

Nine9 CEO Anthony Toma Discusses Entrepreneurship, Show Business, and Helping the 99% Achieve their Dreams



Anthony Toma
CEO

Nine9
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Interview conducted by:
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CEO CFO: *Mr. Toma, what is the concept behind Nine9, the UnAgency?*

Anthony Toma: The concept behind Nine9 is pretty simple: people want to get into the modeling and acting industry, and agencies can't just take on anyone and everyone. Nine9 provides a way for everyone who is serious and committed to take part, be seen, and get into the modeling and acting arena. Traditional agencies or agents won't take most aspiring models and actors on because they have to fund their development, but we can show people how to develop themselves and get all the opportunities they can handle.

CEO CFO: *How did you bring the vision to life?*

Anthony Toma: In order to bring a vision to life, you need a team. The people on that team need to complement each other and bring different skills to the table. I had to count on people who are in the industry, and people who knew a little bit about business, and bring it all together and have their expertise to lean on. Bringing a vision to life isn't always the easiest thing, but if you have the right team, it will most definitely happen.

CEO CFO: *How have you addressed the challenges of growing and developing a business? What have you learned from bumps along the way?*

Anthony Toma: I've learned that you have to stay focused, and you have to be accessible. As a CEO and visionary, you must allow access to your "brain power" for your team to access and bounce questions and different strategies off of. The things that come easy to you don't necessarily come easy to others. You have people in place that are better at certain things than you are, but, as a visionary (and it being your vision), you need to offer all access to what it is you foresee.

As far as what I've learned from the bumps in the road, bumps happen when you take your eye off the ball. People count on you to be fresh, available, and there to lean on. In my situation, I had some friends who were starting up a business and asked me to start a business with them, so I distributed the brain power between one and the other. If you take

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your eyes off the focus of your core business, you're not doing any favors for the people that are actually counting on you. My advice there is to stay focused and avoid the "shiny things". *The Entrepreneurial Operating System* by Gino Wickman addresses that, and says to throw any shiny thing that comes over the fence right back over.

CEOCFO: *What would you have done differently if given the opportunity?*

Anthony Toma: I would keep key players that were key contributors to the growth and the success of Nine9 early on. I also would have parted ways with some people sooner. You need people on your team that share your core values and the company's core values. Early on, I didn't see that and I would definitely search for more people with the same core values.

CEOCFO: *How do you use technology to bring together talent with industry contacts? How do you incorporate personal attention and respect in an industry that can seem a bit uncaring?*

Anthony Toma: I would say technology is key in any industry these days. For us, it's a blend. People are coming to you as green as they come in the industry. Nine9 introduces the technology and we help walk them through the process. We also have a personal touch, so they're not just dealing with a machine. After the internet introduction, people can come into our locations. We have a team that is there to greet, meet, speak with, and teach them. We walk people through the aggravation and the frustrations that happen when companies are dependent on technology 100% or people 100%. You need to have both these days, and I think that the process of breaking into the industry is that much more enjoyable having both the personal interaction and the power of technology of Nine9.

CEOCFO: *As CEO, how do you ensure that each of your offices is operating within the Nine9 corporate culture?*

Anthony Toma: It's not a single step, it's a process that requires checks and balances at each point to ensure that people are getting the best service. We have the office directors, talent specialists, talent coordinators, and receptionists at each location working together throughout the process. Our talent services team at corporate reaches out to talent periodically and sends out questionnaires to see what they are learning and inquire on their specific needs. Our castings department reaches out and supports them as well to make sure each talent is handled by an actual person. Then they are handed off in the process to help them improve and learn more about the industry, and what they need to do to find success.

CEOCFO: *How has your approach changed as media and entertainment have done so over the years?*

Anthony Toma: Our approaches have evolved as the technology and advertising industries have changed. We help get our message out there and in front of people in different arenas and venues. There are different social media platforms that have come and gone, and others that are on the horizon that we have stayed ahead of the curve with by changing up advertising methods and increasing our talent reach. We revolutionized the way that talent can put themselves out there, and developed technology to help them reach out to us better, provide casting opportunities and increase their likelihood of landing a gig. We have

conducted research, invested in seminars, and added video, graphics, and technology teams to stay ahead of the curve.

CEOCFO: *How do you reach aspiring talent? Do potential clients understand the value Nine9 brings to the table?*

Anthony Toma: I think the best way we reach aspiring talent is by finding out who is looking to break into the entertainment industry. These individuals are going to be doing their own research as they are searching for opportunities out there. So we pinpoint these individuals and target them through advertising. It's how the advertising arena is run these days. We put ads out there in front of them and present them with the opportunity they have been searching for.

TV and internet networks are all looking for new fresh faces to deliver more content for their audiences. Agencies, clients, and casting directors come to us for potential new faces with the reach that we have. With our ability to be able to offer a membership to almost anyone that wants to be a part of the entertainment industry, we have a pool and database of talent that clients and casting directors can benefit from. Potential clients see our large network and see that we are an inclusive agency and they like that about us.

CEOCFO: *How has Nine become a leader in nationwide casting?*

Anthony Toma: Nine9 has become a leader in nationwide casting by personal relationships and technologies that help us find castings all over the country. When a casting director is in a bind, they can definitely turn to us and we prove that we can fulfill their castings needs by saving them resources and offering such a large database of talent. We also offer casting directors, agencies, and clients the ability to host a casting in one of our locations across the country, which saves casting directors and clients money on securing venues that are thousands of dollars while they are visiting an area. With our large database, a casting director does not need to be in a specific location to book a gig that they may have landed to provide talent to a national client. With the resources, technology and the ability to sort and search talent, we are the leader in castings because we cater to both talent and casting directors, agencies and clients. So we have a wider reach where our service provides resources to both sides to bridge the gap.

CEOCFO: *What's next for Nine9?*

Anthony Toma: We have shown talent that there are opportunities for every single person out there in the whole wide world. We've covered the United States, next we want to embark on Canada, maybe the UK, and get into a few other English speaking countries where we wouldn't have a translation hurdle to conquer. Since we have educated the talent side we also want to educate the corporate side of the castings directors, agencies, and clients so we can teach them and show them that they don't need to be a twenty-person organization. We can help them be a one person wrecking crew that takes advantage of all the tools and resources that Nine9 has to offer to set them up for the best opportunities. Many casting directors, agencies, and clients don't have the resources that they need to be as effective as they can, and with Nine9 on their side, they can take on bigger jobs that will pay them, allowing them to expand their team.

We are also developing a "game-ified" app that helps people around the country be able to show that they can become a model or actor if they choose to be. Also, to unleash an army of "Nine9-ers" to be able to go

out there and offer opportunities to people that didn't know that these opportunities existed. That will be coming soon, probably by the end of 2017 or early 2018, where we will have a major army of people out there preaching the Nine9 way to the world.

CEOCFO: *What is your message about learning from setbacks; how to forge ahead in the face of adversity?*

Anthony Toma: I would say my message about learning from setbacks and forging ahead in facing adversity would be to believe in yourself, believe in your vision, have a plan laid out and execute that plan. You know there is going to be trial and error and there are going to be setbacks. When you have a setback, sit back, think, dissect it, figure out what happened and what went wrong. Was it timing? Was it just not a good idea?

Make sure that you learn from your mistakes and stay true to yourself. Stay true to your customers, stay true to your employees and everything should work out. Understand that not everything you do is going to be 100 percent perfect the first time around. So stay with it, stay persistent and be sure to forecast.

