



Tom and Craig Ustler

Ustler Development

In 1995, roughly 16 years after Craig Ustler first entered the family business, he began working with his dad. "We've really been working together a lot longer than it looks on paper," Craig points out. "When I was 10 or 12 and Dad was doing vacant land deals and subdivision land, we'd be out in the car on weekends riding in the woods and seeing property to be developed. Even then we were talking business."

And long before Craig opted to go full-time, Tom knew he could count on his son to lend a hand. While Craig was attending the University of Florida, Tom was working overtime to develop some 30 tire stores across Central Florida. Craig stepped in to coordinate the property and zoning procedures for the Gainesville location.

By 1995, Craig had developed his skills as an appraiser and was ready to become a partner in Ustler Development. In a profession that combines the potent temptations of land,

profits, and power, both father and son knew it would be a good match.

"You could go out and find someone," observes Craig, "but you'd have to deal with money and confidentiality and trust agreements. When you work with a family member it immediately gives you a comfort level that you otherwise wouldn't have. A level of trust. You already solve a lot of those issues."

"There is no downside," echoes Tom. "When you have a family member working for you, they show up on the first day and they're ready to go. It's not like they have to get know everyone. They already do."

Starting slowly as they learned each other's work habits and confirmed one another's work ethics, the real estate development and brokerage firm is now firing on all cylinders. Where one Ustler could handle a finite workload, having two Ustlers means that Tom or Craig can step back and allow the other to step in. The only glitch—arguably a minor one—

surfaces occasionally.

"We're sort of busybodies," Craig admits, "so it's natural for Dad and I to talk about business. At family gatherings or a football game something pops up or a problem needs to be solved and you just start discussing it. That's when friends and family just want you to be quiet and talk about something else."

While Craig knows his entry into and success in real estate was eased by his father's experience and reputation, he points out one factor that's needed in any business—family or otherwise. "There has to be some type of core competency," he emphasizes. "You can't just be handed the reins without knowing what you're doing. So don't expect it to be easy or a hand-out or something that's anointed to you. You just can't get into business with someone who is not competent."

Like father, like son.

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