

George Sakellaris

President, CEO and founder of Framingham-based Ameresco

Energy efficiency is the wave of the future, according to George Sakellaris, president, CEO and founder of Framingham's Ameresco. And he's no newcomer to the industry. A first-generation immigrant from Greece, Sakellaris has started two energy efficiency companies, served as a consultant to former President Bill Clinton on energy issues and is a founding member of the National Association of Energy Services Companies. And he wants to make the world a more energy efficient place. Here, he talks about what it takes to start and manage a multimillion dollar company.

Why did you found Ameresco in 2000?

In the late 1990s many companies were all about convergence in the energy sector — that is combining energy services with commodities. I came to realize that from a customer's point of view, they wanted to unbundle the services so they knew exactly what they're paying for. So I took a few months off and decided to start my own company where we would approach the solution from the customer perspective. Since then, it's been a success.

What's been the key to the company's growth?

The biggest key to success is having a good product, and ours is energy efficiency and renewables. In the last two years especially, people have come to realize that energy efficiency is one of the most cost effective ways of not only saving money, but cleaning the environment and contributing to national energy independence. It's self funded, it pays for itself and it doesn't require any federal subsidies.

Secondly, in order to execute in business you need good people. We have tremendous, tremendous talent.

How is Ameresco different from competitors?

It's our ability to design a solution around the customer's needs. Our competitors are large, multi-billion, multi-national companies that are selling their own energy products. We're technology agnostic. We're pushing what makes the best economic sense for the customer.

The other thing that differentiates us is that we have a tremendous amount of technical expertise. Energy efficiency is our bread and butter; it's the only thing we do, so we're experts.

Last year the company went public. Why?

We've given out a substantial amount of stock options in this company to employees; better than one-third of the company is owned by employees. Many of those employees have been with us from the beginning, so we wanted to give them some kind of liquidity and ability to sell

the stock they've accumulated over the years. Plus, we were growing fast and we needed capital for the company.

Did you worry about the sluggish IPO market?

A little bit, but we felt we had a good product. We had a big strategic meeting and we asked ourselves, "Do we want to take our company to the next level?" That's why we did it.

Do you manage the company differently now that it's public?

No, not really. You have to talk to investors and analysts and make all the filings. But I'm the largest shareholder of the company, so my interests are lined up with the investors'. We all want to see this company succeed. In the long term, we're going to create as much value for the company as we can, and we've been doing that even before the company went public.

How is the economy now, from your perspective?

As far as our business, it's very good. In tough economic times, sometimes people are more conscious of costs, so they're looking to do more to save money. We can help with that.

Are there a lot of ways to innovate in this industry?

Everything can always be made better. For example, since I started in this industry we've gone from incandescent light bulbs to florescent and now to LED. Innovations like that will only continue. But the great thing is that we're able to integrate all of those tech-

nology advancements into our offering.

What's the key to starting a good business, in any sector?

Deliver what you say you will. Plus, you've got to believe in what you are doing and be willing to put in the dedication and hard work. There will be challenges when you establish a company. It's not easy, so you've got to have strong determination and believe that you will get there. ■

This interview was conducted and edited for length by Brandon Butler.



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