[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)[More North County news](#)

## Up to the test

### Consulting firm has helped clients improve customer service for 40 years

By Wendy Vurik  
UNION-TRIBUNE

March 16, 2008

CARLSBAD – They say you can't turn a frog into a prince.

In the arena of hiring good employees, this couldn't be more accurate, Harris “Hank” Plotkin says.

Forty years ago, Plotkin started a consulting company with the goal of helping companies hire the best employees through tests that assessed aptitude and personality.

Today the Carlsbad-based The Plotkin Group is run by Plotkin's son, Jim, and has 2,500 clients in the United States and Canada – businesses both big and small. Locally, Roel Construction, Heritage Golf Club, Club Demonstration Services and Iron Mountain are among the firm's clients.

The original mission of Plotkin and Associates in March 1968 was assisting bankruptcy courts by operating businesses in receivership. In one case, Hank could see that a troubled client suffered by not having the right people in the right jobs.

About the same time, Hank Plotkin said, a salesman from a test publishing company began sending him information on aptitude testing.

“He flew out from Texas and scored the test in front of me, and in five to 10 minutes, he described me down to a tee.

“I could see the value of this to my clients,” Hank Plotkin said. “If the company had a lot of people in the wrong jobs, it just killed them.”

Plotkin then had a mission to demonstrate the value of testing to skeptical companies.

“I starting writing articles and giving talks,” he said. “I started talking about the reality of the tests, that they were legal and didn't discriminate.”

Plotkin started by turning friends into clients, such as a golfing buddy who owned 12 beauty salons, and the mayor of San Bernardino, where Plotkin lived at the time, who ran Manpower Staffing Agencies.

Pretty soon, Plotkin started some “aggressive marketing.” Because of his previous experience in the aerospace industry, he started targeting companies that had multiple locations.



ROBERT BENSON

Jim Plotkin (right) took the helm at The Plotkin Group from father Hank (left) in 1991 and moved the business to Carlsbad soon after.

His first big client was Montgomery Ward. Next was Kinko's.

"We had 900 stores and gave 50,000 tests in a year and did background checks," he said. "We reduced their turnover by \$27 million. We helped a lot of our clients become No. 1 in their industry."

The hardest part of the job, Plotkin said, is getting a client to "identify in each position the best and worst people. It's essential. Once you do that you know exactly what qualities you need."

Club Demonstration Services, based in San Diego, is one of The Plotkin Group's clients. The company has about 12,000 employees, most of whom conduct food demonstrations every weekend at Costco warehouses around the country.

Andrea Morgan, the company's director of human resources, said Club Demonstration Services has used The Plotkin Group's services "to get a better quality of employee, a better fit, and to reduce turnover."

"They have really been able to help us create a profile for some of our full-time positions that reflects what we are looking for so we can hire closer to that profile," Morgan said.

Ten years ago, after 30 years of building his company's client base, giving talks and even authoring a book, "Building a Winning Team," Plotkin retired at the urging of his wife. They moved from San Bernardino to Oceanside.

Jim Plotkin took the helm of the company in 1991 and three years later moved it to Carlsbad. Jim Plotkin had worked at the company at various times through high school and college.

Jim Plotkin graduated from Fresno State University with a degree in business, but it took him 10 years to officially join his father's company. He was a touring golf professional, playing in two foreign tours and several U.S. mini-tours, winning 10 events. At the age of 30, Jim decided he was tired of "living like I was still in college."

He started working at The Plotkin Group and within a year was making key decisions. He computerized the office and helped create an Internet presence.

"Hank wasn't an IT person," his son said. "I wasn't either, but I was more connected and could help get that done."


Hank Plotkin also credits his son with scoring the company a huge client – the PGA Tour's Tournament Players Club Network.

"I remember Jim coming home after a tournament and he said, 'The golf industry needs your help. Some of those clubs are run so badly.'" Hank Plotkin said. "So we drafted a letter to the PGA and we are now by far the most dominant consulting firm in the golf industry for customer-service training. His offhand remark really paid off."

Wendy Vurik is a freelance writer in Oceanside.

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/northcounty/20080316-9999-mz1mc16test.html>

 [Click to Print](#)

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.