

Management's responsibility: support service people

■ Your technicians have the most contact with customers, right?

Do they get just enough pay, encouragement, and/or support to get them through another day?

Do they really matter to your firm?

Are they *only* the technicians? Are they *only* the people who deliver service to your customers?

Second in a series on Zemke and 'service.'

"We've got to come to grips with what we pay people in front-line service jobs," says nationally known business consultant Ron Zemke. The operators of service businesses will have less and less choice anyway, says Zemke, because the number of eligible and trainable people looking for entry-level service jobs is shrinking.

Zemke directed a three-day ALCA Executive Forum this past February, and a big part of its message was that responsible, effective front-line people are the soul



Zemke: A manager's role is to support the service providers.

of any successful service company. About 250 lawn/landscape business owners took part in the Forum.

Zemke says some service delivery operations never rise from mediocrity because their management is like a pyramid and rigid. These operations foster the perception that the only way for employees to advance their careers is to become managers, to concentrate more on the organization's operation as they retreat further and further away from customer concerns.

This is dangerous thinking. The function of managers, in fact everybody in a service organization, should always be focused on customers. Or, says Zemke, in

serving the people who serve customers.

A manager's role is, in many respects, a servant's role, he believes—supporting service personnel, running interference, creating an atmosphere of understanding and trust and support.

"You have to have people at the front line who are comfortable with the idea that they have some control, and that you support their effort," says Zemke.

Back to the issue of technician pay.

Do high-quality service delivery organizations always pay their service people more than competitors? Not necessarily.

"Sometimes people are willing to trade off higher pay off for long-term employment and security," he adds. Other organizations reward competent people by giving them increasingly more responsibility and/or job variety. Don't be afraid to be creative when it comes to compensation.

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—Ron Hall



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