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city.

**Taija Sparkman** • Aug. 15, 2014

What do LeBron James and young accountants have in common? According to Gary Shamis, CPA, their presence in Cleveland can go a long way to help restore the city's life and reputation.

Shamis, senior managing director of SS&G, Inc., has been working hard over the past decade to attract young professionals to the Cleveland area. He started by first working to transform his own firm. Eight years ago, he hired a consultant to help create an environment within SS&G that would be welcoming to young accountants. As part of the transformation, Shamis committed to paying attention to potential new employees, as well as current employees, to learn what type of environment and culture they wanted to work in.

"In order to attract new talent, we needed to become a 'Next Gen Workplace' – a firm that resonated culturally, physically and emotionally with potential new hires. Our outreach mechanisms are no different than anybody else's. We are all visiting

campuses, posting job opportunities online and offering referral rewards. It's our

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Illinois" (Large Employer category.

The secret to Shamis' and SS&G's success is that there are no secrets – just a desire to attract more young professionals. Firms that want to hire more young people should seek to understand what drives young people to choose the firms they do. They should be proactive in implementing strategies that make their firm more attractive to the young professionals they are targeting.

"Times are changing and the way young people like to work may be different from how a firm normally conducts business. Things are not going back to the 'old ways,' and that's not necessarily wrong. Firms need to figure how to make these changes work for them," said Shamis.

After working with a consultant, Shamis decided to expand his efforts outside his firm to the city of Cleveland. He co-founded Engage! Cleveland to help bring more young people to the area. Shamis realized that there are socioeconomic advantages for Cleveland competing with other cities for young professionals, such as younger people laying down roots and helping to repopulate the city. Leveraging the talent acquisition model and efforts that already existed in other cities, Shamis spent time securing funding for the necessary resources and people Engage! Cleveland would need to be successful.

"I'm originally from Cleveland, and I'm very proud of my hometown. Lately, it has gotten a bad rep that it didn't necessarily deserve, but there's a great story here in Cleveland. No one was telling that story, so that's what we're doing with Engage! Cleveland – we're telling the city's story, attracting young people, and helping Cleveland rise to a Next Gen city," said Shamis.

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