



## Doing the Moreno Tango To the Beat of Self Storage Success

By John Dunlap

Oscar Moreno has a few loves, two of which he brought to the United States from Colombia. One is a love of soccer. The other is a love of tango. That most seductive and beautiful of dances and that most passionately loved of sports have infused Moreno with an appreciation of life that he has carried into the world of self storage.

Moreno, who works for SK Management, is the property manager for Downtown Mini Warehouse in Los Angeles, California. His ability to reach out to all nationalities and backgrounds, combined with a strong business acumen and understanding of what works well in self storage, have combined to make him one of the top facility managers in the business.

And for good measure, Moreno also supervises two other SK Management operations, the Spokane Mini Warehouse

in Spokane, Washington, and the Ventura Mini Warehouse in Ventura, California. Altogether, he oversees a total of about 2,000 units.

“I stumbled upon the self storage system back in the early '80s when I needed a place to store personal items as well as business related merchandise,” Moreno says. “I was immediately attracted to the concept behind the self storage business, since to me it was something new that was not, and still today is not, a well-developed idea in many Latin American countries.”

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*Oscar Moreno is flanked by assistant managers Herber Marquez (left) & Charles Lewis (right) at Downtown Mini Warehouse in Los Angeles.*

## Becoming a Problem Solver

Since moving to Los Angeles, Moreno has also become a fan of two local teams—the Los Angeles Dodgers in baseball and Los Angeles Lakers in the NBA. The two franchises are highly successful on and off the field (and court), bringing Los Angelenos together. Moreno tries to take the same approach with his self storage work.

“Client service is essential to this business,” Moreno says. “In providing people with a self storage solution you become a problem solver, even if it is just momentarily. I instill my management team with the same ideals. It’s important to empathize with prospective tenants, be a good listener and put together a sellable package. Whether their need for a unit is a spur-of-the-moment thing or it has been a long-planned move, we strive to put ourselves in their shoes.”

“But above all, becoming extremely familiar with your software program is a key to an efficient site. Being knowledgeable about your operating system enables you to run the business on a more timely and efficient basis. We use Domico at our three sites and I highly recommend it.”

Moreno has been in the self storage business for 15 years. He arrived in the United States in 1979 from Colombia with a degree in business administration and began managing apartment buildings for several real estate companies in the Los Angeles area. In 1982, he became the general manager for a jewelry manufacturing store in downtown LA. Then, in 1994, Moreno joined Public Storage, where he worked as a property manager and relief manager until 2000. While at Public Storage, he applied himself through hard work, discipline and dedication to learn everything about the self storage business. Starting in 2000, he began working with SK Management.

His own checklist of ways to be successful in self storage includes, naturally enough, a checklist.

“Having a checklist helps daily tasks run smoothly,” Moreno says. “Because I have a great team of property and assistant managers, we find there is always something to attend to. Our priorities, however, fall among lock checks, responding to all kinds of tenant communications, maintenance reports and excellent client service even when calling delinquent tenants. As a word of advice to all, the one thing that should never be neglected is keeping track of interactions with your tenants, which you can do by making a habit of documenting occurrences.”

## The Moreno Way

Moreno has seen the hardships that the current economy has caused, even to self storage. But, like the economy itself, he sees things bouncing back in self storage—and believes operators need compassion for clients at this time.

“Given that the self storage business accommodates people who are in need, as well as those who are better off, I can say that like every business in America, we have seen a slight reduction in occupancy. But through our meaningful client interactions we have managed to retain our tenants’ loyalty.”

If Moreno could start his own self storage business, what would his priorities be?

“If I could start a self storage business from scratch, I would focus on wide lanes to deal with today’s heavy traffic, drive-up units, reliable and familiar software programs, and prices that are affordable and competitive.”

One might also assume that he would concentrate on the customer’s needs, be empathetic and helpful and appreciative of their business. Heck, Oscar Moreno might even do a tango or two for them. Success comes naturally to him. Married for 25 years to wife Elva, with three children (Jovita, John and Laura) and three grandchildren, he has tangoed his way to happiness, both in his private life and the world of self storage. ❖

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