

# Build Your People, Build Your Business

By Bruce Carter

Over the years, countless fire equipment business owners have shared with me their frustration over the daunting task of finding and retaining high quality people in their organization. Not long ago I was treated to a beautifully illustrated demonstration of how to address today's personnel challenge.

## Impressed From the First Impression

It was Monday morning and I was looking forward to an exciting day of sales training and motivation that I was going to be conducting for a large and very successful fire equipment distributor in the western United States. I had arisen especially early, anxious to get the day started.

Rather than the usual 10-minute taxi cab ride to the meeting location that I was accustomed to, the company owner insisted one of his shop men pick me up in the lobby of my hotel at 6:30 a.m. and bring me to their location. Seldom refusing anything free, I accepted the generous offer gratefully.

At precisely 6:29 a.m., a young man bounded through the front door of the hotel lobby and walked briskly across the room, his right hand extended. "Mr. Carter, you look just like yourself. I'm Mike," my chauffer chirped with a broad smile that consumed his well-tanned face.

My initial thought was that Mike's exuberance was more typical of a young school kid on a Friday afternoon anticipating the weekend than of a young man facing the workweek on Monday morning. "I saw your picture on the seminar information you sent my boss," Mike offered in explanation of the instant recognition.

"Oh, I see. Well, I sure do appreciate the lift Mike," I replied as my driver swooped up



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my two large bags and did an about-face toward the lobby door.

As we rode along, it became apparent that Mike was definitely not your typical employee in his early twenties. This young guy was especially bright, alert, polite, and brimming with enthusiasm. He said that he worked part-time for my host and was a student at a nearby university as well. I told Mike that it appeared he sure did enjoy his job, even if it was only part-time.

"I absolutely love what I do and the people I do it for, Mr. Carter. You'll see why I say that in just a few minutes. We're almost there," he said. I wondered just what I was in store for.

## Cheering on Employees

Obviously standing watch for our arrival, Dave, the company owner and my host for the day, exploded through the front door as our car rolled to a stop. Sporting a grin as wide as Texas, he swung open the car door, grabbed my two bags, and shook my hand all in one fluid motion.

"Bruce, welcome my friend! The whole gang is excited about you coming. We've been looking forward to this day all month long," he said as though he was a long-lost friend who had not seen me in years. "Come on in. I'll introduce you to my family before we get the seminar started."

What followed was not rehearsed, planned, or acted out for my benefit but, as I later learned, was simply standard behavior around this most unusual fire protection company.

With both of my bags in tow, Dave proceeded to provide a more "formal" introduction to my morning's chauffer. "Bruce, Mike here is one extra-special young guy. He keeps our service shop running like a top. In just twenty hours a week this fellow gets more work completed and out the door than any two men working forty hours each! I've decided I'm just not going to allow him to leave here when he graduates from school!" Mike's wide smile broadened while savoring every word of praise the boss was heaping on.

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As we walked into the lobby, Dave shouted across the room. "Hey Billy, get over here my man. Bruce, this is Bill, the best service manager in the business bar none. I don't know how I'd keep the doors open around here without this guy. He has recruited and trained an absolutely fantastic service crew. His people love him, and he loves them right back. He does one terrific job."

"I'm pleased to meet you Billy," I said. Billy was beaming.

As we rounded the corner toward the training room we nearly ran into a petite lady who Dave introduced to me as Theresa. "Bruce, Theresa here is our ace, premier, numero uno accounts receivable person. If there is some poor soul out there that owes us money, I can guarantee you this little lady is going to get it! She keeps this place in the black and we all love her for that. Her bubbly attitude is like sunshine every day around here."

Theresa blushed a bit, saying, "Oh Dave, you're always saying stuff like that." I could tell that she enjoyed it too!

After identical encounters with yet four more company associates, it was clear to me why my young chauffeur was the ball of fire he was at 6:30 that morning. Dave, the boss, was a cheerleader par excellence! He looked for the good in his people (his "family") at every opportunity and told them what he found. His positive enthusiasm was highly contagious, and it appeared as though his entire team was infected!

## The Benefits of People Building

In organizations where praise and recognition are liberally administered and where people are encouraged to feel good about themselves, exciting things begin to take place:

**Confidence abounds.** You could see it in their body language and hear it in their voices. Dave's team had a positive self image. Each member was motivated to do and be their best each day.

**Customers win.** When customer service providers enjoy their work, their enthusiasm and positive attitudes are transferred to customers. Talk about a winning situation for everyone concerned!

**Turnover is minimal.** Associates are much less likely to leave a workplace where it is obvious people are complimented and feel valued. Even that supposedly all-important compensation becomes less important in an environment where people are encouraged and efforts are recognized regularly.

**Associates are more punctual.** Recent university studies reveal that in working environments where people feel respected and appreciated, incidents of poor punctuality and absenteeism are dramatically lessened.

**Work is, well, fun!** When people sincerely enjoy their jobs, tasks becomes much less like work and more like challenging goals to be achieved. It makes perfect sense that when associates know they will be positively recognized for a job well done, they strive to do the things more frequently that will get them recognition.

Mary Kay Ash, founder of Mary Kay Cosmetics once said, "If you want to build your business, you've got to build your people." Dave is a fire protection company owner that has obviously taken Mary Kay's advice to heart and is reaping the benefits—one very loyal, productive, and motivated "family."

Keep up the good work Dave and thank you for the encouraging lesson in people building! ♦

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