

CornerStone Title: Creating Partnerships in Title and Beyond

By Lalaena Gonzalez-Figueroa | Photography by Jennifer Soos



Tom and Mary Howard at their residence, a newly remodeled farm home, located just minutes from their Lakewood Ranch office

When founders Tom and Mary Howard opened CornerStone Title in 2006, they did so with a well-defined vision for their company and its purpose. During a transitioning real estate market, the couple went into the industry understanding the challenges that awaited. "But we moved forward anyway," recalls Mary. "We knew what would work, and we really had a desire to build a company that would be both successful and significant."

Less than five years after launching CornerStone Title, the Howards are proof positive that opportunities do exist, despite an inundation of negative market projections. Mary states that the company has grown to become the second leading independently-owned title company in Sarasota and Manatee Counties, gaining market share through a highly personalized and attentive approach. Tom explains, "Anyone can create an efficient title agency. What we add is an exceptional experience, for both consumers and real estate professionals, with every closing. We partner with agents, brokers, lenders and builders to become an extension of their teams, and we focus on how we can contribute to their success in every aspect of the relationship."

At the foundation of CornerStone's business is a commitment to providing clear communication, attention to detail and a sense of urgency. Building upon these principles, the company has developed its "Perfect 10", a plan for the ideal business entity that lays out, in specific and accomplishable details, how the Howards envision CornerStone Title at its finest. Among the issues addressed are creating and sustaining a welcoming office environment, utilizing systemization and technology in order to facilitate a more efficient and productive transaction, and maintaining an organization built upon a solid foundation of values and professionalism.

Putting their vision into action, Tom and Mary have built a purpose-driven business that consistently takes ideas from paper to real life. Their office offers a friendly atmosphere, a place where business is conducted professionally and with a personal touch. Every transaction is facilitated by a dedicated closer, a licensed and richly experienced individual who offers support from the start of business to beyond the closing. And all transactions are handled with an empathetic approach. Explains Mary, "Each member of our team shares in our values and treats every closing as if it were the closing of their own home." This is more than a process; we are providing a solid product and a positive experience for all parties involved."

Tom adds, "As partners with real estate professionals, we are an integral component to a satisfied client. A chef who prepares a great meal still depends on the efforts of an excellent wait staff to deliver the last impression in order to ensure a truly satisfied customer. We provide exceptional customer care in order to maximize the experience and assist our partners in growing their business through repeat and referral clientele."

CornerStone maintains a leading edge approach to business by staying connected to the needs of consumers and real estate professionals. An entrepreneur with a background in B2B sales and experience in the software industry, Tom recognizes the opportunity – and need – to incorporate technology into the title process. "For at least a decade, the traditional title agency has fallen behind in technological and business practices," he observes. "Our goal is to bridge the gap, to provide a level of service that is extraordinary within our arena."

Staying connected with the changing facets of the real estate industry as a whole, each of the professionals at CornerStone Title appreciates the opportunity to serve as trusted resources for their

clients. "We're always available to answer questions and address concerns, connect people with underwriting counsel when necessary, and to provide our clients with insight on market trends and changes," says Mary. "Education is a vital component to long-term success, and we are here to help as agents continue to build and develop their business." Through seminars and training CornerStone Title has reached out to its professional partners, assisting them in putting best practices to work in their business endeavors.

As a boutique local business, CornerStone Title understands and believes in the value of community service and involvement. "We are earning the trust and confidence of our customers at every closing, and with every action we take," says Tom. "That's a substantial responsibility." Beyond the daily efforts of facilitating smooth transactions, the company is vested in the interests of its community, supporting organizations including the Payton Wright Foundation and Bayside Community Church. In 2011 CornerStone Title has committed to donating a portion of its proceeds from every closing to Habitat for Humanity, which offers area residents an opportunity to create better lives for themselves through home ownership.

Tom and Mary agree CornerStone has been blessed to assemble such a fine group of professionals on its team and be invited to do business with many of the best and most successful real estate professionals in the industry. If past performance is any indicator, 2011 proves a promising year for CornerStone Title and its clientele. "We are excited about the opportunity to continue to grow, and seek to fulfill our vision of becoming the leading independent title company in the area," reveals Tom. "With offices in Lakewood Ranch and West Bradenton, plus plans for a satellite location in Sarasota, we look forward to building relationships with real estate professionals and consumers throughout Sarasota and Manatee Counties."

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