

R. Craig Coppola: Focus on Developing Talent

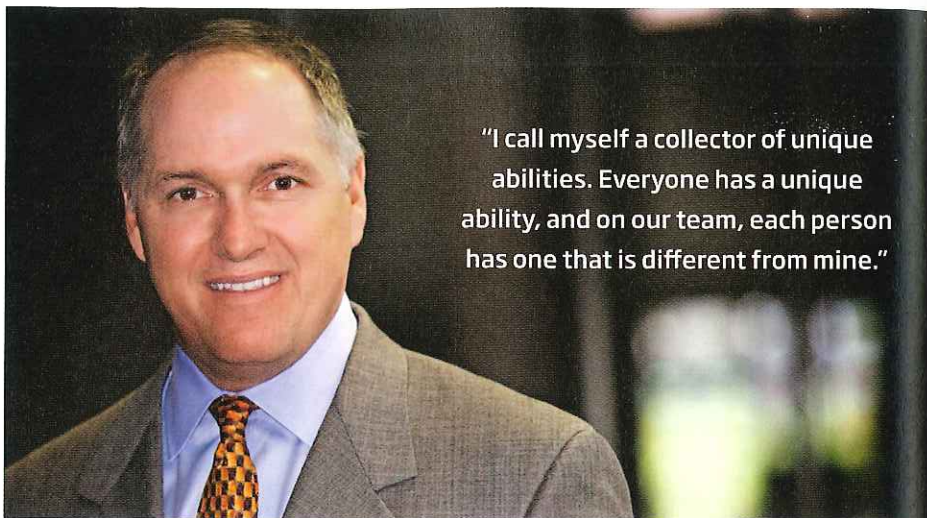
Lee & Associates founding principal R. Craig Coppola refers to himself as “a collector of unique abilities”

by Alison Stanton

THROUGH HIS 38 years in commercial real estate, Lee & Associates Arizona founding principal R. Craig Coppola has discovered a very important key to success: maintaining a constant and consistent focus on building a great team. “I call myself a collector of unique abilities,” Coppola says. “Everyone has a unique ability, and on our team, each person has one that is different from mine.”

In addition, rather than sitting back and being content with the team of employees he has, Coppola says he is always looking for ways he can hire more people and grow the team. “I meet people and find out what unique abilities they have, and then, with that information, put them into roles.”

In order to help find the best possible employees with the skills that Lee & Associates needs, Coppola says he utilizes the Kolbe Indexes as part of the interview process. These instinct assessments measure how people naturally do things, which Coppola says provides him with a really accurate way to determine what people are naturally good at. Coppola used the tests — which are available at Kolbe.com — when he was looking for his two assistants. “Both of them scored very high on following through with things, which is exactly what I want my assistants to do,” he says.



“I call myself a collector of unique abilities. Everyone has a unique ability, and on our team, each person has one that is different from mine.”

In some cases, Coppola says, determining what someone’s strengths and abilities are means assigning them to roles they would not otherwise have considered. “In the case of my administrative assistants, neither one of them had ever experienced this type of role before,” he says.

Knowing that he has hired the best people for each position at work is quite satisfying, Coppola says. “I like watching people do fantastic things. It’s the same reason we like to watch the Olympics; we like to see athletes like pole vaulters and think, ‘Wow, I could never pole vault 18 feet.’”

Another factor that Coppola says has contributed to the overall success of his company is the way his office is laid out. The office currently houses seven people, but, instead of having individual offices or cubicles, everyone shares one open space. “Our entire team sits in one big cube, including me,” he says.

Working in an open environment has several advantages, Coppola says, including

the ability for everyone to have an open dialogue and great communication, as well as the chance for the team to learn from everyone else. “I literally sit within two feet of my interns and assistants, and everyone can hear information throughout the day and also hear me when I’m on the phone.”

Because the commercial real estate business is very cyclical, Coppola does what he can to keep overhead costs as low as possible to help Lee & Associates weather the inherent downs. “We try to keep our costs reasonable so when [down] cycles hit we don’t have to shut our doors. We are very conservative with our expenses.”

For example, although the company is in a fantastic, albeit spendy location at 32nd St. and Camelback and is filled with state-of-the-art technology, Coppola says they cut corners in other, more significant ways. “We don’t have 20 different office spaces to maintain, so we are very frugal that way. And we have a very flat organization, with no management layers within the company, like principals and associates. We have a very lean staff,” he says.

In addition to putting people in the right position and helping them succeed, Coppola believes that to help ensure every member of his team stays with the company for as long as possible it is important to not skimp on pay. “If you spend your days doing what you truly love to do, and you get paid a great salary, why would you ever leave?” The average tenure of brokers at Lee & Associates Arizona is almost 20 years. ■

A Passion for Real Estate

- R. Craig Coppola, one of eight principals who founded Lee & Associates Arizona in 1991, is the highest-producing office broker in parent company Lee & Associates’ 35-year history.
- The Coppola-Cheney Group, led by principals Coppola and Andrew Cheney, is the No. 1 office leasing and sales team in Lee & Associates’ history.
- Coppola has earned the top three industry designations: Certified Commercial Investment Member (CCIM), Society of Industrial and Office Realtors (SIOR) and Counselors of Real Estate (CRE). He is one of fewer than 40 people worldwide who hold all three designations, and one of only 17 professionals in Arizona who hold both CCIM and SIOR designations.
- Coppola is also the author of *How To Win In Commercial Real Estate Investing* and *The Art of Commercial Real Estate Leasing*; his latest, *The Fantastic Life: How to Get it, Live it and Pass it On*, is being released this fall

Lee & Associates Arizona lee-associates.com/arizona