

Are You an Asset?

By Ric Harry

Many in the water industry have been at it for a long time and have seen many changes over the years. Especially interesting is the change in how valuations of positions, functions, personnel and companies are measured.

Remember when we had “backup” personnel and even backups for some of *them*? Terms such as apprentice, intern, trainee or assistant were common, and were the expected place for most employees to start. Many young people could not wait to start working part time while still in school. Profit before taxes was not the only measurable and valued asset—companies considered skilled personnel, succession planning, and human and intellectual resources just as important.

This surplus of eager people created a competitive workplace culture. People took pride in “paying their dues” or “earning their stripes,” knowing that their hard work would be recognized and was of consequence. Time spent training on the job was considered a common and esteemed investment by both the workforce and companies. Evidently, this investment created loyalty in

both employers and employees, as statistics show people used to stay at companies for much longer than they do today.

Employees clearly understood that they had to do their share and do it well—otherwise, they were a burden to the rest and of little merit. The expectation to contribute more than you received was understood and adhered to, and there seemed to be a self-governance in place.

There was a self-imposed stewardship to perform as well as or better than mentors or coaches. The culture of “we can do more” was driven by personal pride. It was not all that long ago that we timed each other loading the trucks or tried to outdo each other during installations for nothing more than bragging rights.

We competed on how many appointments we could book in a day and how many demonstrations we did in a night, week or month. The friendly competition was about the work, not the results—the working philosophy at all levels, be it worker, manager or owner, was “do the work and the results will come.”

Measuring Up

Many companies today have people on staff or on contract to measure everything. In fact, those are the positions we have backups for and the strategy is simple: You are either adding to or subtracting from the worth of the company—there is no gray area or middle ground.

Companies today are extremely sensitive to cost and are operating leaner than ever, so it is important not to be overhead or risk being “down-sized” or “right sized.” Although we live in a “super size” world, this is not the staffing model of most companies in North America. Knowing that, we can easily calculate whether we are assets or liabilities. More importantly, we can make small improvements to ensure that we are valuable. We must be sure we are contributing to the company’s

top and bottom lines. It is not enough today to be a loyal subject or even great at what we do. We must add a measurable contribution to the company to ensure that our positions and functions are significant, and this must be quantified in dollars and cents.

It is simple to determine the new revenue salespeople bring in each day, week and month. This means not just closing the leads the company pays for, but generating new leads, selling more dollars per close, and ensuring the costs to generate new business are low and margins are high.

The same can be said of service people—they need to be adding on services, upgrading old equipment and minding the company’s revenue stream. As with salespeople, it is easy to calculate the revenue generated each day from service and ensure that customers are getting all the services they want while still making a profit.

It is really no different for the person in the office answering the phone, minding the company’s business or administering the company accounts, as there are occasions to uncover new revenue opportunities, reduce costs and show measureable profit gains.

For the installer, fulfilling the promises that the salespeople make ensures customers are satisfied. There are many situations in which additional equipment and services that the salespeople may have not presented could be uncovered, which provides measureable worth.

Human resources is not just a buzzword or department, but a commodity that companies count on to survive. Without great people there are no great companies. Regardless of the position or function, it can be interesting and fun to deliver a measurable contribution. In reflection of what you do and how you do it—are you an asset or a liability? *wqp*

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