

Shining The Spotlight On Success

by Margaret Pittelkow

Winning the battle for market share and customer service excellence are ongoing challenges for any business. Tow industry recognition awards not only provide an opportunity to reward those who are at the top of their game, but can also provide a snapshot of best practices that others can adopt. And the winners will tell you good business practices don't have to be complicated — sometimes the formula for success is as simple as going back to the basics.

"We operate under the 'Golden Rule' — simply treating others as we ourselves would like to be treated. It may sound old-fashioned, but it works with our customers," says 2003 AAA Service Providers of Excellence gold-level award recipient Joe Kleczkowski, owner of Personal Auto Care in Middletown, Connecticut. His business has been involved with the AAA Hartford/Cincinnati Motor Club since 1987. Kleczkowski says he uses the Golden Rule with his employees as well, providing them with insurance benefits and higher-than-average pay. He is proud to be well known for another reason — the cleanliness of his bathrooms. "We've earned a good word-of-mouth reputation for paying attention to the small details that others may find less important. But it's one of the reasons people trust us with their auto repairs," says Kleczkowski.

A look at other winners reveals some traits and practices shared by all. Some of their core operating philosophies can benefit those who are just starting out, or who are looking to emulate their success.

First, there is a passion for excellence. Although the gold-level Service Providers of Excellence Award winners had individual call volume in the several thousands each year, these winners managed to achieve low service delivery time to the scene while netting a high number of compliments from the motoring public along with very low lev-



els of damage complaints. Clearly the owners have figured out how to motivate their service personnel to provide a memorable road service experience for their customers.

Good Business Practices

All top achievers place an emphasis on driver training and appearance of both fleet and uniformed drivers. Some owners set up and sponsor training that is open to all drivers in their surrounding areas. Ted Dixon, President and CEO of Pro-Star Towing, Inc. in northern California devotes approximately 800 square feet of his successful towing and repair operation in Milpitas to training, and shares the space for the CTTA (California Tow Truck Association) education efforts. "We hold monthly meetings for our drivers to discuss safety issues and share best practices with each other, and we never forget we're in the service industry," says Dixon.

Community Service

Most top tow businesses are respected for their community service. Involvement in substance abuse prevention programs as well as youth sports and civic programs are just some of the ways this group gives something back. And businesses that are memorable for this reason will attract customers who want to be loyal back to them in return.

Finally, this group innovates — they

are open to new and different business opportunities as well as creative ways of doing the routine. Some have diversified into related business lines such as taxi and limousine services. Many who tow for AAA have figured out how to incorporate alternate service delivery methods such as light service vehicles over the more costly tow truck, especially the new roadside AAA/CAA battery replacement service. This group also has embraced new service delivery methods and technology innovations — remote facility dispatch and GPS systems for location and truck monitoring are common methods.

Pro-Star may have hit upon a very low-tech yet creative way to turn a bad roadside experience into a positive one. "Before they leave, all my drivers offer to clean the windshields of the members they serve," says Ted Dixon. "It took some convincing of my drivers at first, but the overwhelming positive response leaves everyone feeling satisfied."

As uncertainties abound, what probably will not change is the successful formula needed to thrive in the ever-competitive automotive service industry. Expertise, professionalism and hard work continue to endure. And those who master the basics of the Golden Rule will continue to shine in the warm glow of the spotlight. 🚚

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