

Seattle Funding Group's

MILLION DOLLAR MAN

It's safe to say Seattle Funding Group wouldn't be what it is today without Kent Rowe.

During his twenty five years at SFG, Senior Vice President Kent Rowe has seen it all. He was there for the lending group's explosive early growth in the late nineties and early 2000's; he remained a steady presence during the Great Recession; and he is still there today, a key player in the immense success Seattle Funding Group has experienced over the past three and a half decades.

I recently got a chance to talk with Kent at his Bellevue, WA office. He shared the story of how he came to Seattle Funding Group, how he's seen the industry change over the years, and the lessons he learned along the way.

PRIMED FOR SUCCESS

A veteran in the lending community, SFG Senior Vice President Kent Rowe embodies the smart and agile practices that have made the funding group a leader in the industry.



Kent Rowe | SFG Senior Vice President

As Kent Rowe talks about his career at Seattle Funding Group, he is quick to point out that SFG's success has been a team effort, and this is absolutely true.

But if you spend a few minutes talking to Kent and his colleagues, something else becomes crystal clear: the name Kent Rowe is synonymous with the agile, flexible, and smart lending practices that have made SFG what it is today — the leading direct portfolio lender in the western US.

In many ways, Kent's path to the world of private lending seems inevitable. His parents owned apartment buildings for as long as he can remember; real estate has always been a part of his life.

Early in his career, Kent got involved with flipping houses, which he did successfully for a number of years. After a stint as a sales rep, he considered partnering with a friend to buy the business, but pulled out when he saw the writing on the wall: being a middle marketer was a dead end. He was looking for something with far greater potential.

By the time Kent made his way to SFG, both he and the fund were primed for explosive growth.



Pictured | Kent Rowe with his wife and three sons

BETTER BORROWERS, BETTER LOANS

"Kent was a big part of our early growth," says President and CEO John Odegard. "He made inroads with builders, creating lasting relationships. He was also instrumental in crafting many of our lending products."

Kent came to Seattle Funding Group in 1998. Although the fund had been in existence for a decade at that point, the direct lending industry (at least as we know it today) was in many ways still in its infancy.

"Back in the day," Kent jokes, "you got a hold of a \$250,000 loan and you thought you were God's gift to lending."

The industry as a whole was focused on relatively small loans for relatively small projects. Quick-turn money wasn't seen as entrepreneurial money, like it is today. Back then, getting a construction loan from an outside source was frowned upon by many established builders and real estate entrepreneurs.

SFG, like most private lenders in those days, lent primarily to individual borrowers for residential projects. The projects were smaller and the borrowers were less sophisticated. They also carried a greater risk.

"Those smaller deals were really just a band aid loan for many borrowers," says Kent. "I've always pushed us to try and do a bigger deal. As opposed to going out and filling the traditional hard money lending niche, we were looking for better: better borrowers, better properties, better locations."

THE FIRST MILLION DOLLAR DEAL

Ultimately, this search for better deals led Seattle Funding Group to establish its own niche, moving away from residential and single-use properties and into commercial use and residential investment properties. And no one does this better than Kent Rowe.

In fact, Kent brought in the company's first million dollar loan. Although today, SFG's portfolio is full of deals worth quadruple that amount — and more — a million dollar loan was far from commonplace when Kent first brought the idea to John Odegard and the other principals.

Says Kent: "I remember telling John at the time, 'It's just another zero. It's the same thing.'" Same amount of thorough vetting, same amount of quality lending products. Essentially the same amount of work for a far greater investment. It was a leap of faith, but as with anything Kent does, it was a very calculated leap, always keeping the interests of investors top of mind.

But moving toward bigger deals wasn't only about adding more zeros to SFG's portfolio. As Kent puts it, numbers aside, those bigger deals are also better deals. "You want to make sound decisions. Decisions that make sense." Sometimes this means forging strategic partnerships, bringing others into a large joint venture to make a particular loan more palatable for the company to take on. Sometimes it means being flexible, tailoring a loan product to meet the needs of a specific project.

Whatever the situation, Kent has a keen understanding of the many nuances that go into a deal. This instinct is a good part of the magic that makes Seattle Funding Group tick.



Kent's SFG Funding | Luxury Spec Construction - Kamuela, HI



Kent's SFG Funding | Street Level Retail - Burien, WA



Kent's SFG Funding | Sun Valley Construction - Ketchum, ID



Kent's SFG Funding | Apartment Complex - Federal Way, WA

“THE ACTION OF THE BORROWING COMMUNITY SPEAK FOR ITSELF”

When describing what makes Kent Rowe such an asset to Seattle Funding Group, John Odegard puts it this way: “The actions of the borrowing community speak for itself.”

Smart lending practices and an eye for a good deal are only part of Kent’s success. Lending, especially at the scale done by SFG, is built on relationships. Kent seems to navigate these relationships almost instinctively.

“Kent is such a pleasure to work with,” says Bill Sherman of Sherman Homes. “He is straightforward, continually works to find us reasonable solutions, as well as just being a nice guy. We are honored to consider him as such an important part of our team.”

Maria Pettit of Belliss Homes, LLC agrees:

“We have worked with Kent since 2004 and have had nothing but a positive experience. He is professional, extremely easy to work with and knowledgeable about the building process. He is honest and able to get deals done quickly.”

When Kent is involved in a loan, says John Odegard, it’s not uncommon

for borrowers to return fifty or sixty times. This is well beyond the industry norm. Seattle Funding Group as a whole is above average in terms of repeat borrowers, but this is even more common when Kent gets involved in a loan.

“Borrowers with Kent are always long-lasting clients,” says John.



Belliss Homes | Kent Rowe SFG funding



Belliss Homes | Kent Rowe SFG funding

A CULTURE OF HARD WORK AND FAMILY FIRST

For many borrowers, the name Kent Rowe might be synonymous with Seattle Funding Group, but as Kent sees it, the true magic lies in the team of hard-working, skilled professionals behind every loan.

“When I bring in a great deal,” says Kent, “it’s not just me. When you’re going through a loan, you’re putting your name on a big number and expecting professionals to handle the product. If they’re not, you’re not going to want to come back again and again.”

Kent credits the entire team at SFG with guiding each successful loan from start to finish: office coordinator Lisa Larsen, who always knows just what to do when a borrower calls with an urgent problem; construction manager Jim McBride, whose attention to detail is a big part of why SFG has never lost on a construction project; Denise Tallman, who closes loans with deft and skill. And the many others who make each project happen.

If you look at Seattle Funding Group’s team roster, you’ll see all of these skilled professionals. You’ll see something else, too: longevity.



Pictured | Kent with his wife, Sarah and sons
(from right to left - Jack, Charlie & Scotty)



Pictured | Kent Rowe with his wife, Sarah

More than half of SFG’s team members have been with the company for over a decade; nearly a third have been around for at least two decades. Kent credits this longevity to a company culture that emphasizes family first.

A father of three boys, ages nineteen to twenty four, Kent has never missed a school event or a kid’s sports game. He took time off over the years to sit on football boards and lacrosse boards. He and his wife, Sarah, always made time to travel with their family: on frequent skiing vacations; to their golf hideaway in Suncadia; and trips to Europe, Australia and Africa.

So far, Kent’s career has been a huge success. But his track record with his family is his most important role.

“If you’re not taking care of your family, then what are you doing any of this for in the first place?”

About the writer: Allison Vrbova writes about business, technology, and innovation for freelance publications nationwide. She is based in Bellingham, WA.