

Entrepreneur Profile

ROB COCKRUM

PRESIDENT & CEO,
THE CRE GROUP LLC

What it does: Project and construction management.

HQ: San Francisco.

2010 revenue: \$1.5 million.

Employees: 16.

Founded: 2007.

Source of startup capital: Self-funded.

Background: I have a B.A. in psychology and an M.B.A. in finance. After graduate school, I started in finance and moved to real estate and construction a few years later.

Age: 40.

Residence: Walnut Creek.

Website: www.thecre-group.com.



Big picture

How's business: Good. We grew over 320 percent from 2008 to 2010, and 2011 is going to be our biggest year yet.

Biggest challenge for your business: Finding great employees. There are a lot of people looking for work. The difficult part is finding people who fit with the culture of the company.

What's going to change at your company in the next year: We are going to hire a few new project managers and expand to other markets.

Business moves

Reason for starting business: I was working for a global real estate service provider and ... I recognized the opportunity to build a team of experienced project managers that could offer a great service at a lower cost than the large global organizations.

Most difficult part of decision: I started the company and went out on my own with zero clients. I was 36 and I had recently been promoted to vice president. I was on a great career path, and I had young children at home.

Biggest misconception about ownership: I thought it would be a long time before I started competing with large global (firms). It happened quickly.

Biggest business strength: The ability to remain calm and think clearly.

Biggest business weakness: I struggle to disconnect from the company.

Biggest risk: Asking my friend, Guy Trotola, to leave his previous position and be my first employee. That was a big risk on both of our parts, and it has paid off well.

Biggest mistake: Not starting the company sooner.

Smartest move: Hiring the 'A' players. As a service provider we are only as good as our

people.

Biggest worry: The economic environment.
What do you wish you had known from Day 1: That the most difficult part would be finding the best employees, not finding clients.

Work routine

Most challenging task: Ensuring all of the employees are happy and busy.

Favorite task: Pitching new business. It's exciting and I love to win.

Least favorite task: Acting as the IT help desk for the company.

Biggest frustration: Not having enough time to get everything done in the day.

Source of support in a business crisis: My father and my employees.

Dreams

Key goal yet to achieve: Have a national project management organization.

How will you know that you've achieved it: Offices in multiple geographies with many more national clients.

Five-year plan: Continue to grow the company smartly. We are in the planning stages to open offices in Chicago, Denver and Los Angeles.

First choice for new venture: Open a surf shop.

Personals

Most-admired entrepreneur: Steve Jobs.

Favorite pastimes: Time with my three children and surfing.

Favorite book: "East of Eden."

Favorite film: "The Art of Flight."

Favorite destination: Maui.

What's on iPod: Snow Patrol, Coldplay, Blink-182.

Automobile: 1995 Suburban, 2007 BMW.

—Chloe Dominguez ■