In 2005, during the heyday of Silicon Valley real estate, Chris Trapani (B.A., Political Science, 1990) had all the outward appearances of success — a lofty position in a national firm, financial success, and a loving family. But something was missing.

“I was in a typical corporate real estate role,” Trapani said. “It was a classic profit-driven, bottom-line company, but there was no sense of soul from within.”

Trapani wanted to do business differently.

“I just decided that if I were going to pour myself into a company, I wanted to do it on my own terms, and that meant having a soul — the thing that gives us a deeper reason for what we do, a ‘why,’ beyond just sales transactions and profitability.”

With his lifetime best friend, Ryan Iwanaga (B.A., English, 1991), Trapani founded Sereno Group, a regional boutique real estate firm. Since opening its doors in 2006, the firm has grown to include 300 agents in nine locations spanning Santa Cruz, the Monterey coast, and Silicon Valley. Sereno Group finished 2014 with more than $2.4 billion in sales and has been showered with business accolades, including ranking in the top four of Silicon Valley residential real estate firms and in the top five residential firms in the nation for per-agent productivity. Additionally, Sereno Group has been named by Bay Area News Group as one of the Best Places to Work in the Bay Area for the past six consecutive years.

**FINDING SOUL**

Six months into the company’s launch, Trapani took a chance to travel to impoverished areas of Nicaragua with a micro-finance company, delivering micro-loans to local entrepreneurs. The trip changed his life and sent Sereno Group in a fresh direction.

Reading books influential to the Nicaragua trip organizers — “Banker to the Poor” by Muhammad Yunus, Nobel Peace Prize winner and micro-finance pioneer, and “Let My People Go Surfing” by Yvon Chouinard, Patagonia founder and owner — Trapani and Iwanaga found the inspiration for the development of Sereno Group’s soul: social entrepreneurship.

“I’d never really heard the concept of social entrepreneurship before,” said Trapani. “Six months
in, we had all this passion and artistic concepts of ‘we want to be different,’ ‘we want the soul.’ When I saw the definition of social entrepreneurship — essentially, being in business is about doing social good — it clicked.”

Added Iwanaga, “‘Let My People Go Surfing’ gave us permission to be a thoughtful, conscious company that aimed to be profitable but that also aimed to stand for more than just the dollars and cents of success. It really helped us formulate a vision and an idea that we could be a for-profit company but still have a soul and integrity.”

1% FOR GOOD
Embodying this newfound social mission, Sereno Group developed the 1% for Good movement. A unique take on Patagonia’s “1% for the Planet,” Sereno Group commits 1 percent of gross commissions to the local communities its offices serve. Every quarter, each office selects an organization to support.

“1% for Good is a very clear representation of the social entrepreneurship philosophy and our goal to be an active participant in the community,” Iwanaga said. “To me, an extension of social entrepreneurship is that you not only exist as a business owner within the community, but you also participate in the community as well. That’s really where the measure of one’s success comes from — how engaged you are in the community.”

Social entrepreneurship and 1% for Good are core values of the company, continually impacting Sereno Group’s strategy and culture. “A couple times over the past decade, we’ve lost our focus on the ‘why,’ and we feel it,” said Trapani. “We reprioritize to focus back on the good and the impact we’re having. If you use that as your compass, it helps you to work backward from there.”

In 2014, Sereno Group gave more than $400,000 to local communities and was named one of the 50 most philanthropic corporations in Silicon Valley. The company jumped an incredible 16 spots from 2013 to 2014, ranking 32nd on the Silicon Valley Business Journal’s philanthropy list and “competing” with tech giants like Google, Intel and Oracle.

“Old-school–minded businesses, including real estate firms, often tout being No. 1 in sales production and volume,” said Trapani. “We would rather boast about our giving. The more we actually lean into that, the more we see the influence and impact we’re having — and it provides inspiration for our organization.”

“It goes far beyond our sales and revenue numbers; it creates a lasting impact, a forever impact.”

Above: Ryan Iwanaga and Chris Trapani set out to create a real estate firm with experienced staff focused on delivering quality services. Sereno Group, a luxury boutique real estate firm, offers a host of services for clients, including real estate marketing, sales and lending.
The 1% for Good movement is agent-driven. Each of the nine offices chooses causes in its community to support.