



Running LAPS

BY JIM PALUCH / PRESIDENT JP HORIZONS

In service, little things mean a lot

The most significant opportunity for leadership development is allowing interaction between your team and your customers.

For some owners this becomes a scary proposition, especially the controlling owner who thinks only he can treat the customer the way it needs to be treated. I have watched many of these owners and often thought they would be better off allowing their employees to talk with the customer. The opportunity to interact with clients can have a magical effect on the company through developing leaders, enhancing relationships and increasing profits. Client interaction is simple when the process is understood.

Bob Coulter, past head of people strategy for Club Corp. and now a key program developer for JP Horizons, talks about customer interaction in a three-step process. Following are highlights that your leaders can implement to add to your customer relationships.

1 THE WARM WELCOME – Teaching how to say hello, extend a handshake and look the other person in the eye is the foundation of this step. Pay attention to how people greet each other. The individual that has true leadership potential knows these basics. Follow up with simple courtesies that, unfortunately, the client often does not hear from a contractor or vendor, such as: “Mrs. Smith, thank you for taking the time to meet with us on this pre-construction meeting. The next half-hour will certainly help in the overall success of your landscape.” In a training session, create a list of warm welcome opening statements and continually

practice them in foreman meetings and training sessions.

2 THE MAGIC MOMENT – Magicians are masterful at doing the unexpected. Magic moments in customer service are those unexpected things that will stick in clients’ minds, keep them talking about you, and most importantly, telling someone about your company. A magic moment can be a foreman presenting a computer-enhanced “after picture” of a key focal area in a pre-job walk through. It could be asking whether the client minds if you take notes so you capture the important details. It can even be picking up a piece of trash or snipping a branch during a site visit, just to emphasize your attention to detail and quality. Creating and role playing magic moments and asking in company meetings, training challenge sessions or production meetings who created a magic moment will bring an awareness in those individuals with the potential to be leaders.

3 THE FOND FAREWELL – As contractors, this fond farewell stuff may sound a bit mushy, but rest assured, the fond farewell is what will bring the audience to its feet. It is based on the ability to smile, shake hands and make eye contact. A parting statement that creates confidence, ensures follow-through and continues to develop positive feelings from the client toward the employee and the company is the grand finale to this magical performance. A parting statement such as: “Mrs. Smith, with the input you have given me, the expertise of our crews and the detail

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BOOKSHELF



“Growing Dreams,” by Jim Paluch, is full of content and practical ideas as it systematically introduces the concepts of organizational excitement, a blueprint for every owner to use to energize their company and team. \$11.96 (plus tax for Ohio residents) and \$3.95 for shipping and handling.

“‘Growing Dreams’ is full of basic information put in a usable form. Anyone can grasp the ideas and put them to use immediately.” – *Don Hartwell, President of Spruce Lane Farm, Calgary, Alberta*

“Your chapter about Keeping The Good One reminded me of one of my key words for our best team members – “She or He is a real KEEPER” When it’s all said and done, it’s all about our people and you obviously get that. ‘Growing Dreams’ was a great read, a wonderful perspective for many of our processes and what a great operational blueprint for landscape businesses everywhere!” – *James Martin, President of James Martin Associates, Vernon Hills, IL*

“Just like Oscar and Curtis, I began at an early age mowing lawns around the neighborhood. I knew as a very young boy that I wanted to make horticulture my profession. My passion for pleasing customers and being successful has always dominated my life. I found so many things in this book that I could relate to. I’ve shared the book with many of my customers and all of my staff. This book is a “must read” for everyone who wants to be successful in the business world.” – *Jay Mears, Plant Center Manager of Lancaster Farms, Suffolk, VA*

Leadership Insights Q&A

Q How can the industry focus leaders on delivering quality to the customers?

A "It is the value and focus the organization places on quality that determines the focus of its leaders. If profits and other issues are more important, then the company's quality to focus will follow." — *Bob Franey, Total Landscape Inc., St. Louis, MO*

"Identify what customers want. Look at where we as leaders have our companies doing the right thing and where we are weak and why. Once you know that, plan and implement the improvements." — *Mike Leuders, Leuders Environmental Inc., Needham, MA*

"The best tool I have found for keeping our leaders focused on the customer is a business plan that allows them to keep score of the customer's satisfaction. We know once we have a customer for three years they are ours for the long run. New sales are a must, and of course we track that, but we also look very hard at how the customer votes on our service with their renewal "ballot". — *Phil Fogarty, WEED MAN, Euclid, OH*

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of this design, we will complete a project we all will be proud of. Thanks, and please call or e-mail if you have any questions." Allowing your foreman and crew people to develop statements like this, practice them in group settings and leading discussion on how clients will feel hearing them will produce a magical transformation in your future leaders.

One last thought on this "Warm Welcome, Magical Moment, and Fond Farewell" concept. It can work the

same incredible magic in relationships between employees, departments, peers, associates, and most importantly our families. ■

Jim Paluch and the JP Horizons team, through decades of combined experience in business, bring people solutions to companies through innovative training, creating compelling visions and systematically growing leaders. Contact them through their Web site at www.jp horizons.com.

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Participating in ALCA leadership leads to lasting relationships.

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7 How did we do?

Utilizing surveys to gauge customer satisfaction helps companies keep clients front and center.

TRAINING TIP

Evergreen Lawn in Michigan gave disposable cameras to its crews and asked them to take pictures of high-quality and poor-quality work. Most of the pictures returned were of high-quality work, and the crews were able to see everyone's perception of quality. Some things that crews do that are not part of their services make a property look high quality, such as edging asphalt, washing trash cans, making sure the owner's newspaper is on their step, and so on. Sharing perceptions of quality opened the minds at Evergreen Lawn to greater performance. (*From The Training Challenge by JP Horizons.*)

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