

Mark Allen Llano
Source One Distributors, Inc.

(Carol Hart, Florida PTAC)

Source One Distributors, Inc., a small business supplier of products to the military, the federal government, private industry and law enforcement began very simply on February 13, 2003 in Mark Llano's garage. As a Marine Veteran, Mark was used to getting things done in a "no frills" environment. Using a cell phone, a computer, a determining spirit and hard work putting in 100 hour weeks, Mark was intent on starting a business where he could help give back to the servicemen that he felt a brotherhood with. Mark says, "I've chewed the same dirt that the military is fighting today." Integrity and discipline are the ethic that Mark has brought from the Marines to his small business.

Mark also began working with Florida PTAC counselor Carol Hart. Carol is in the Small Business Development Center on the campus of Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, Florida. Says Carol, "Mark is one dedicated business owner who takes dealing with the government as serious business. He knows that shortcuts don't work. He networks well, does his due diligence and because of his work ethic has reaped the benefit of sales growth. It has been a real privilege to witness his company's success.

As a former Marine, Mark drew the motivation to push for success from his affinity for many of the people who ultimately use his products – soldiers in the United States military. He drew on the discipline and integrity that were fundamental to his experience as a Marine. And he realized early on that it was essential to surround himself with people like Carole, who could answer his long list of questions.

"I have found that it is extremely vital to surround yourself with people who can get the answers you're seeking and guide you in the right direction. One of the most respected and knowledgeable people I have met is Mrs. Carol Hart who has been an invaluable mentor to me. Without her patience and perspective, navigating the complexities of selling to the government would have been utterly overwhelming. She has been readily available for support with my many questions – early in the morning, late at night – it doesn't matter. She is one dedicated professional committed to helping her clients be successful in their endeavors

Mark believes in sharing his success tips with others and regularly speaks to Veterans groups and others in the small business community about doing work with the Government. For a company to exceed \$2,000,000 in sales the twelve months of operations, be looking to close his fourth year in excess of \$50,000,000; and have an annual growth of employees averaging 125% is nothing short of remarkable. Mark is a master marketer and a true visionary. While preparing his original business plan he established a five (5) year revenue goal of \$25,000,000; now many people would have called that quite a bold goal. Mark has doubled that number in his third full calendar year of operations – what a stellar example of hard work and dedication. Counted among Mark's customers are over sixty military bases (60) covering all branches of the military. This coupled with the fact that as a bonus, Mark's products are used by the Military that as a civilian he continues to serve both in the field and off. I understand he spent the day yesterday donating his time to help train

twenty-seven (27) Marines preparing to deploy to Iraq on close quarters combat tactics! Other small businesses I know have been inspired by Mark's success and are working diligently to emulate some of the strategies he has shared with them.

In early 2005, the Marines received a report analyzing injuries from Iraq and learned that the current body armor did not provide adequate ballistic protection to side torso. Systems Command advised Source One in June of this problem and requested their assistance in designing a device or carrier that could attach to the existing armor they wear that could hold a ballistic plate to increase the level of protection. Source One teamed up with two small businesses that work in the ballistic protection field to develop a solution. Over the next six to eight weeks multiple prototypes were brought to Quantico for review, recommendations and modifications until they had two different carrier solutions that were just what the Marines wanted. Contract negotiations began with the Marines and by September Source One had a contract in excess of \$5M and had two manufacturers in full swing making these carriers to provide the extra protections our Marines required. Source One's team developed training materials, and even agreed to help out the Marines by integrating the ballistic plates with the carriers and ship them as a complete set ready to be attached to the current armor the Marines were wearing.

By the end of the year there were carriers being fielded in Iraq. By May of 2006 Source One was already notified of a life saved as a result of the new protection, a 20 year old Marine was shot by a sniper. The Marine Corps Times ran the article on 22 MAY, 2006.

Mark empowers his employees to continuously strive for excellence and by his leadership example continues to inspire others that work with him. He has a tremendous thirst for knowledge, and is very skilled at interviewing others to learn what they know to gain knowledge and improve his own performance. Mark truly exemplifies the entrepreneurship spirit and enriches the business community; encouraging others to strive for their dreams as well.

Membership in councils, boards and clubs providing support and services to the community include the following groups that Mark is a part of in his belief to give back.

- NASA's Minority Business Resource Advisory Committee (MBRAC)
- United States Service Academy Screening Committee for Congressmen
- Florida Defense Alliance Advisory Board (BRAC)
- Minority Business Enterprise Input Committee (MBEIC)