



Creating a Win-Win Culture

by Bob Houchin

Typically, the *Learning from the Best* column is dedicated to the stories of power-performing technicians, salespeople, and CCRs who have posted phenomenal Scoreboard numbers. Occasionally, THE COMPASS comes across incredible stories about SGI companies that need to be shared. This is one of those moments.

PSI member Brothers Plumbing & Heating in the Denver/Boulder, Colorado area recently received the Better Business Bureau's Torch Award for Marketplace Trust. The award recognizes the company that strives to set a higher standard in every aspect of business. Roughly 120 companies were nominated, but after an extensive evaluation process, the award belonged to Brothers Plumbing & Heating.

Owner Marvin Kansteiner sincerely believes in the "win-win-win" theory. He believes the customer should be treated with respect while receiving exceptional service. (It's no surprise that they receive dozens of endorsements from happy homeowners.) Marvin also believes his people should be treated well and paid well. When the company hits its goals, he has been known to write \$40,000 in bonus checks in one month. Finally, when the consumer and the employee win, Marvin knows that Brothers Plumbing & Heating also wins. The company has been around for 30 years, has more than 40 employees and 25 trucks. This triple-win philosophy has developed an incredible culture that the Better Business Bureau selection committee has recognized.

So, what did Marvin think when he was nominated for the BBB's Torch Award for Marketplace Trust? How did he respond when he discovered that Brothers won? And what exactly makes the business worthy for

this type of an award? I think you'll see after reading this month's *Learning from the Best*:

Congratulations on the award. Were you nominated for it, or do you submit an application for this award? We were nominated. We're not sure by whom, but there were 120 companies that received nominations. After the nominations, there's a process you go through to proceed. You have to answer a number of questions, and it's quite detailed. Based upon the information provided, they select the top 10 nominees. A committee then narrows it to three and the final three are interviewed by another committee. The selection committee comes to your place of business and interviews the principles and three of your employees. The committee consisted of 12 people and the process took roughly three hours.

When did you discover that the company had won? They don't tell you until the night of the award show. It's like the Academy Awards. They invite all three finalists to attend, and spotlight each company throughout the evening. At the end, they announce the winner.

What did you initially think upon receiving it? It was very exciting. I had to speak in front of about 500 people, which was a bit intimidating. I'm not used to talking to quite that many people. Actually, in my speech, I recited the poem "Beyond the Bottom Line" that Terry Nicholson wrote. It's something we truly believe in; in fact, it hangs in our lobby. Now, three or four people have called us looking for a copy of it.

Denver is one of the largest metropolitan areas in the country. Yet, you managed to beat out 120

companies. Why do you feel like you were chosen? We've been in business for 30 years, and over that time we've always provided our customers with superior service. We also take care of our employees and stay active with charities in the community. Whoever nominated us must have seen that. We never quite figured out what put us over



Marvin Kansteiner of
Brothers Plumbing &
Heating in Denver,
Colorado.

the edge. I think it was probably a combination of things.

I've heard that you're a big proponent of the win-win-win philosophy. How did you introduce it to your team, and how do you ensure it's something that everyone in your company practices? You're right. We really do believe that the customer, our employees, and the company should all win. I think it's something we've instilled in our culture. It helps that my management team has been here a long time. They understand what we're trying to do and everyone talks about the win-win-win situation. So, they're always hearing the message.

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"We don't just want to perform a service for our customers; we want to go above and beyond."

Bob Houchin is
Editor-in-Chief for
THE COMPASS



Hope and Change

These Two Powerful Words Can Lead to a Successful 2009

by Darrel Yashinsky

Our neighbors from the south recently had their presidential election. I've referenced it several times in my past Monday Morning Memos. Both candidates, Senator Obama and Senator McCain, ran on the platform and premise for hope and change. Obviously, the message that resonated with the most Americans decided the election.

This message of hope and change resonated with me, as well. It made me stop and think. It's hard to believe, but 2009 is here. Consequently, it means 2008 and what happened this last year is in the past. In talking with a few members, that's probably a good thing.

No doubt that 2008 was a stressful year for some people. I know contractors that had some hurdles to jump and challenges to conquer. It's easy to think negatively when the economy begins to stagnate. Anyone can get sucked into that "bad seed" mentality, especially when it's talked about constantly around us.

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We also have an awards banquet every year. At the last banquet, we unveiled a bronze statue of a turtle on a fence post. If you haven't heard the story around the turtle on the fence post, the point of the story is that it takes others to help you get on top. The turtle obviously didn't get on the top of the fence post on his own. It's a great way to look at life and business, too. It takes a team to do something. We keep that statue in the office to remind everyone that building this company takes a team effort. No one person can do it all. I think we've created that type of culture.

While you value everyone in your company, it's the technicians in the field that are face to face with the clients. What do they do in the home to make themselves stand out from the others? In the hiring process, we place a lot of emphasis on personality. It has to

You might have seen this defeatist attitude in your own company. Salespeople appear more disappointed that sales aren't as easy. Technicians may be coming back with more diagnostic fees, and your CCRs aren't booking quite as many calls. Maybe, you've been sucked in, too. You may be having some negative thoughts about your business!

I'm here to tell you that 2009 is a new year. And it's time to change that negative way of thinking! Rather than focusing on the bad, you need to believe in the possibility of the positive. You need to preach a message of hope and change to your team!

The American economy has struggled mightily. Still, people turned out to vote in record numbers because they responded to the two candidates' messages of hope and change. You need to be that same mouthpiece in your company. Unless you have everyone working together and being positive, nothing

be there. Our people have to be friendly. We wear the Safety Seal on every shirt and, of course, we do background checks and drug tests. We also stress the importance of value all the time with our people. We don't just want to perform a service for our customers; we want to go above and beyond. On our response cards, people rarely talk about the actual work. They write about how nice or personable the technician was. I read every response card we get, and we put the really good ones in our technicians' boxes to see. They're getting positive reinforcement on a weekly basis, and it makes them want to continue to do better.

You mentioned the Technician Seal of Safety. Do homeowners seem to notice it? We put it everywhere. In addition to the patches, we also have it on our trucks. We even have a Yellow Page ad that has a picture of a baby in a crib. The ad reads, "Do you know who's com-

can improve. Nothing can evolve, and you'll stay in this negative-thinking rut.

As you enter 2009, start thinking of things you can do to lift your team and the atmosphere in your business. Get back to the basics. As a company, develop some goals and make everyone sign off on them. Don't be afraid to ask your employees to commit to working harder for a better, more successful new year. Then, start training—train every day if you must. Next, if you're really struggling for calls, there's nothing wrong with going door to door and asking for business.

No matter what you do, start 2009 on a positive foot. Help your people believe that 2009 will be an incredible year; you won't be affected by what's going on around you... if you all stick together and work hard as a team. When people have hope and a desire to change, great things can happen. **SGI**

Darrel Yashinsky is President of SGI Canada

ing into your home? We do." Then, we have the Safety Seal in the ad. People call us all the time on that ad. We use it in other marketing, too. It's a powerful message that really works well.

To receive this type of honor, you must have an exceptional staff of people. Where do you find your employees? How do you recruit? Well, a lot of people find us. We have about 25 trucks on the road now and have been around for 30 years. We have high visibility. However, we also pay to have a recruiter; it's a temp-to-hire service. They know our business very well, so they recruit constantly and screen people for us. We don't hire everyone they bring us, but they cut down the process. It's worked very well for us.

We have a lot of people who have been here for a long time. We promote that longevity. Actually, last year I took six



Brothers Plumbing award-winning team.

in the war can be nominated to have a house built for them. We were recently involved with one of the homes that was built; we donated all of our services and also got some of our wholesalers involved. We helped build a two and a half bath home for Sergeant Keil who was shot in the neck by a sniper and became paralyzed from the neck down. We have another one coming up for a marine who lost both legs from the knee down. There are about 50 or 60 of these homes nationwide, and we're proud to be involved. I was never in the military, but I had a father who was in two wars. I felt like it was something we should do.

guys that had been with me 10 years or better fishing in Alaska. In 2010, I'll be taking probably 12 of them up. It's getting to be a large group. It gives them something to get excited about.

When you hire a new person, what kind of an indoctrination process must that individual complete? How do you get them to understand the importance of the win-win-win? If it's an apprentice, they'll ride for a year or two with another technician. If they already have attained the appropriate skill level, there's an orientation process that my daughter, who does our human resources, goes through with them. That takes about a half a day. Next, they see our videos and learn about who we are. Then, they ride with one of our lead techs for a minimum of two weeks. We don't like throwing them to the wolves, and it's not unusual for them to ride along for as long as four weeks. If they haven't done any StraightForward® Pricing, it can take a while. Over time, they learn our culture by being around our guys and going to meetings. Finally, they go in their own truck.

You mentioned that you have an awards ceremony, and you take employees fishing. What other types of activities do you have throughout the year to promote the company's team atmosphere? We have three parties a year. We just had our Christmas party and this year's theme was a mystery playhouse. They did a great job of getting everybody involved and we all had a lot of fun. In March, we have our awards ceremony and in the summer, we'll have

a picnic. It's funny, more people attend the awards ceremony than anything else. We have about a dozen awards, and they vary from serious to a silly one. Really, the awards ceremony is a great chance to compliment everybody. With having about 45 employees now, it gives us a chance to reintroduce everyone to each other. It ties everyone together.

I know your company is very active in charitable efforts. What organizations do you work with, and what do you do for them? We've been with one particular one for about 10 years now. It's called the Brent Eley Foundation. It's similar to the Ronald McDonald house, but it's not as publicly known. Brent Eley was a young boy who died from leukemia 20 years ago. His parents started the organization. Our children's hospital serves about seven states. When children contract leukemia, they come here for a minimum of six to nine months for treatment. These kids need a very sterile environment to stay in because they don't have an immune system. The foundation has a home that can provide that type of environment. We came across them by accident. They called us to do work for them, and after finding out who they were, there was no way we could charge them. Any time they have a need, they know they can call us. They've just built a new 18 apartment complex next to the new hospital, and we pledged to donate \$100,000 over a three-year period to help.

We also got involved this year with a program called Home for Our Troops. It's similar to Habitat for Humanity. Soldiers that have been severely injured

We selected these charities because they help people who have either put their life on the line for others, or they've been affected by circumstances through no fault of their own. We felt like this was the least we could do for these people that really deserve a hand.

How rewarding is it to receive an award of this nature? Do you feel like you're achieving your company-wide goals to best serve your clients? I don't know about other owners, but you don't get stroked very often. Most of the time, you hear the bad. So, it was a great feeling that night. It was nice for someone to recognize something that I've believed in the last 30 years. Yes, it meant a lot.

If you talked with a new member of SGI, and they wanted to replicate the team atmosphere that you've managed to create at Brothers Plumbing & Heating, what would you say to them? You have to be deeply involved with the lives of your employees. You have to care. As we've gotten larger, I don't deal with a lot of my people on a daily basis anymore, but when we were smaller, I used to always thank everyone for their hard work each day. One employee stopped and said no one had ever done that, and he appreciated it. I was saying it because I genuinely care about them and am thankful for their hard work. I haven't been in the field for close to 20 years, but you have to remember they do some nasty work. You always have to treat them like people and be positive for them. If you want people to go the extra mile, you have to go that extra mile for them. **SGI**