: sun
Leno or Letterman: Leno
Map or GPS: GPS
iPhone or BlackBerry: BlackBerry
Satellite or cable: cable
Baseball or soccer: soccer
Bottled or tap water: bottled
Burger or hotdog: burger
Tie or open collar: open collar
Mac or Windows: Windows
Beer or wine: wine
Downtown or suburbia: downtown
Book or e-reader: book
Coffee or tea: coffee
Cat or dog: dog
Fiction or non-fiction: non-fiction
DVD or theatre: theatre
Drive, walk or cycle: walk
Port Stanley or Grand Bend: Port Stanley
Pen or pencil: pen
Early riser or sleep in: early riser

the quote

As a family, we decided that we would not sell and I would one day take over.

Ivey graduate taking helm of firm built by parents

HANK DANISZEWSKI
The London Free Press

Mark Malerba is the first to admit cleaning and maintaining offices and industrial buildings is not "sexy." But it is one that has allowed his family to build Metropolitan Maintenance, one of the most successful and admired family businesses in the London area.

Malerba, 32, is vice-president of the company, working closely with his father, Mike, who is the chief executive and founder.

Since Mark joined Metropolitan Maintenance six years ago, the family business has expanded, opened a new headquarters and won several awards.

Malerba said the folks who clean and maintain offices may never shed their blue-cover image, but they provide an essential service that isn't likely to fall victim to technological change.

"There always a need for it," Malerba said. You are looking after a client's most important asset — their building.

"A clean building is important to their image.

The company was founded in 1980 by Mike Malerba and his wife, Joanne, both Italian immigrants who followed other family members to a new life in Canada.

Mike first found a job as a cleaner at St. Joseph's hospital and went to work as a manager at a maintenance company before striking out on his own.

In the beginning it was a true "mom and pop" business. Mike and Joanne would line up clients during the day, mainly banks and professional offices, and go back to do the cleaning at night.

The business grew steadily over the years, mainly through word of mouth.

Malerba was just a year old when the company was founded, and he and his sister Emily grew up in the business.

Malerba remembers going on jobs as a boy with his father. He spent every summer as a teen working in a different aspect of the family business, including bookkeeping and operations and cleaning.

Malerba went on to study finance and business at the University of Western Ontario. He graduated from the Richard Ivey School of Business with an honours degree.

Malerba said education was always a priority for his parents, but there was no expectation he would take over the business.

After graduation, he became an analyst with the Ivey Business Consulting Group, but in 2005 there was a turning point.

Ivey Business Group decided to move to Toronto just as his parents were approached by another company to buy Metropolitan Maintenance.

"I had no interest in moving to Toronto. I was born and raised here and I wanted to stay. As a family, we decided that we would not sell and I would one day take over."

Malerba works closely with his father and has gradually taken on more leadership roles.

Transitioning a family business can be fraught with peril, especially when personalities and business philosophies clash.

But Mike Malerba said he has an excellent working relationship with his son.

"It works great. In all the time we have

worked together, we have never argued once."

Mike said his son values his experience and he respects Mark's business education and grasp of new technology.

Mike said Metropolitan is still very much a family business with his daughter, Emily, working in human resources, his wife Joanna continuing to do bookkeeping and Mark's wife, Caterina, involved in marketing and administration.

Malerba said the strong family dynamic also makes the business work.

"I took an approach of watching and learning. My parents obviously did something right and I just work to make it better."

The company now has 140 employees working at about 100 sites. Major clients include London Life, London International Airport, the City of London, Farhi Holdings, Lerners law firm, the Middlesex-London Health Unit and Great Lakes Copper.

In 2005, Metropolitan Maintenance won the business integrity award from the Better Business Bureau of Western Ontario. The company won a quality award from the London Chamber of Commerce in 2007. A year later, Metropolitan Maintenance was declared the family enterprise of the year by the Canadian Association of Family Enterprise.

Malerba has also worked on expanding his credentials in the business.

In 2009, after completing a demanding program, he was designated as a certified building services executive, the highest professional standard in the contract-cleaning industry.

The care in choosing employees has been the key to success for the business, Malerba said.

He said trust and honesty are important issues in hiring because the company's employees need access to offices normally subject to tight security because of sensitive legal, medical and financial information.

In a business notorious for a high turnover rate, Metropolitan Maintenance has an annual turnover rate of just 8%.

Malerba said the family gets along both inside and outside the business, celebrating anniversaries and birthdays and even vacationing together.

"My wife says we are like the Brady Bunch. But it really works."

Malerba and Caterina have an infant son, Luca. Despite the pressures of the business, he squeezes in as much family time as possible.

True to his Italian roots, Mark also finds time to indulge his lifelong passion for soccer. He and his wife are music lovers and attend many concerts at John Labatt Centre.

After many years on Adelaide St. near Dundas, the company marked a milestone in March by moving into a new headquarters on Stronach Cres.

The new building is twice the size of their old headquarters. As might be expected Mark's office in the building is organized and spotless, but in the corner there's a toy cleaning cart for times when his son comes for a visit.

"Might as well start them young," he said with a laugh.

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Mark Malerba, vice-president of Metropolitan Maintenance, switched from working with Ivey Business Consulting Group to joining the company founded by his parents.

CRAIG GLOVER
The London Free Press

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