PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE
This Is the Season

It is the season of giving, of hope, of faith, and of fellowship. It's also a time of renewal and re-dedication to our chosen walk in life. As a craftsman, a business owner, and a member of PDCA, what does this season mean to you? For many, it brings the close of a successful year, a year of milestones and great accomplishment. For some, it closes the door on a year best forgotten, where outside circumstances and inside turmoil conspired to produce less than expected. Regardless of outcome, this is the season to prepare to begin anew.

In this season of giving, has this been a year of generosity? Have you given of your time, of your money, your talents, your ideas? Have you been too busy to make a difference outside of your own reality? Opportunities abound in your community, in your country, and in your world. There is even opportunity within your own profession to take another by the hand and help show them the way. Reap what you sow is a simple lesson many never learn. Giving isn't something you do when you get time or when you have enough. It is also something that produces returns you cannot measure. If giving hasn't been a priority, the opportunity to begin again quickly approaches. Give. It can change the world.

In this season of hope, hope breeds optimism. Hope isn't a gamble, it isn't two fingers crossed on each hand with your eyes closed, it isn't luck. Hope is an attitude of possibility, an outlook of opportunity, the fuel of dreams. Have you internalized optimism, made it the spring in your step and the force behind your words? Hope isn't just nourishment for your own soul, for if it is, you've wasted the gift. Rather, it is something you share, give away, and teach. It should spread like a wildfire on a hot summer's day among those close to you, your family, friends, employees, peers, and customers. Dedicate yourself to fan the flames and spread hope.

In this season of faith we look beyond ourselves. We look to a higher power to guide our hand and show us the way. We not only have faith in something bigger, we have faith in ourselves, in those around us, and in our mission in life. Faith helps keep us on the straight and narrow. It is seeing clearly when the room is dark, hearing what isn't said, and knowing you've been heard when no one is around. Do you have faith in your plans, your goals, your dreams? If not, it's the perfect season to renew. Make big dreams, have faith, and don't be surprised.

In this season of fellowship we celebrate our journey with others. For without those around us, success would be hollow, failure lonely, and the challenge empty. Fellowship is an opportunity to share, to learn, to save and be saved. It is also something that takes effort, doesn't happen by itself, and needs to be nourished. Did you have a year of true fellowship? Did you make a connection that made a difference?

Continued on page 2
in your life or someone else’s? Did you miss that connection and the treasure it promised? It is the season to sit and talk a little longer, to really listen and care a little more, to offer some hard won advice and look for help where you haven’t looked before. Find the time and find a friend you didn’t know you had.

Make this your season of renewal and rededication. May it bring you, your families, employees, and all those close much joy and countless blessings.

Wishing you all the best,

Mark Lewis, President
PDCA Residential Forum

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

As I enjoyed reviewing the new round of articles for this edition, I am once again impressed by the vast reservoir of knowledge that our membership possesses.

In this issue Dean Ridings generously describes his return from a financial precipice and Julie Gehrke bravely exposes one company mishap that could happen to any of us ....and all of the contributions reveal a resourcefulness and integrity that set these members apart from the crowd.

For those of us who occasionally experience moments of pompous grandiosity and believe our companies need no improvement or our systems no refining, these honest reflections serve as reminders that running a business, any business, can yield life-altering and humbling experiences. Success can never be taken for granted!

My thanks to those who take the time to share with us a glimpse into their businesses.

Now that winter is upon us we will all enjoy a more relaxed schedule. As you read through and savor this edition of the Painter’s Rag, I ask that you reflect on your own past and find that nugget of wisdom and share it with your fellow Residential Forum members.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Cheers,
Nigel Costolloe, Catchlight, Inc.
Fine Residential Painting

CONTACT INFORMATION TO SEND ARTICLES TO NIGEL FOR THE NEXT PAINTER’S RAG!!

Send word documents via email to catchlight.painting@verizon.net
Call Nigel at 617-734-1696
I've heard it said that disasters don't happen in a bubble, they are more often the result of a series of small missteps, tiny clues, slight innuendos, eschewed glances. Put in another way by my favorite accountant, "The devil is in the details."

That would explain how we painted the right house wrong this fall - the first offense of this magnitude in our 25 years of operations.

We were contracted by a remodeling company to paint the trim on a home. The body had cedar siding - the kind of siding many folks prefer to leave natural looking. The estimate was given a year prior to the work being done - tremor #1. When it came time to organize the job we looked at the specifications and there was no body color mentioned. Hmmm - it must be the same as the trim color - tremor #2.

The trim was bid using a blueprint - site unseen. Just prior to the start date our new apprentice estimator eye-balled the job. A veteran painter would have recognized the natural cedar siding as a questionable recipient of latex paint but not a newbie - tremor #3.

The paint was ordered and delivered - the crew arrived. The supervisor of the crew (not being a native to this part of the country) didn't question anything - tremor #4.

The field superintendent for the general contractor of the job visited the site at least four times during the wrongful painting of the body and didn't question the proceedings - tremor #5.

Then the homeowner arrived on the weekend to view the progress. I can only imagine the response. If it were me, there would be lots of screaming and maybe some fainting - EARTHQUAKE.

We got the news of the disaster via a phone call from the builder's rep the morning of our last day on vacation. With the price of lumber, my first thought was - oh my gosh darn golly, it's going to be a $30,000.00 siding job. After a phone call to our trusty paint rep - we found out that the paint could be stripped using a water based product and a power washer. We called the builder's rep back and offered to strip the paint or have the homeowner choose any color and we would repaint the siding.

The homeowner chose the strip job if we could prove it would work. The 3 foot sample area worked like a teacher's pet at a 5th grade choir audition for the solo part. It was predicted that it would only take the crew 4 days.

Someone, I can't remember who, said, "Much quicker than repainting." High fives all around.

These are the times when a sense of humor is all you've got baby!

Three weeks or so later: it took a combination of liquid and gel strippers together with brisk 50 degree weather for our sneezing, coughing painters to get the job done. We dealt with freaked out homeowners and water issues I don't ever want to remember.

Did I mention the location? This kind of thing doesn't happen on your simple side street. It happens in the woods where there is no access by vehicle. It happens where there are mile long treks through ravines. Ever hear the word "portage"? Picture a ladder with a painter on each end, loaded with boxes of paint to carry down a path no wider than the ladder.

After all of that, the trim we were actually supposed to paint needed to be repainted due to the trauma of power washing the stripper.

If you believe that all things work out for good then this story will eventually have a happy ending if I can save you time and money the next time you need to strip latex off a cedar sided house. Give me a call and I'll explain the exact procedure.

Also, if you can top this one I'll pass along my Blooper of the Year Award - otherwise I think mine is a lock.

In closing, I wish I could say that a simple solution would prevent a repeat of the crisis described above. The paperwork was all in order and stated the correct specifications. The error occurred when the original estimator left our employment and did not go over the paperwork with the new estimator. The new estimator should have called the general contractor to ask about painting the body. Instead he ordered enough paint for the body and when the job supervisor saw the volume of paint he assumed he was to paint the entire house - even though the information in his field file differed. In the future, a routine walk of the property, as is our usual protocol, with the estimator and job supervisor will eliminate this problem.
After years of fantasizing, pressuring and promising I finally moved back to Denver. Fanta­
sizing because I spent my formative years there and still got warm fuzzy feelings when I thought about it, pressuring my father to remake his business so I would feel more at ease, and promising my wife because she’s a Denver girl and Denver is where we courted, married and started our family.

Long story short my chance came this past summer. We left for Colorado mid August and after setting up the family with relatives I returned to MN to ready my house for sale, two weeks later I was loaded and ready to roll. Well, a funny thing happened on my way to Denver, a colleague called me on my cell phone; he too was on his way to Denver and as it turns out we were only a few miles apart on the freeway; so we decided to share a meal and a bunk in Nebraska. Over dinner my friend shared his experience that afternoon; just outside the Twin Cities he dozed and went off the road, the shock of the rough ditch jarred him alert in time to avoid a bridge abutment, in so doing he nearly rolled his truck. Fortune smiled on my friend that day and in the place of disaster - only a flat tire and minor fender damage. The event terrified him but he also felt a sense of gratitude and a feeling of renewal - like he’d been given another bite at the apple. He and I felt similar emotions as a result of different circumstances.

My friend fell asleep at the wheel because he was bored, but put him on the ribbons of city freeway and he'll not be sleeping. So, pardon me gentle readers but I feel a metaphor coming on here, is driving a little bit like life?

As many of you know our family has been hard at work for some years trying to fit all the pieces together in this business. Through trial and error we worked at it: PDCA, Advanced Shop Talk, Advisors On Target and countless related programs and events strengthened our business, and hardened our resolve - we had a lot of chips on the table and we were learning from the very best in the business. Naturally we thought it was just a matter of time before the walls cracked and the fortress crumbled and our cup would runneth over (if you want to make God laugh, tell him of your plans).

Stagnation. More than one head makes anything a freak, and a business is no different; bring too many ideas and consensus becomes unattainable, the result is stasis, balance and mere existence - but no motion. The first law of physics: objects in motion tend to stay in motion; objects at rest tend to stay at rest. We were at rest in the family business and something had to change.

Stagnation is a condition required for renewal because let’s face it, if something is working well - or at the very least making unambiguous movement in the right direction - there is little reason for renewal.

Change is a wonderful process, one to be embraced and not avoided. Change is a force that brings no prejudice along with it, like the invisible hand, change is an amoral force that sometimes acts upon us without regard for our preferences.

One man’s fortune is sometimes another’s misfortune – or so it may seem. A Chinese proverb comes to mind: once a horse came to a farmer’s yard and he took it in. The farmer told his friend about the horse, his friend replied “what good fortune”, to which the farmer replied “we’ll see”. The next day while training the horse the farmer’s son fell and broke his leg. The farmer told his friend who replied “what misfortune”, to which the farmer replied “we’ll see”. The next day the army swept through the countryside conscripting all able bodied young men. The farmer told his friend who replied “what good fortune”, to which the farmer said “we’ll see”. The point of the parable is obvious, but the lesson is not so easily absorbed – especially when you’re in it.

**HOLIDAY JOY OR HOLIDAY STRESS??**

The holiday season is here and for most of us it is a joyful time. For most of us also—STRESS! Here area a few pointers to de-stress yourself.

Use breathing to restore calm. Breath slowly in through the nose and out through the mouth several times. Be decisive: Carrying around indecision can be stressful and exhausting. Manage your time & set priorities: Everything can’t be top priority. Decide what tasks truly requires immediate attention. Also try these: reward yourself and get sufficient sleep.
DEBT MANAGEMENT FOR THE SMALL BUSINESS
By Dean Ridings, Ridings Custom Painting

It was the spring of 2002 and we had just finished the build-out of the new showroom in the upscale neighborhood of Bellevue, just across Lake Washington from Seattle. After being in business for over 17 years, the prior year of 2001 was a banner year for Ridings Custom Painting Inc., with over $2.2 million in sales and a cash reserve of over $70K, and a line of credit of $80K we felt ready to take the company to the next level of growth and profitability.

Our optimism and enthusiasm was quickly defused by a loss of momentum, a lawsuit over $75K, the increased overhead, and the lack of sales from the showroom; much of which could be contributed to some degree to the overly optimistic projections based on our new Ridings Meydenbauer Showroom and the dissipation of energies and focus during its set up. The company began a free fall which I hope to never experience again in my lifetime.

With a payroll of over $20K weekly, cash reserves disappeared in a matter months, the credit line began to be exhausted [maxed out], bills went unpaid, and creditor calls came to be new daily management task. We embarked on a recovery plan to save the very life and vitality of the company. Fortunately after two years of making some very difficult decisions, cutting costs, and systematically managing our debt, we have slowly but consistently raised out of the ashes of debt to become a leaner and more profitable company.

It is my hope that you never have to experience what we have over the last two years; the following are some guiding principles to ensure that you will not have to.

“Live beneath your means...” Spend Less Than You Take In: This would apply both in your business and personal life. A company should always have some cash reserves, starting with 2 or 3% savings. With a goal of trying to save 10% or more of your net profits or 2 - 5% of your gross profit, this will allow you to accumulate reserves which can be called upon during the winter months, an economic downturn, or unforeseen setbacks in your business. With a goal of a month’s expenses in reserve you can sleep well. As it is known “cash is king” in business and there is no substitute for a solid cash reserve.

Obtain a Line of Credit Before You Need It: While your company is vital and profitable, you should develop a banking relationship which is active and mutual. This is to say that the bank should need you as much as you need them. We had set out about six months prior to obtain a new banking relationship. After interviewing three banker and banks we found a small local bank with an emphasis on small businesses. I remember the first time we went to buy a van with our new bank; we called them and told them what we where try to accomplish and asked them how long it would take to get approval for the van loan. Our banker paused for a moment and replied, “You’re approved, when would you like to come in to sign the papers and pick up the check?” One cannot overestimate the importance of a solid and real relationship with your banker during periods of debt. Of course the key is to develop your banking relationship when you don’t need it; so get started today to find a local bank that will take a personal interest in you and your business and discover a higher level of service in banking.

Reduce your Costs of Operations & Cut Cost As Needed: During periods of success and prosperity a business will often accumulate non-essential expenses and cost. At Ridings we jokingly refer to the fact that an owner can have only one “pet project” at a time, but beyond that we need to cut costs and live with a level of financial accountability which will allow the company to grow and prosper.

Break-even Forecast: During our darkest days financially we ran a break-even forecast and realized that with our current overhead and we would have a break-even point higher than our projected sales for the New Year. After considering all the available options, we decided as a leadership team to make some very difficult restructuring changes within the company.

- We analyzed our budget and expenses and cut costs on all levels.
- We froze all new expenses and purchases of non-essential items.
- We froze wages.
- We sold assets and liabilities – starting with my new truck; I decided to drive a company 94 Mazda mini van for over a year to show everyone I was dead serious about saving money and cutting costs.
- We stopped accumulating additional debt and credit.
- We cut the owner’s wages and salaries: After much consideration we decided to keep our management infrastructure in place and not cut back further on our administration and overhead, which would limit our future growth. Instead we decided to cut the wages at

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DEBT MANAGEMENT
Continued.....

the top; we agreed for my partner to be outsourced and obtain work with another company, limiting him to earning a commission on his sales. Next I agreed to suspend my salary for a number of months, taking only modest “loan repayments” which I had given the company over the years.

• Overall we were able to cut over $400K from our budget and thus lower our break-even number to where we could ensure success for the year and in the future.

Capitalize On Your Strong Relationships with Suppliers and Vendors: During financial struggles and the accumulation of bills which may not be able to be paid on time, you will need to manage key relationships with suppliers and vendors. We went to our suppliers and shared our current situation prior to being grossly past due. We found all but one to be very patient and willing to work with us to ensure that we would remain in business and so are there for the future to buy from them. Some vendors got frustrated by the length of time it took to get them paid off but when we sent them a personal letter with our plan and expectations, kept the communications open and made sure that we always did what we promised we would do, we eventually regained our respect with each and every supplier. One major vendor assisted us with over $40K in financing over 18 months which set us up to manage our way back from the brink of failure. Others waited patiently while we made smaller than expected payment on a regular and consistent basis, never missing a payment and always keeping our word.

• Two keys to managing these relationships were; Once we would pay off a debt we would insist on paying them interest for the use of their money and second we always continued to buy from them while paying them off, to show them that we fully intended to continue on with them being our supplier, even if it meant at times we would pay cash for purchases.

• Once we would pay off a supplier or vendor I would write them a personal note thanking them for standing with us during a very difficult time in our business. This would let them know that we appreciated them and intended to continue to work with them in the future.

Keep Your Leadership Team Informed On the Company’s Progress: Regular updates are needed for your leadership team so that they can inform the field workers and dispel any rumors which may not have been completely true. We found as long as were where up front and honest everyone was more than willing to do what they could to strengthen the company.

Steps to Recovery:

• Have a budget – make sure it pencils prior to starting the year.
• Understand your break-even number.
• Make a plan for recovery and getting out of debt – take control and lead the way!
• Cut costs – starting with you! Sooner than later. Review every expense and consider if it is justified in light of your current situation.
• Continue to Control costs at all times.
• Improve your Receivables – taking the lead from Nolan Painting, we revised our collection methods and expectations to get paid immediately upon completion of the project. Cash flow has now become one of our strongest assets within the company.
• Manage cash weekly [daily if necessary]
• Communicate with your debtors and your leadership team.
• Job cost every job to ensure profitability.
• Review your plan – Quarterly, monthly, weekly if needed.

Celebrate Your Successes: Once you pay off a supplier, vendor or debt, celebrate your success. Give your team an update and let them know you are making progress and that with time you will succeed. Let them know you are committed to getting out of debt no matter what. [To date this year we have paid off more than 200K in debt – and we are celebrating.]

Credit and debt can be useful tools within your business, used wisely with checks and balances; you can use them for growth, management, and expansion. Today Ridings is a better company, leaner, more organized, more profitable and better managed than it was before. Success often comes to those who refuse to give up!

Never explain....your friends do not need it and your enemies will not believe you anyway.
Quote from Elbert Hubard
A few weeks ago, my father-in-law accompanied me on several of my sales calls. He was visiting from Maryland and as a fellow salesman, was curious about how a painting estimator works in San Diego. When we finished for the day, I asked him what he thought about my approach to selling. His answers were full of the practical wisdom gained by experience. First, he told me that I needed to be more enthusiastic and confident when I meet with a homeowner. He said that I was shy or too businesslike in front of the homeowners. I needed to be more relaxed and to enjoy each estimate. He knew that my painting business was one of the best in our area, and he said to let it be known that I love my work. He encouraged me to enter each home as though I have already won the job. As in any service industry, I should spend the time getting to know the homeowner and his or her needs. I recognized the truth of his observations. I do tend to be a little standoffish, presuming that most homeowners will not wish to use us because of our high price.

The second thing my father-in-law shared with me was just as important. If the homeowner did not make a decision on the first visit, he suggested writing a personal note to say "thank you" for calling my company. He recommended writing notes on every sales call. So doing, I would separate myself from my competitors. The note should include a brief thank you, a copy of an excellent customer survey and possibly even a photograph of my family. The goal is to connect with the homeowner and make them feel that I am a cut above the rest and fully trustworthy. My father-in-law shared examples of how showing customers a picture of his family would quickly break the salesman/client barriers and help him to establish good rapport with his customers.

My father-in-law's ideas invigorated me with fresh enthusiasm about my work. I am proud of my company and want to share a good thing with each homeowner who calls. So my first change has been seeking to be more enthusiastic and cheerful when I meet homeowners. Secondly, I have been writing notes of gratefulness to the people I meet. I can already see a difference in people's response when I am happy to meet with them rather than being so businesslike. Whether or not the homeowner decides to go with my company, I have cheerfully extended to him an offer for my services and am happy to be known as a first-rate and friendly business.

I have been monitoring our cash on hand in 5-day increments since 1987. Why would I do such a thing? My goal was to grow my business rapidly and be profitable. This system helped me monitor the buildup of capital that I thought was necessary to grow. I knew that my cash position would have to grow every year for several years to avoid borrowing the money needed for growth. Today, my business is mature and growth in end of year cash balances is no longer necessary. But monitoring cash is still important.

Cash is essential to running any business. It is even more essential if your business is growing. Have you ever been short on funds in the spring as the summer season approached? I am sure that almost all painting contractors have experienced such shortfalls at times. I believe these shortfalls should be handled as planned events rather than as a surprise. Your vendors and employees do not like these type of surprises. They want to be paid on time.

Most painting contractors are flush with cash at the end of their peak season. This is normal. However, this stash of cash indicates nothing about profitability by itself. A system of measuring cash regularly and comparing it with similar time periods in earlier years is a better gauge of your business performance. Cash balances that are higher than the prior year could mean that more money will be available for bonuses or for building the capital needed to fund growth. Cash balances that are low could be a sign that profitability will be lower.

I count up my cash balances every five days and list them in a spreadsheet for easy comparison with prior years. I also run ledger reports from the prior year in Quickbooks over the last few months of my tax year. I attempt to analyze end of year cash flow and try predict how much cash will be available for bonuses/salary increases.

Measuring cash is only one of the things that I measure to keep a pulse on my business. However, I believe that it is one of the most effective.

**PAST PRESIDENTS**

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<td>Mike Chism</td>
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I don’t think is possible to grow as a person or a business without the commitment to always be learning. The process of learning for me has created a passion, for wanting to learn more and grow as a person. It is my belief that the more I learn, and grow as a person the better my company will become - the people, the finances, the quality of life - for all involved will benefit.

I was listening to John Maxwell, who has excellent material on leadership development say, “There needs to be a commitment to grow yourself and help those around you to grow.” He went on to say “Instead of being driven by goals be driven to always be growing. It’s a commitment to always be growing.” I am committed to do just that, in my own company. I have asked myself and my team to commit to grow and to improve.

I suppose if you have people around you that don’t want change, and aren’t willing to take the next step, they are probably the wrong people to have in your organization. In the book “Good to Great”, Jim Collins says “There are people who are on the wrong seat on the wrong bus and they probably need to get off at the next stop.” There is no substitute for good people.

Through behavior profiles and great council, Grant Mazmanian from the Pinnacle Group (www.pinnaclegroupusa.com). They have helped me put together a good team. I haven’t always committed to growing. I am what you call a late bloomer. About five years ago it’s like the lights came on and I saw the need to grow. I got tired of repeating the same mistakes in my business.

The more I learn the more I realize how much I really don’t know. What a revelation! I really enjoy learning. I find the Bible is the best source to live by; it is full of rich nuggets of wisdom. I like the daily devotions by Joel Osteen (www.hourofpower.org) who wrote the book “Your Best Life Now”. He has great insight on having and keeping the right attitude. John Maxwell provides a free monthly newsletter, and I subscribe to his tape of the month. John has great insight on leadership development. His web site is www.maximumimpact.com. Through these sources, I am learning how to put the right people on the bus in the right seats with behavior assessments.

I greatly benefit from my business development coaches, the accountability, ideas and strategies have proven to be monumental. They are Brian Nolan, from the Summit Group at www.nolansummitgroup.com and Linnea Blair from On Target at www.advisorontarget.com. I grew up playing sports and I can tell you that having a good coach had a big impact on the success of our team. Without our coaches, it would have been total chaos. I really appreciate all who helped me stay focused and on track.
Your Reputation Precedes You, Now even more than ever!
by Lynn Bicknell  Lbicknell@bicknellpainting.com

The good old days are back! Remember when businessmen in small towns, were known by their reputation for good work or bad work. Well those days are back. Because of the internet, specifically web site bulletin boards, your reputation is easily accessed. Just go to Google search engine and type in your company’s name.

This point was graphically brought home to me here in the Washington DC metropolitan area. There is a consumer organization, known as The Washington Consumers Checkbook. Originally, as I understood it, The Washington Consumers Checkbook was a magazine much like the national Consumer Report, but this is a more local publication. Since the onset of web sites, The Washington Consumers Checkbook has its own bulletin board, where consumers can post their accolades or criticisms of home improvement contractors.

The odd thing about the Washington Consumers Checkbook is that the magazine publisher does not rate or review residential painting contractors even though consumers do. This speaks volumes about our industry. I always ask consumers when they call, particularly if they called us because of our reputation on the bulletin board, as to why they, as a consumer think the Washington Consumers Checkbook does not rate painters. After all, anyone can paint?

I stumbled upon the fact that residential painters are not rated or reviewed, accidentally. We started getting calls from people who had accessed this Washington Consumers Checkbook. You know how important it is to track the source of your leads at the moment they call your company. I kept wondering how they were getting our name. I cannot remember which came first, but what was most memorable, was when my good bicycling friend, Eric Moody, a $30 / year subscriber to The Washington Consumers Checkbook told me he had seen a couple postings on the Web site bulletin board about Bicknell Painting, Inc. In our next company quarterly newsletter sent to all our old customers, I inserted an article asking who these “raving fans” were. I immediately got a response and sent them thank you’s for their kind words.

We also belong to the local Better Business Bureau (BBB), which has us listed on their web site. Can you imagine one bad comment and you are dead in the water! I had resisted joining the BBB for years, because I did not want to spend $300-$400 annually. Boy was I wrong! Now that we are members of BBB we get lots of leads, particularly from the consumer who takes the time to go to our web site. We are told repeatedly that we are one of the few residential painting companies that have a web page.

The real experience that my reputation does really matter, even in a metropolitan area like Washington, DC came home to me when Eric pointed out that a good friend of mine who has a Heating and Air Conditioning Company had a bad review on The Washington Consumers Checkbook bulletin board. I asked my Heating / AC contractor friend if he ever got any leads from the Washington Consumers Checkbook bulletin board. He acknowledged he never had. I explained to him about his bad review.

I told this story to my painters so they could appreciate that maybe “B” & “C” were passing grades in school, but in the real world one bad review can really hurt your business. Our reputation is even more important now a days with the speed of the internet!

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SHARE THE VISION
BY Paul Licari
Licari Painting

On the road to growing my business or, I should say, making my business grow up, I have read management and self help books, attended PDCA sponsored seminars and even hired a consulting company. It was my consultants Brian and Kevin Nolan, of Nolan Consulting, who had introduced me to the simple idea of "sharing your vision." I did this for the first time at the grand opening of our new shop and offices in April of this year and I had no idea how powerful this tool could be.

Getting others to follow you down that road is the purpose of sharing your vision. I used our opening day celebration as a platform to do this. I started my speech by discussing what we had done in the past. We talked about the problems we have faced, the lack of structure, our disorganization, and our productivity. Then we moved beyond that. I began to outline our goals for 2006 and 2007. I explained the purpose of our newly created business plan, our mission statement and our organizational structure. I also explained how we would move towards a system of accountability where crew leaders would operate with more responsibility and control than ever before.

People though, ultimately want to know "what's in it for me?" That's our nature, and I don't ignore it, instead I choose to embrace it. So that's the way I delivered my vision. First, I detailed some of the plans that I had put in place which laid out a broad picture of our destination. I told the group, "we can grow the company and provide opportunity for you to make more money, have more control over your day, and have more power. In exchange, though, you must subscribe to the new ideas of the company." After all, isn't that really the premise behind any win/win deal?

Motivation, whether it is intrinsic, that which inspires you, or extrinsic, for instance a pay increase or a bonus, ultimately has to address that paradigm. For me, it was a combination of these motives that got my people "on the bus". Part of their motivation is their continued and improving compensation, but beyond the money and control was something bigger. It was the vision of creating a "real" company, one with structure and organization, a winning franchise. The more I analyzed it in the weeks after our grand opening, I realized that it was the promise of a better business that really unified our team... something that is exceptionally more powerful than one or two people with a good idea. I can honestly say, that since April, Licari Painting has changed. I hear my staff talking about our goals and what we need to do to achieve them. They give solutions to our challenges instead of miring in them. I sense their new empowerment.

Like all energy, though, motivation is not perpetual. There is a need to constantly reinforce it and continue to share your long term goals. More importantly, however, is to share in the victories. However small, your team must see progress. They need a win! You can do this in two ways. First, identify your wins. As you think about it, consider this, you may believe that what you are doing is simple necessity, not worthy of recognition, however, what you are really doing is implementing plans that support your plan of growth. Let me remind you, if you're reading this article, participating as a member of the PDCA, and creating change at your company, then you are in the minority in your industry. There are thousands of contractors that are not making progress. They merely wallow in their daily routine ignoring the support and learning opportunities that surround them. My point is, don't discount what you've accomplished, even if they are small victories.

Some of own victories are the completion of our physical office, the purchase of job trailers, inventory purchases and our latest... hiring of an Administrative Assistant. The second is sharing this information. Once a month we have a company meeting. During the meeting I focus on the wins, the progress. For instance, during our grand opening I told everyone that our organizational structure would include an Administrative Assistant. I reminded them of that goal and how we have now achieved it. I pointed out how her addition has ensured the office is in order and will lend in furthering support and organization. Already she has proven effective. The job folders are complete and organized which has proven to be a plus to the crew leaders and the office. Again, small wins for everyone. Moreover, I told them, her hiring will aid in furthering our remaining goals.

I learned from my father the importance of promoting yourself. It is no disservice to bring light to your own accomplishments. Simply put, but deep in design. It is too easy for people to be blind to the positive changes and focus on small negativities. That is why, once in a while, you must take the pulpit.

Getting your staff behind you by sharing your vision is imperative to your company's success. Identify your goals, create your plans, and share those plans on a scheduled basis with the people that surround you.
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