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Technology Services for Small Businesses and Organizations



Ryan Barton - CEO

Mainstay Technologies began in 2004, as Barton Computer Consulting. Ryan Barton founded the company to meet the growing IT needs of small organizations in central New Hampshire. In 2004, he had experience, skills, a green Ford Explorer, and a vision.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: Mr. Barton, would you tell us about Mainstay Technologies?

Mr. Barton: Mainstay exists to help small businesses and organizations in Northern New England. Specifically, New Hampshire is our primary focus. We help those small organizations with their technology. We really bring the stability and the leverage that technology represents, that large companies to small business often do not have access that kind of technology support. Therefore, our team essentially operates as an IT department that these kinds of companies could typically never afford. We provide the full range of the breadth of the team, the depth of skill set and the availability for organizations that would not normally have access to that kind of technology expertise.

CEOCFO: You are certainly not the only company that provides these types of services. What is different at Mainstay?

Mr. Barton: That is a great question. It is something that we spend a lot of time talking about in terms of who we are and what is in our DNA and what really makes us different. The things we talk about a lot here at Mainstay are our core values. For us, everything really comes down to making sure that we are operating from a set of core values that we hold to personally. As a team it has really come to defining values for us. They separate the types of decisions that we make, the way that we look out for our clients, the way that we work on their team and the way we treat our staff. It all comes back to a model of business that defines success by the value they create of all that are impacted – staff, owners, clients, community, vendors, and environment. Unfortunately, so many businesses these days are ultimately about the bottom line and that is really the only measure of success or failure for them. For me, when I started Mainstay Technologies it was really about impacting peoples' lives and helping them. There are few things more stressful than technology and when it does not work well it can be extremely frustrating and agonizing. It can slow down business and cost huge amounts of money. Therefore, to impact those people lives and be able to have those personal relationships and provide the technology services in that context is really motivating for me. Therefore, we fashioned Mainstay as a model of business that is best defined as what the Whole Foods founder has termed "conscious capitalism." We believe that our success is a result of the good that we create for everyone that we touch. If we are profitable that is only one measure of success. That is because that means that the owner is successful. However, we want to make sure that we are genuinely creating value for our clients and creating more value for them than they are paying us for. We are pretty good for them. We are blessing them. We want to make sure that our staff are being blessed that this is a place that provides mentorship and safety and be a place where their careers can grow and flourish and they can be treated like individuals. That it actually makes their lives better and blesses their family and blesses them as individuals. We want to make sure that our community prospers as a result; the non profits that we give to and the taxes that we pay and our community involvement. We want to make sure that it is good for the environment and it is good for our vendors. We do not want to be taking from anyone. We want to see all of our success as a result of the good that we create and the blessing that we are able to give to each person our business impacts. That philosophy really impacts everything that we do. For me, it is the only way to run a business that really can last and be a sustaining force for good, if you really consider all of those stakeholders and measure success based on the value created for all of them.

CEOCFO: When you are interviewing potential employees how do you know that they understand and really believe as you do about the corporate philosophy? What are the intangibles you look for in prospective employees?

Mr. Barton: It is a great question! You have hit on one of the great challenges in running any business. We are a service business and so our greatest asset is also our greatest challenge, which is our team. Having a great team is what it is all about. Adding to that team and being able to keep pace with our growth by adding new team members; it is so important that they really get it and that those values resonate. Therefore, we spend a lot of time focusing on our core values. Even before an interview we ask all applicants that we see which of the core values really resonates with them the most and why. You can tell, really right off the bat, when people say, "Integrity above all else really resonates with me," they will often give you an example of how they have been in businesses where integrity has not been first and has not been above all else; what it means in their personal life. You can tell that they really get it. Therefore, we go over the core values with applicants and we ask questions that pull out whether or not they live to those values in their own personal lives. Integrity is not something that you can put on at work and then go out in the rest of your life and live without integrity. If integrity above all else is your core value as a person that is going to come out in how you treat your family, the kind of relationships you value and the kinds of things you value in a career. When we have applicants who are smart and qualified and have the experience, but all they are really looking for is another job and all they care about at Mainstay is the pay and getting to the next level in their career and they are not looking to come here because of the environment and because of those values and the culture and those are not the things that draws them, you can just tell we are not going to click with them when we are talking. We have been in serious hiring crunches where we need staff and it is stressful to not have the right extra new team member. We have had experienced qualified people who could do the job and make us money, but ultimately they are treating it like another job. They are not seeing those core values. They are not resonating with them. You can tell that we will not hire those folks.

"I think that one of the greatest forces of change, of good, and of created value in our country is the force of capitalism - when it is done well and it is done consciously." – Ryan Barton

CEOCFO: *You mentioned giving your clients more than what they expect. Would you give us a concrete example of how you are going above and beyond at Mainstay?*

Mr. Barton: Absolutely. We always want to make sure that we are providing more value to their business and that the impact of what we are doing is greater than the cost that we are giving them. That is really the ultimate for a successful relationship. It has to all be in the context of a trusted relationship where we have to be a trusted partner. For instance, we do not make money on hardware and software the way that almost everyone else in this industry does. We have passed on hardware and software, basically, at our cost for years. That allows us to be in a position where we do not have any salespeople. We are not trying to sell anything to our clients. We never try to push anything on them. We do not have any quotas to meet. We are genuinely making sure we have the right technology and we are making the right recommendations for them. That is one example of how we seek to provide the most value and take a personal hit, so that we really can follow integrity above all else and be on the same team as the client and look out for them.

CEOCFO: *What is the key to keeping up with the newer technologies? How do you know what is going to stick around?*

Mr. Barton: For us, internally at Mainstay, we obviously have ways that we keep abreast on many different technologies and innovations. We do a lot of training. We go to Microsoft conferences and industry conferences. Our guys get new certifications. We try to make sure that we have a lot of intentional ways that we stay up to date with every change or ahead of the curve for wherever our industry is going. Part of it is that we are all a bunch of geeks and we love technology. We are the kind of people that go home and play with technology and try out the new smartphones and tablets and the new cloud technologies and server technologies. Therefore, hiring people that genuinely love technology, love innovation and putting them together in a team, you get a lot of that as it is. For our clients, we really want to make sure that we always keep that trusted advisor role. For us, it comes down to understanding their business goals, what our clients do, how they do it, where they are going as an organization, what those business goals are and that we are helping them design the right technology solutions. We have many conversations around bringing new recommendations to clients, bringing new technologies to them and really saying to them, "Does this work in your environment, here are the risks and here are the advantages." Of course, many of our clients are hearing things like cloud and mobile computing. They are already experiencing them. Most all of our clients are experience both of those things in some way or another. Therefore, we have many discussions that they may initiate and many that we initiate about that to make sure that our clients are benefiting from all of these new technologies. There certainly is a lot to keep up with. That is because technology expands at an *exponential* rate. That means the rate of progress is just blindingly fast. To be a growing business in the midst of providing technology services, which always has their own challenges in the midst of such an innovative industry, is both exhilarating and challenging.

CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about community involvement for the company?*

Mr. Barton: We try to be very good citizens and neighbors. We recognize that our success really should be blessing many different people. Therefore, we have a charity program where we encourage giving. We do some level of a

matching gift for our staff when they give. We encourage volunteer time. We participate in some fundraisers. We discount rates for non profit clients that we have. A number of us serve on boards at different non profits. I happen to chair the board for two different non profits locally. Several of our team members are active on boards or in charities. Mainstay is a member of multiple chambers of commerce across the state. We go to many events. We host open houses at our offices. We just really try to go out of our way to make sure that we are blessing the community, blessing the chambers and businesses and the non profits that really take care of the needy, both through some intentional giving and through some volunteering and through discounted services and just being a part of events and really being a part of the neighborhood, doing our part.

CEOCFO: *Are there particular types of businesses that you tend to work with?*

Mr. Barton: We work across a number of different industries. There are quite a few industries that we work in ranging from municipalities to corporations and non profits. We work across a number of different industries, partly because we really love the synergy that happens and what we pick up. Working with one of our medical clients about security and the kind of security innovative work that we have to do for them really ends up being a benefit to all of our clients. For instance, if we just focused on municipalities we probably would not be quite as cutting edge when it comes to security. Also, from a business standpoint, we really like having different industries, both from the growth that it can create and from the stability. A number of years ago when the market kind of collapsed we were a much smaller company. We had a few mortgage broker clients that got massively hit or wiped out and if we had only been in the finance sector our business would have been really, really hurting. Therefore, the fact that we have been across multiple industries ends up working well. Our target size tends to be between ten and about one hundred and fifty employees. That tends to be our sweet spot for the kind of team based approach that we can provide and the greatest value. About a quarter of our clients have their own IT person full time on site and then we supplement them and that one person gets the benefit of working with a forty person team for twenty four seven coverage for projects, for consulting, for that kind of second tier support when they just need a question answered or they need an issue fixed.

CEOCFO: *How do you reach potential clients?*

Mr. Barton: We do that through many different ways. We recognize that what we ultimately are, as I said several times in this conversation, a trusted advisor. A trusted advisor relationship is very different than selling a commodity. We are not out to try to sell as much offsite backup as possible or spam filtering and just push these products or new servers. We are trying to make sure that we establish relationships that then last for a very, very long time and are based around a "trusted advisor" relationship. That does not happen through cold calling. It does not really tend to happen through a traditional sales approach. We teach a lot of seminars. We write articles. We work with positioning ourselves in terms of publicity and marketing to really position ourselves with this folks and do a fair bit of networking. Much of our growth just happens very organically through word of mouth and through folks that recognize their need for a high quality, little bit of a larger team approach than a lot of what they have had options for in this area. Therefore, they go looking for us or through the publicity that we get and through our web presence they end up being able to find us fairly easily. We try to make sure that we have good positioning, that we are very easy to find, that people hear about us in many different places and then allow them to come to us and find us, rather than doing a very targeted kind of direct or telemarketing kind of approach.

CEOCFO: *What are some of the things that have surprised you since starting Mainstay?*

Mr. Barton: There have been a lot of surprises! We have grown a lot! Six years ago it was just me and now we have just gotten over forty employees. I think what surprised me is how fun the business side is. I got into this because I love technology at it. I was a technology consultant, not because I was a businessman and to really see for myself. It has been a wonderful surprise to see how my passion has truly found a home in growing the business and leading the business, more than even working the technology, for me personally. It has been a surprise that it has been as challenging as it is to grow a business and do it well; the scale quality, the scale of the experience, the high touch experience that you get when it is a one or two person shop and to really grow that. I think it has been a surprise, all the different challenges along the way. It has also been a surprise that I have been able to find so many great people, especially because we are in New Hampshire. We are not in a high tech Mecca. We are not in Boston. We are in New Hampshire and to find so many great people that genuinely care, that genuinely resonate through our core values, that are great, talented professionals and that are intelligent, experience people who want to work and buy this vision and work on this team, to see how our culture has been able to scale and how much we are even more "Mainstay" today than we were when it was just me and to see how that has translated across the team. It has been such a wonderful surprise to find so many other similar people that we have been able to hire and some that have moved here from other states to New Hampshire. It has just been absolutely wonderful.

CEOCFO: *Are there areas or services you would like to add that you are not currently offering or areas of technology that you would like to be a little more involved with?*

Mr. Barton: That is a great question! We are always innovating our service model, partly because our industry is changing so fast. We are always seeking those new ways to provide more value to our clients. We are just really expanding our development pipeline in terms of being able to do customer work for clients. I think that being able to help

clients understand their data and work with reports and work with data and create dashboards is something that we are really looking hard a moving more into. That is because, ultimately, you can have the best running system, but if you are not getting the data that you need when you need it and the right optics into your business, then that great technology only goes so far. We are moving more into training. We want to make sure that we are providing a level of training to our clients, ranging from security to just proper efficient use of computers and higher levels of security. That is because the threats that used to exist only for large organizations, those threats are now really applying to small businesses as well. Therefore, security innovation and a level of monitoring and responding to attacks are something that we certainly provide, but taking that to the next level and really finding ways to constantly increase protection for our clients. We like to try to find enterprise level technologies to see how we can scale them down and make it a cost effective way for small businesses. We have a holistic security model. That is a service component that we are rapidly working on innovating and developing.

CEOCFO: *What is your day like as CEO?*

Mr. Barton: That is a great question. I like to stay involved many aspects of the business. I tend to meet quite a bit with department heads and the managers and understand the challenges that they are facing. I like to meet with clients and understand their challenges, both with what they are facing in the industry and what is working and what is not in terms of the relationship with Mainstay and how we can provide better service. I spend a lot of time meeting with my team to innovate what we are doing as a business and as a company. Of course, I have got to make sure that I am watching the company across all kinds of measures, especially when we are growing fast it is easy for things to get out of balance. Therefore, I spend a lot of time really monitoring and working with the different things that we have control over in terms of quality, service, growth rate, profitability, the way that we are training our staff and the back end systems to make sure that we are really continuing quality. For me, if we double in size and we double in profitability, but we lose the quality of the clients and we start losing clients and having client turnover rates and start having staff that are getting burnt out, that's not success. That is so easy to happen in a technology industry, because it is just the challenge of working with technology and being a service business. If we grow and we meet those financial goals and those size goals, but we lose those other things, to me that is not success. Therefore, I spend a lot of time making sure we are focused on the right things, that we can really fulfill that vision in a meaningful way.

CEOCFO: *Why pay attention to Mainstay Technologies?*

Mr. Barton: What we are doing is providing a high touch, high quality relationship, at a very cost effective level to small businesses, so that they can leverage technology and do it in this conscious capitalism kind of way. If I could say anything to your readers, it would be to pay more attention to all of the stakeholders in the business and making sure that all are being blessed and having so much good poured into their lives as a result of the business and that success is really based on how well you meet all of those things. The CEO of Whole Foods wrote this great book called Conscious Capitalism that I think is an absolute must read for any business owner or business leader today. That is because I think that one of the greatest forces of change, of good, and of created value in our country is the force of capitalism - when it is done well and it is done consciously. We are generally trying to do this in a way that blesses our staff and our clients and our community and everyone that we touch in a way that everyone's life is better off because Mainstay Technologies exists. If there are people that we are really taking from more than we are giving, that isn't success. It is not just about a paycheck. A person works for a paycheck, but that is ultimately only one factor. That does not provide happiness. If you talk to people who are stressed out and make a lot of money and hate their jobs, you realize very quickly that that is only one factor in what it really takes to bless a staff member. Therefore, here at Mainstay we are trying to build in a fast moving industry that does not have a lot of big players. We are looking to build a long lasting company that really lives the core values and seeks to bless others like that in that kind of an intentional business model. To me that is the exciting thing, when I hear other business owners talking about that and I see that they get that. I do not always hear that very often, but it is really exciting to me, because that is really the long lasting thing of true value.

BIO: Ryan Barton is the founder and CEO of Mainstay Technologies – a Business NH Magazine “Business of the Year” in 2013, and a member of the Inc 500 | 5000 list two years in a row. He recently won the NH Rising Stars Young Professional of the Year award, chairs 2 nonprofits, and is a serial entrepreneur.

“As CEO of Mainstay, I am responsible for ensuring that we have a compelling vision, that we create the right strategies, and that we are hitting our goals. I work closely with the executive team on strategic planning and the continual evolution of our IT services. We have a fantastic team and really wonderful clients, which makes my job a true joy.”

When I was drawn to a career in computers:

When I was 9, my father brought home a “cutting edge” black and white computer from work. I think I spent 8 hours on the computer that first day and I never looked back. I found technology endlessly fascinating and rewarding, and the journey began for me that very day.