

# Bal Agrawal On His Successful LifeWorx

## A CEO on his project that now provides services to over 40,000 homes

BY Katie O'Donnell



**Bal Agrawal** started LifeWorx, headquartered in Chappaqua, after a housekeeper stole his silverware while he and his son were grieving over the loss of his wife 15 years ago. “It stuck in the back of my head that you go to work and everything works well, you know? The people show up on time, and things get done. But at home, things are random.”

Determined to move forward, Agrawal found a new, “outstanding” housekeeper and founded the company that’s provided some 40,000 home services, from child- and eldercare to professional organization and personal assistant and chef staffing, over the past eight years.

We learned how Agrawal takes his coffee (cream and sugar)—and how that might be analyzed by LifeWorx's human-screening systems—plus why he'd rather work with people than computers, when we took a coffee break with the CEO.

### **How did becoming a single parent affect your view on what it takes to run a household?**

When there are two parents and both are pitching in and everything is moving well, you don't realize how the world can change. You want to be there for your family, and not disappoint your coworkers, and be successful. I remember coming home at 10:30 at night bringing groceries after my son had gone to sleep, and he's 12 or 13, but that's the only time I could go. You do what you need to do.

**Some people argue against having domestic help.**

One cannot do everything. Of course, nobody should outsource being with family. But, if the quality of life for everyone improves by having trusted, reliable, and skilled help at home, one should be willing to delegate. With the resources available now, especially in America, in terms of talent, technology, and convenience, most people should take a step back and think, 'What's important to me?'

**And you're able to say that each and every one of your service providers is trustworthy?**

We do such deep amounts of research on their background that you never have to worry what they're going to do in your home. We ask [candidates] questions like, 'What do you do when you're driving in the car?' And they don't even know why we're asking. It tells us about their personality, their organizational capabilities, how they can handle stress—all of that.

**Efficiency-wise, is it more about simply getting things done or how well they're done?**

It's optimization of both. If someone is looking for a housekeeper who can cook Italian food well and can also go swimming with the kids, we have all that information in our system and can fit a combination of personality and skill together. We have two patents on our search technology, and we're just starting a personality test that will tell us about [workers'] attitude, warmth, compassion, et cetera.

**So there's a scientific aspect to it.**

Absolutely. We have two components to our business: understanding people and understanding information. People are the soft part. You look in their eyes and you can sort of tell if there's something behind them. When you put the two together, you have a very good product.

**How else has technology affected the way you operate your business?**

For a small company, technically, we are very advanced. All of our people can go into any office at any time and start working as if they are in their own office. We don't have any secrets—they all have access to all of our accounting information. It's so different than other small companies where one guy controls everything. I don't have to be here to run the company—people run the company.

**What about retaining those stellar staffers?**

It's all about treating people person-to-person. When these people get a job, they come running with a bottle of wine; they bring flowers for us. My own housekeeper, I make tea for her every time she comes because she's my right-hand person. We pay within and outside the office well. Within the office, learning and going is a really important part. We have 15 employees, and they're always learning and getting new jobs and moving on.

**On the other side, how do you gauge how successfully services are received?**

Proof of the pudding is word of mouth. When clients tell their friends, that means they're happy. Our surveys say we probably have 95 percent customer satisfaction. We still have work to do. It's not an iPhone or a car where you can tweak things in a factory.

**You've turned passion, and a good idea, into a profitable business. What's the secret?**

You have to love what you do. Once you do, the product is going to come. Believe me, it takes a lot. Every business owner will say it takes more than you have, but it never feels that way if you're fulfilled. I have gone home so many times totally thrilled because clients called and said how happy they were or someone came in happy that they found a job or I trained an employee in a new way and they progressed. People are number one. Everything takes longer, takes a lot of effort, but having your own business is so satisfying.