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# Make Room For Awesome!

The William Warren Group's  
Philosophy For Business And Life

Including

**The 2019 Top Operators  
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*Over two and a half decades ago, William “Bill” Warren Hobin was working for a large, regional home builder when he took notice to the lack of closets and storage space in newly constructed homes. Concurrently, he was dating a daughter of the owners of a self-storage facility in Ventura County, Calif. Hobin, who was curious about the storage business, had plenty of questions for his then girlfriend’s parents. Although that courtship fizzled, he went on to consult for his ex’s folks when their self-storage investment’s profits had fallen flat.*



# **Make Room For Awesome!**

## **The William Warren Group's Philosophy For Business And Life**

BY ERICA SHATZER



In an effort to help the couple ramp up revenue, Hobin searched for suitable, professional management to oversee the day-to-day operations of the self-storage facility. While his efforts to find an existing satisfactory management company failed, Hobin didn't throw in the towel. Instead, he rose to the occasion and formed his own self-storage management company to take over the daily operations of that one facility.

"I figured if I learned how to operate it, I would have a good chance of raising capital and building my own store someday," recalls Hobin, who lightheartedly adds that he also learned a valuable life lesson: "Be nice to your girlfriend's parents."

Nowadays, Hobin's Santa Monica, Calif.-based company, The William Warren Group (WWG), a privately held, entrepreneurial self-storage development, acquisition, property, and asset management company that operates facilities under its StorQuest Self Storage brand, has a team of more than 450 employees nationwide and operates more than 160 facilities in 14 states. The company provides much needed square footage to thousands of space constrained apartment dwellers and homeowners alike and enjoys a workplace culture that rivals some of the largest tech companies in the United States.

### Swell Goals

Of course, The William Warren Group didn't go from one store to 160-plus overnight. When asked how the company became one of the self-storage industry's top operators, Hobin admits that he "was born with a competitive spirit".

"I set lofty goals," says Hobin, founder and CEO of The William Warren Group and StorQuest brand, "first about building one store, then about building five."

Obviously, Hobin also has good judgement and keen leadership skills, because he managed to meet his goals and push the company up the rankings of *Mini-Storage Messenger's* annual Top Operators list to become one of the top

10 operators in the nation—a position WWG has held for several years.

But, as the saying goes, a ship's captain is only as good as his crew. And Hobin is quick to acknowledge his partners and the company's executives for their invaluable contributions.

"I was fortunate to be able to convince some very smart people to join me early on," Hobin says, "being my partner and president of the company, Clark Porter, and my younger brother, Tim Hobin, who serves as our head of real estate activities, and then later on our Chief Operations Officer Gary Sugarman. Together we set out to be a different type of operator than what was available in the industry."

Hobin adds, "We wanted to push the limits on product design, change the model about who we hired and how we operated, and most importantly build a super dynamic brand."

It's safe to say that they surpassed that pursuit, as their vision for The William Warren Group has resulted in a unique brand and one of the most progressive company cultures in the self-storage industry.

### Catch The Wave

According to Gary Sugarman, COO, WWG's company culture is infused into the StorQuest brand, mission, and overall business philosophy, all of which he says are merely an extension of Hobin and his innate zest for life.

Hobin, an outdoorsman with a strong sense of adventure, encourages his employees to take advantage of their surroundings. "It's OK to take your meeting out on a walk along the bluffs of Santa Monica," says Hobin. "It's OK to use the beach as the tremendous resource it is. Our office is 100 yards from the sand, so get out and use it. Go for a run at lunch, jump in the ocean, take out a surfboard, or bike along the beach path. I don't care if you take longer than a standard one hour or even two. As long as you are getting exercise and enjoying our immediate surroundings, go do it."

Clearly, Hobin is devoted to enabling his employees to truly enjoy their workspace and every day of the work week. "'Make Room for Awesome' is not just a brand slogan," says Sugarman, who adds that the company markets that simple—yet simultaneously unanimous—motto to its customers and employees alike as a singular message: Make room at home or at the office to expand your life. This concept notably resonates with StorQuest customers and allows the brand to consistently exhibit the highest social media activity and engagement industry-wide.

"We should all aspire to this idea," Sugarman says. "It's an authentic approach to life."

Essentially, within WWG's corporate environment, "Make Room for Awesome" is about creating balance. Sugarman expands upon that notion by stating that it is about making room for more than just your job.

"It's building and growing a balanced and happy life," says Sugarman, noting that he hasn't encountered anything similar to what they've built at The William Warren Group within the self-storage industry or other real estate companies. "There's a broader focus. It's not just about business success or profitability goals. We like to ensure that our employees are feeling great."

Taking that mindset a step further, Hobin emphasizes that productivity hinges on employee happiness. "I know personal happiness and reignited energy will allow for greater productivity and greater employee satisfaction in the long run," he says. "Such happiness is infectious and allows us to recruit more like-minded team members. And teamwork makes the dream work."

Hobin believes that his company's greatest asset is its "human capital". That's one of the reasons he sowed the seeds of a culture that puts its people first. In addition, as Hobin notes, this kind of progressive culture is essential when competing for top talent.

"If we have the best company culture in the industry, we will attract the best people in the industry," says Hobin. "This is the No. 1 reason industry executives will pick up and move across the country to join our team."

The William Warren Group's culture helps the company attract people outside of the self-storage industry as well. And its numerous employee benefits enable the company to better compete with the large tech-driven businesses in the area.

"We are fortunate to operate our corporate office only 100 yards from the Bluffs of the Pacific Ocean in Santa Monica," Hobin says. "This also happens to be the epicenter of technologies in Southern California, thus providing us with a very large and extremely bright talent pool. And hiring smart, technology-minded professionals allows us to constantly innovate. This is not your father's real

estate company. We think of ourselves as a 25-year-old start-up company. This enables to attract and keep bright people and stay ahead of our competitors."

Moreover, acknowledging that 54 percent of the workforce is millennials, Hobin adds that the younger half of the workforce is drawn to cultures that provide a good work-life balance. "They feel good to be part of a company that breeds a healthy culture," he says.

## Rad Rewards

Besides a flexible work schedule, calming beachfront locale, and an easy-breezy seaside vibe, employees at The William Warren Group are treated to a plethora of perks—from the typical to the totally tubular. Here are some of the company's benefits that are anything but mundane:

- **Work Late Wednesday Dinners** – Employees submit take-out orders and eat as they finish up projects.
- **Zen In 10** – Employees can sign up for monthly 10-minute office massages.
- **Outdoor meetings**
- **IQ Boosters** – Employees can participate in "Lunch and Learn" sessions that cover various topics.
- **Puppy Pawdays** – Employees can bring their dogs to work.
- **Mandatory holiday leave** – Employees have the week off between Christmas and New Years and it's not counted as vacation time.
- **Beers on tap** – After 6 p.m., employees can enjoy a brew while they work.
- **Gratis Grub** – Employees are treated to a free breakfast on their birthdays and Mondays. They also have access to snacks all day in the office.



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- **Surfboard “rentals”** – Employees can borrow StorQuest branded surfboards to ride some waves during their lunch breaks.
- **Mid-day yoga sessions** • **Free gym memberships**
- **Monthly parties and celebrations** – According to Sugarman, the company is “always finding reasons to celebrate”. Most recently, WWG held a tailgate party in the parking lot of the corporate office as well as a Halloween party.
- **“Be Bronco” award** – The newest addition to the company’s list of perks, the “Be Bronco” award, named after Hobin’s vintage 1972 red convertible Ford Bronco, is given to the employee who most embodies the Bronco’s classic allure: high-energy and driven. The “Be Bronco” award winner gets the keys to this sweet ride for a week.

“If the CEO is not having fun, no one else is, and I don’t want to work there,” Hobin says. “I demand that we have fun mixed into our work schedule on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. I drive my marketing team crazy by constantly asking them, ‘What are we doing fun this month?’ And when I say ‘we,’ I mean all of us.”

Hobin goes on to say that, “The list [of benefits] is extensive and translates to a greater level of happiness, which means greater productivity and greater length of stay. We are trying to build careers—not offer jobs. A happy cohesive team wants to put in the extra hours and effort required to put up big results to win.”

### Sick Standards

Similar to its brand’s slogan, StorQuest’s mission is to “get out there, discover, help others, and lead a more awesome life”. While the company’s culture is focused on enhancing productivity by enabling employees to enjoy their lives and their careers, its continued business success also stems from its core values. StorQuest’s four core values are:

1. **Care** – Caring about and for its employees and customers
2. **Pride** – Taking pride in the work they do and the facilities they operate/manage (i.e. curb appeal, cleanliness, etc.)
3. **Helpful** – Being helpful to each customer as well as co-workers
4. **Fun** – Having fun in the office and at the facilities

These four values are the heart of the StorQuest brand, which Hobin calls “customer obsessed”. He mentions that his managers are tasked with the job of getting the customers to be happy despite the typically unpleasant circumstances surrounding the need for storage. Hobin aspires his employees to provide top-notch customer service that is akin to the hospitality industry. “We want customers to feel the difference,” says Hobin.



“Self-storage facilities are basically hotels with a thousand closets. We think of our customers as our guests.”

For instance, Hobin doesn’t hire janitors or maintenance people; instead, the person hired for that position is called a “bellman,” and his/her first job is to help customers. Every other aspect of their job description is secondary to assisting customers in need. Another customer-centric aspect of StorQuest involves its “Truck and Driver” program. StorQuest offers the use of a moving truck—as well as a driver—to each new customer to “take the hassle out of storage”.

Above all, Hobin wants StorQuest to be known as the unique and bold brand that is 100 percent focused on customers. And as the corporate website says, “Whatever life has in store for you, we’re here to help you make room for it,” because WWG and StorQuest strive to motivate and inspire customers to “live big” as they are making room for awesome. These objectives have helped the brand become a dominant private operator and boast a nearly perfect sentiment rating on Google company-wide.

### Surf’s Up!

Along with these progressive business aspects, Hobin’s competitive streak and determination keeps WWG climbing the ranks of the top operators. “We aspire to be the most creative, entrepreneurial, and profitable self-storage company in the

industry. We do this by outperforming other larger public firms and offering upward career mobility to our team members with no lid on opportunity. We want our team to be successful. We want our clients to be life-long clients that continue to invest in us year after year and trust us in maximizing value of the assets we operate," he says. "Simply put, we want to win."

Hobin and WWG plan to win by adding new revenue sources for their physical properties and continuing to pursue new acquisition, development, and management opportunities. They understand that portfolio growth is imperative to remain competitive. "All of the large operators are growing," says Hobin. "We just have to grow at the same pace or greater to maintain positioning. I believe if we aren't growing we are dying."

The company has accomplished this so far by expanding its team,

entering new markets, and investing a significant amount of capital into its operating platform—all of which has allowed them to collect and analyze data at a rapid pace. "I give credit to my brother Tim Hobin for having the vision and for pushing me to expand our real estate team and investment activities when others in the industry were sitting idle immediately following The Great Recession," adds Hobin.


However, WWG's third-party management platform is where Hobin sees a lot of potential for growth, especially since the company has scale. He states that scale "offers us the ability to keep making significant capital infusion into our technology platform, which speeds up the machine".

Although he predicts growth for The William Warren Group's third-party management platform, Hobin mentions that they are "very selective" about who they will take on as a client. "We have to like the asset, the market, and the people as much as they like us. We have positioned the company to be

the operator of choice for some of the upper echelon of capital investors in the sector. We call this 'Smart Equity Management'." The kinds of investors he's referring to include large family offices, private equity companies, and some of the nation's largest institutional firms that select WWG to either deploy capital into a partnership with them or manage their existing assets.

### The Closeout

With a surefire strategy, a talented team, and a killer culture, it's clear that WWG will continue to make a splash in the self-storage industry for years to come.

"We remain very excited about the future of our company, the storage industry as a whole, and honestly believe that 'we are just getting started'," says Hobin. 

*Erica Shatzer is the editor of Mini-Storage Messenger, Self-Storage Now!, and Self-Storage Canada.*

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