

Customer First

The Journal of the National Customer Service Association

Pebble Beach Company

Promises and provides a
Once In A Lifetime
Experience Every Time

Small Businesses

The backbone
of America

The world-renowned Pebble Beach
Golf Links at Pebble Beach Resorts
hugging the Pacific coastline

Photo by Joann Dost



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In this issue...

The first word...



Welcome to the Issue 2, 2013 Edition of *Customer First*, the **Official Journal of the National Customer Service Association**. We are once again very pleased to provide you with excellent customer service articles and information that has been developed exclusively for the National Customer Service Association.

This edition of *Customer First* offers you stories provided by very successful organizations that are committed to putting their customers first—every time. We are confident all of you and your employees will gain significantly from the valuable philosophies and lessons shared.

As we approach warmer weather, many organizations will be employing temporary, summer help. Many of these individuals will be in customer contact roles. In the on-boarding process for these employees, it is easy to overlook the necessary training to enable them to provide the service levels you expect. Ensure that ALL of your employees—regular and temporary, full-time and part-time, have the training (soft and hard skills) that will allow them to provide the kind of world-class service your customers expect and deserve.

Good luck, and remember, excellent service is a planned, deliberate process. We are here for you.

Best wishes,

C. William Crutcher, President
National Customer Service Association

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Photo by Pebble Beach Company

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Once in a Lifetime Experience Every Time



7th Hole, Pebble Beach Golf Links | Photo by Joann Dost

PEBBLE BEACH COMPANY—PRESERVING THE LAND AND VALUING PEOPLE

Pebble Beach Company History

Pebble Beach Company was founded in 1919 by Samuel Finley Brown Morse. At the age of 29, Morse was hired to manage the Pacific Improvement Company, which had extensive real estate holdings on the Monterey Peninsula in California. In early 1916, Morse convinced the board to build Pebble Beach Golf Links by assuring them it would help boost interest in the development of the area. (He was right!) On February 22, 1919, the grand opening of Pebble Beach Golf Links and the Del Monte Lodge at Pebble Beach was held.

To facilitate his vision, five days after the Pebble Beach Golf Links grand opening, Morse formed the Del Monte Properties Company, which included 18,000 acres of land on the Monterey Peninsula—beginning the fulfillment of another dream for Morse: preservation of precious land. On May 10, 1969, Samuel F. B.

Morse passed away, 10 years after ensuring that easements would preserve hundreds of acres of forest and coastline along the now world-famous and very popular 17-Mile Drive in Pebble Beach. “Protect the land around us” started with Samuel F. B. Morse and remains a critical element of the Pebble Beach Company philosophy yet today. An example of just one of the elements of superior and diverse customer service exhibited by Pebble Beach Company.

Another goal that Morse had was to bring the U.S. Open to Pebble Beach, and on August 27, 1969, that goal was accomplished.

Morse’s vision remains the foundation of Pebble Beach Company each and every day and is a good reminder to all businesses of the importance of getting out of the box, taking appropriate risks, following through, realigning as needed, and then doing it all again over and over and over. These are the hallmarks of a growing and successful organization.

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Pebble Beach Company was sold to Japanese business holders in 1990, but by the summer of 1999, it returned to American hands, where it remains today, under the ownership of Clint Eastwood, Richard Ferris, Arnold Palmer, Bill Perocchi and Peter Ueberroth. The plan is to never again sell Pebble Beach Company to another ownership group.

Today Pebble Beach Company has more than 1,600 employees.



The Inn at Spanish Bay | Photo by Joann Dost

Pebble Beach Company assures that excellent customer service just adds to a phenomenal scenic view.

What Makes up Pebble Beach Company

Five phenomenal, world-renowned golf courses:

- Pebble Beach Golf Links
(legendary golf since 1919).
- Spyglass Hill Golf Course
(one of the toughest courses on the PGA Tour).
- The Links at Spanish Bay
(a true Scottish links course).
- Del Monte Golf Course
(the oldest continually operating course west of the Mississippi).
- Peter Hay Golf Course
(the only 9-hole course on the Monterey Peninsula).

Three hotels that draw golfers and non-golfers alike from around the world:

- The Lodge at Pebble Beach
- The Inn at Spanish Bay
- Casa Palmero

Situated on 5,300 acres of coastal Monterey Peninsula property between Carmel-by-the-Sea and Monterey, these properties proudly offer much more than luxurious lodging options. They also include beach, pool, tennis and fitness clubs; The Spa at Pebble Beach; an equestrian center; shopping; and conference facilities.

They are known worldwide for their stunning ocean-front locations, peerless quality and, most importantly, their outstanding service.

And, of course, 17-Mile Drive offers an unforgettable journey in and of itself, where guests can truly appreciate the preservation outcomes from Samuel Morse's vision as they drive the scenic route through the Del Monte Forest showcasing the Northern California coastline, native wildlife and spectacular sites such as The Lone Cypress, Bird and Seal Rocks and Pescadero Point.

Customer Service Philosophy

"To give every customer a personalized, memorable experience, exceeding expectations every time" is a topic at every management meeting across Pebble Beach Company. Subsequent meetings with employees in a variety of venues drive home how that will happen every day with every interaction.

While Pebble Beach Company properties may "sell themselves" by virtue of their name, that is only as reliable as the day-to-day service that each customer receives, according to the General Manager of The Inn at Spanish Bay, Rod Schinnerer. Schinnerer spent 33 years in various positions in the hospitality industry,

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including serving as the General Manager of several sites within large hotel systems around the country. He has always enjoyed the hotel business, and when he had the opportunity to join Pebble Beach Company as General Manager of The Inn at Spanish Bay, he “jumped at it.” A good part of the draw was the culture of customer service which starts “at home” with how employees are treated. He wanted to be part of an organization that believes that employees are its most valuable resource and acts accordingly every day.

The Values of Pebble Beach Company speak to their commitment to providing a “once in a lifetime experience every time.” Their Values include Trust and Integrity, Enriched Employees, Open Communication and, of course, World Class Service. And, as further proof of the commitment of Pebble Beach Company to its employees and customers, Maximize Financial Performance is also a priority value!

While these Values sound wonderful, Schinnerer backs them up with numerous examples of how they play out every day and how they are supported and monitored by Leadership throughout the organization. It starts with hiring the right people for every position.

Every finalist candidate for any position is interviewed by potential peers and leaders, all of whom must agree on who is being hired. The interview process deeply explores with candidates Pebble Beach Company Values, ensuring the candidate “fits” with them personally. Candidates are thoroughly educated on not only the Values, but also the Mission and Standards of Pebble Beach Company. Potential employees understand up front the expectations behind all of these statements—thus “hiring the right people for every position.” Between the exhaustive hiring process and subsequent training, as well as the

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Roy's at Pebble Beach
Photo by Jason Restivo

Pebble Beach Company restaurants are proud to be very busy and yet provide the utmost of customer service with every interaction.



The Lodge at Pebble Beach | Photo by Joann Dost

Golfing and world-class vistas are enhanced by Pebble Beach Company's service excellence strategies.

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ongoing employee communication methods, the success rate for hiring the right people at Pebble Beach Company is nearly 90 percent!

Once the right person is hired, he or she is supported, guided and monitored during a 90-day orientation period, while both "sides" assess the "fit" in the job and with the organization. Significant education is provided during orientation to assure that the newly hired employee understands the history of Pebble Beach Company and the importance of his or her role in achieving its Values, Mission and Standards.

Technical skills training is, of course, key as well, with the right tools provided to do the exceptional job that is expected. But the greatest emphasis is on how employees are expected to treat one another as well as their external customers. Schinnerer agrees that employees will only treat their customers as well as they are treated, so consistently living Pebble Beach Company Values with employees assures that "once in a lifetime experience every time."

"Walking the talk" for the Pebble Beach Company Leadership includes constantly creating meaningful recognition opportunities for employees. Leaders serve meals in the cafeteria at The Inn at Spanish Bay periodically in order to stay closer to employees. All cafeteria meals are free to all employees—wow! What a "recognition" strategy that draws Spanish Bay employees to dine in the cafeteria, which then allows enhanced opportunity for sincere relationship building between them and leadership.

Pebble Beach Company believes that you have to "know your people—staff and customers—on a deep level. You must get to know them personally—what they like; about their family; what they do outside of work." Schinnerer relates that one of his staff was at the recent Boston Marathon, and that he deliberately sought out that employee on his first day back at work to assure that he was all right, express concern about him and what he experienced, and truly show that he remembered and cared. Perfect example of "walking the talk."

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Schinnerer also exemplifies sincere recognition and relationship building by hand delivering each of his 400 employees' service anniversary cards to them.

Pebble Beach Company has formal recognition programs as well, which include the "Employees of the Quarter" and "Employees of the Year" awards. Nominees are recommended by their peers or Leaders, with the ultimate award decisions based on how those individuals exemplify the organization's Values, Mission and Standards. Depending on the outcome of these assessments, 2–3 employees are chosen for the "Employee of the Quarter" award, and those collective winners go forward as candidates for the "Employees of the Year" award, which brings with it a \$5,000 cash gift!

Communication Strategies—Employees

Pebble Beach Company believes that there is a ripple effect from how employees are treated, to how they feel about their job and the organization, which in turn impacts the quality of external customer service. The Values, Mission and Standards play out every day with every interaction. Pebble Beach Company has instituted a series of communication strategies with employees throughout the system to support achieving those goals. Employees also annually review and sign a Code of Conduct that emphasizes how the Values, Mission and Standards of Pebble Beach Company will be displayed with every interaction.

Included in these communication strategies are:

- "Our Standards," which emphasize being a gracious host, solving problems, taking pride, being proactive and being professional—the expected behaviors behind the Values.
- "Daily huddles," where Supervisors provide informational updates to employees within their direct reporting relationship. The Values, Mission and Standards are discussed, and associated implementation successes and barriers to consistent achievement are surfaced. Each Manager is responsible for holding these huddles, synthesizing information from them to address opportunities for

recognition or improvement, and elevating, as appropriate, to assess trends and corporate responses.

- "Chats" are held in departments at least annually by the General Manager, where more input from employees is sought on improvement opportunities, needed supports, appropriate recognitions, etc.
- One-on-one meetings are held at least annually between each employee and his or her Supervisor to find out how the job is going; discuss expectations met and those that can improve; ascertain needed supports, etc.
- An annual all-employee meeting with the CEO is held, where corporate finances and goals are reviewed, and recognitions are delivered, all in a fun and enjoyable setting. This 2–3 hour session provides the opportunity for every Pebble Beach Company employee to hear directly from the CEO and to pose questions or provide comments, again underscoring that every role within the organization is critical and every employee's input is valued and sought. Throughout the year, employees are encouraged to interact with any member of the Executive Team with their questions and comments as well. Pebble Beach Company is proud to live the "open door" policy.
- Every 2–3 years all employees are surveyed regarding their workplace satisfaction. Each Manager is expected to drill down on the results and create and implement prioritized action plans to address opportunities for improvement.

While the hospitality industry certainly is challenged by a recovering economy and the seasonality of certain lines of business (that can go from very, very busy to slow—all in a moment's notice—depending on the weather, time of the year and other competing factors), Pebble Beach Company is proud that they

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The Spa at Pebble Beach | Photo by Scott Campbell

Relaxing at Pebble Beach Company properties is made special person-by-person.

have retained a sizable employee population. While studies on hiring and retention suggest that employees join an organization based on a perceived good fit educationally, experientially, geographically, monetarily, etc., they tend to stay based on how they are treated. A great testament to employee satisfaction at Pebble Beach Company is their high retention rate.

Communication Strategies—External Customers

In order to constantly monitor the service they are providing, Pebble Beach Company ensures that every Lodge or Inn customer receives an online satisfaction survey immediately after their stay, which is conducted by an objective, independent firm. While participation is optional, the response rate is significant, and all input is strongly considered and appropriately used. Leadership reviews this customer input and addresses opportunities for improvement, including a personal call to any customer who is not satisfied

with any aspect of the service they received to assure resolution. Of course, the feedback also includes many compliments, which are then shared with employees, since their customer service is the reason for the compliments—yet another recognition strategy!

If surveys reflect repeated comments on a potential improvement, those are quickly considered and often result in changes. For example, several customers requested that the evening lobby coffee service be extended. When dissatisfaction about the shortened coffee service was mentioned a few times in the customer surveys, Schinnerer reinstated an expanded schedule and now receives acknowledgments from customers for that “perk.” “It costs relatively little in time and products, yet is very much appreciated by our guests. We have to look for these opportunities and respond to them in order to maintain our exceptional service philosophy with every customer at every interaction,” says Schinnerer.

As one would expect, Pebble Beach Company occasionally faces challenging and unhappy customers. Pebble Beach Company believes that “leaders must dispense enthusiasm.” Schinnerer cites an incident when he got a call from a staff member asking him to meet immediately with an unhappy customer. Schinnerer went to meet with the guest, who told him, “You have a terrible job because you have to deal with people like me who are angry.” Schinnerer responded: “I have a great job because I can make angry people like you happy.” Good to his word, he explored with the customer exactly what had gone wrong, made restitution immediately and turned an unhappy customer into a happy one.

“The customer is always right,” according to Pebble Beach Company, and every Leader is empowered to assure that the “once in a lifetime experience” does happen every time, as echoed in the words of day-to-day customers who report:

“The service is top notch—second to none.”

“These resorts have the best, most first rate service anywhere.”

“This is an experience you live your whole life for.”

“This is paradise and heaven rolled into one spectacular resort!”

“It was one of the single greatest experiences of my life.”

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The Inn at Spanish Bay
Photo by Joann Dost

While the lodges are large, Pebble Beach Company has figured how to provide individual, exceptional service.

Another customer group that is critical to achieving the goals of Pebble Beach Company is the golf professionals who play the courses and enjoy the resorts and other facilities as “paid” and “paying” guests. To quote just a few:

If I had only one more round to play, I would choose to play it at Pebble Beach.

~ **Jack Nicklaus**—18-time Major Champion.

Ask any golfer around the world to name a golf course in the United States and Pebble Beach will be the first thing they say.

~ **Tom Watson**—8-time Major Champion.

I don't think you can get a better venue any place in the world.

~ **Ernie Els**—2-time U.S. Open Champion.

Playing here should be a sacred experience...this magnificent course that has had so many great champions.

~ **Johnny Miller**—2-time Major Champion.

Bottom Line

On every Pebble Beach Company business card is their Mission Statement: a public and ongoing commitment to what they are about; what they will deliver with every interaction.

***Exceed the expectations of every guest,
by providing a once in a lifetime experience...
every time.***

When an organization is bold enough to publicize the expectations to which they want to be held, the sincerity of the Values by which they intend to live takes on a whole new perspective.

As Schinnerer proudly reports, “Pebble Beach Company never takes their customers for granted; we must embody exceptional customer service with every interaction because customers deserve that.” ■

By the NCSA Editorial Team.

Pebble Beach Company Values

OUR VALUES

What We Believe.

T	Trust & Integrity	<i>Because trust and integrity are the foundations of every great organization. In every situation we must act ethically and honestly. Our Code of Conduct helps guide us and if you are ever in doubt ask yourself: Would I be comfortable if my actions appeared in the local newspaper?</i>
E	Enriched Employees	<i>Because they create amazing results. Employees are our greatest assets. Our goal is to have the best rewarded, best trained, most fulfilled workforce possible, and to provide a diverse work environment that encourages employees to reach their potential.</i>
A	Accountability	<i>Because keeping our individual commitments is essential to our success as a whole. We all need to take personal responsibility for achieving our individual, departmental and company-wide goals. Take ownership.</i>
M	Maximize Financial Performance	<i>Because building financial value benefits all of us. By maximizing the financial results of our Company, we benefit not only our ownership, but also employees, their families and the community as a whole. With financial success, we all succeed.</i>
W	World Class Service	<i>Because service is our core business. A commitment to world class service must therefore be ingrained in our culture, and be the focus of every interaction with both our guests and each other.</i>
O	Open Communication	<i>Because a commitment to communication is a hallmark of every great organization. Each and every day, we must strive to communicate, and more importantly, be open and honest about the issues and goals that are key to us as a company.</i>
R	Respect Our Neighbors	<i>Because we live together in a special place. Being a good neighbor means many things. It means taking care of the wonderful natural environment in which we live and work. It means working with others to improve our communities. And it means sharing our success with those less fortunate than us.</i>
K	Keep Improving	<i>Because we must move ahead or we will surely fall behind. Constant improvement is expected of each of us. Every day, our competitors are improving. Every day, we must also improve.</i>

TEAMWORK: *Because what each of us does affects the other.*

Pebble Beach Company Standards

OUR STANDARDS

How We Succeed.

P	Pleasantries	<i>Be a gracious host.</i> Welcome each guest with a warm and genuine greeting, and extend a fond farewell with an invitation to return.
B	Basic Rule 15-10-5	<i>Ensure all guests and co-workers feel welcome.</i> At 15 feet make positive eye contact, at 10 smile, and at 5 say hello.
S	Solving Problems	<i>Own the request.</i> Personally follow to completion all requests and complaints. Always call the guest or co-worker back to update them on the status within 15 minutes.
T	Telephone Etiquette	<i>Telephones are first and lasting impressions.</i> Answer all calls within 3 rings with a smile and the appropriate greeting.
A	Attention to Detail	<i>Take pride.</i> Constantly look through the eyes of our guests, pay attention to the small things to ensure that our guests always see perfection.
N	Name Recognition	<i>Make it personal.</i> If and when possible, acknowledge every guest by name, at least twice during a conversation.
D	Directions	<i>Extend a personal touch to the guest experience.</i> Escort guests to their destination whenever possible; when not possible, verbally guide guests and avoid pointing.
A	Anticipatory Service	<i>Be proactive.</i> World Class Service can only be accomplished by anticipating the needs of our guests and our co-workers. Paying attention to everyone's unexpressed wishes ensures that we provide a once in a lifetime experience.
R	Resort Knowledge	<i>Be a Pebble Beach Company ambassador.</i> Continually promote our resorts. Each of us must stay informed on our jobs, our departments, and our company.
D	Dress with Pride	<i>Be a professional.</i> Our appearance reflects our passion for guest service and instills confidence in our abilities. Take pride in your appearance by following our company appearance guidelines.
S	Safety	<i>Safety first!</i> Correct any unsafe conditions and know the emergency procedures for your area.

Service Statistics

In The Next Ten Years—The Biggest Staffing Challenges

In 2010 and 2012, The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) asked Human Resource Executives what the profession's top challenges would be in 2020 and 2022 respectively. Following are those results:

FUTURE CHALLENGES	2012 RESULTS	2010 RESULTS	VARIANCE FROM 2010
Retaining/rewarding employees	60%	51%	+9%
Creating an attractive corporate culture	36%	44%	-8%
Developing the next generation of corporate leaders	52%	-	NA
Finding employees with specialized job skills	-	41%	NA

Clearly, focusing on keeping the staff that you have is a critical component of predicting your future organizational success. And while the numbers did decline for the impact of creating an attractive corporate culture, never underestimate the relationship between a positive work environment and the likelihood of retaining your employees. Coming up with unique and meaningful reward techniques that suit your business is one of the best ways leadership can spend their time to better assure you will retain the staff that make you successful every day. ■



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Land of the free because of the brave.

The Backbone of American Business

BY BOB HERNANDEZ, HERNCO AND NIVI NAGIEL, NCSA

Bob Hernandez, lives in Honolulu, Hawaii. Is that not the perfect place to conduct business? What more could a business owner want? Well, regardless of the beautiful location, Bob faces the same challenges as other small businesses located throughout the US. He is the sole proprietor and employee of Hernco—a web-design/web-hosting business he founded 12 years ago. That means he is the receptionist, the administrative assistant, the technician, the marketer, the on-call staff member—he fulfills every function of the 24/7 business!

Due to the nature of Hernco—which also includes coordinating web-site design for the more in-depth requests from his customers as well as a sideline in vending machine support and repair—Bob serves customers throughout the US. He is proud of Hernco’s ability to provide unlimited web-hosting. Many of Hernco’s customers come to and stay with Bob because of the personal service. If you need help, support, clarification, Bob is available—by phone or email. The more critical the situation, the quicker the response but, every customer gets a response as soon as Bob becomes aware of the opportunity to serve. He prides himself in providing the “human touch” vs. an automated call attendant or a staff member at larger businesses who is reading to you from their “how to” manual.

Bob enjoys helping his customers differentiate between what they think they want vs. what they really need. He walks them through the process in question and assists them in ultimately agreeing on the desired outcome and how to get there. He prides himself on being a good listener—a critical skill in the IT

“Do your job everyday as if the business was your own.”

support field. Bob’s philosophy on customer service goes back to all of his jobs over time starting with the Marine Corps and now into his own business: “Do your job everyday as if the business was your own.” While that mindset certainly helps Bob be successful as Hernco’s owner, that general philosophy helped Bob progress to levels of greater responsibility in his past careers, learn on-the-job and gain enough knowledge to start and grow his own IT support business. So whether you are a small business owner or aspire to be one some day—Bob’s message is to behave everyday in every role you have as if that business is your own. That characteristic will carry you far in life—Bob is a sterling example of that!

While the customer is not always right because they may not have the knowledge to assess what is “right”, Bob’s customer service approach requires that he leaves every customer feeling satisfied and that



Hernandez providing his customer-focused, efficient and quality IT support services.

they have accomplished what was needed. He views patience as a great virtue of a small business owner in the IT support field—some customers are frustrated both because there are occasional periods of unplanned “downtime” but also because the customers very often do not have the breadth and depth of knowl-

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edge to understand what is wrong, what it takes to “fix” the issue, associated timeframes, etc. Bob’s job is to listen, make viable suggestions and co-own the issue with the customer to reach a viable and quick solution.

Even when Bob has had the rare customer that he could not please, he still goes the extra step to find them other web-hosting firms for their consideration. Bob’s 60 – 70 hour workweek is fulfilling for him. He estimates his customer retention at 75% with the bulk of those that he has “lost” giving up their web-site and no longer needing his services. When you consider that Bob’s business has grown dramatically in the last 12 years, that he is always busy, you understand why his “marketing method” of word-of-mouth is obviously working.

Bob enjoys making his own hours, providing what his customers need fully, efficiently and pleasantly. Of course, other small business owners/single proprietors understand what it is like to fill every role within your firm every day—even on vacation or when sick. Bob relates that he had the flu in the early winter and his customers were most understanding giving him more time to take care of their requests. He is certain that level of support and patience from his customers comes from the daily support he provides at all other times.

Bob is the epitome of small business in America: creative, driven, focused, talented, constantly learning, customer-focused, respectful, patient, quality-driven. Kudos to all of you who are truly the backbone of American business! Bob can be contacted at sales@herncohost.com. ■

Bob Hernandez is the Owner of *Hernco*, Honolulu, HI
Nivi Nagiel is an *NCSA* Editor

Service Builder

Employee Perception of Manager Fairness

Your employees’ perception of whether you, their Manager, treat everyone fairly in the work group is the ultimate deciding factor of that evaluative component of Leadership. In the past, the performance evaluation done by the Manager’s Supervisor was the telling factor in predicting that Manager’s Leadership success. We now know that the relevance of that evaluation is completely contingent on whether the employees that report to that Manager agree (particularly on fairness). A lack of consensus will show up in the employees’ quality and quantity of performance, motivation, and overall attitude. While the Manager’s intentions could be well intended—wanting to “care” for all of his/her staff—depending on how the Manager displays that caring, it can appear unfair from the employees’ perspective. Routinely eating lunch with the same staff members or giving first option for prime days off (vs. a rotating schedule based on agreed-upon criteria) to select employees or “always” being readily available for certain people sets the stage for a perception of favoritism.

CUSTOMER SERVICE TIP: Regardless of which staff you know better than others, which ones you may “like” better than others, which ones are consistently reliable and perform well, as the Manager, you must establish with your team how they want to be treated by you, e.g., individual time with them, vacation assignments, etc. Agree on the strategy and implement it. Remind staff at subsequent meetings of the agreements and check in on how those expectations are playing out. Keep the communication open and you will have a team that is productive, quality-driven and motivated to serve because they will feel fairly treated by you, their Manager. The epitome of a successful Leader.

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Pebble Beach Golf Links, Spyglass Hill Golf Course and The Links at Spanish Bay

*Offer valid April 1, 2013–September 4, 2013. To receive package rate, all golf must be secured at time of booking. Offer is subject to availability and includes Garden View room at The Inn, occupancy tax, County tourism assessment and service charge. Golf package prices quoted above are for one round on Pebble Beach Golf Links and one round on The Links at Spanish Bay, for one player. Please inquire about other room types and golf selections which may be available. Valid for new bookings only, and parties of 8 rooms or less. Not valid in conjunction with other offers. Some blackout dates apply. Rates are subject to change. Pebble Beach Company reserves the right to modify or discontinue these offers at any time. Pebble Beach®, Pebble Beach Resorts®, Pebble Beach Golf Links®, Spanish Bay®, The Inn at Spanish Bay®, The Links at Spanish Bay®, Spyglass Hill® Golf Course, The Lone Cypress®, The Heritage Logo and their respective distinctive images are trademarks, service marks and trade dress of Pebble Beach Company. Photo: Tom O’Neal. © 2013 Pebble Beach Company

Service Reminder

Ensuring Service Excellence



You can never be “too busy” to take care of the customer’s needs—regardless. . . this means:

- A smile every time
- Responding immediately in a friendly and positive manner
- Ensuring accuracy/precision
- Providing personalized attention
- Maintaining confidentiality
- Being professional in appearance and attitude
- Always being respectful and respectable
- Following-up—“the ball is always in your court!”



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Happy Grass Makes Happy Homes

BY ALAN BEAUCHESNE, HAPPY GRASS/HAPPY HOMES AND NIVI NAGIEL, NCSA

What more needs to be said about the customer service philosophy of Alan Beauchesne and his team at “Happy Grass Landscape/Happy Homes Construction” than the term “Happy” as the name of his business? Alan found himself gravitating toward outdoor work even as a child. He grew up next door to a blueberry farm owned by a widow named Eleanor, where at age twelve he started working in the summers. On the farm he learned how to prune and care for the berries, but also observed how the business end works and how Eleanor turned a fair profit after customers picked the bushes clean. Alan’s mother, herself brought up on a farm, also taught him how to grow beautiful vegetables each season. Finally, Alan picked up the basics in landscaping from his older sister, who ran her own business in town. Today, he is the Founder, Owner and President/CEO of “Happy Grass/Happy Homes” in Lexington, MA since 1985.

His business has taken on a variety of forms and names over the years but one day, while driving, Alan hit on the term “Happy” for how he wanted his customers to view his business and its services. So he did the most logical thing—renamed it to “Happy Grass/Happy Homes,” confirming in writing how he wanted his employees and his customers to view the expectations from his company. Alan insists that satisfaction internally and externally be at the level of “Happy”—an on-going goal customer-by-customer; interaction-by-interaction; employee-by-employee.

“Happy Grass/Happy Homes” is 28 years old and celebrates its significant number of regular and returning customers based on word-of-mouth praise for Alan’s commitment to proving integrity at every interaction. “Our business remains small with three regular employees and numerous part-time and



Alan Beauchesne lives his business motto: “Don’t worry. Be Happy.”

seasonal/project staff as needed” says Alan. But he reminds us to never underestimate the difficulty in choosing and motivating staff who come and go depending on available projects, time of the year, skills required, etc. “Each employee is chosen based on their ability and willingness to be oriented to and consistently meet our expectations of how customers are to be treated including how the employees treat one another,” according to Alan.

Alan emphasizes to his employees (new and “old”) his expectations:

- Pride in work;
- Appreciation for the skills and abilities present in the employee group;
- Diversity of projects that run the gamut from cutting grass to doing home remodeling and that all are important;
- Respect for customers’ homes and property; and
- Constant clarification of customer expectations to assure that all are on the same page.

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Alan's best "training" method with his employees is to role model his expectations which also include:

- Having fun;
- Being yourself;
- Being Friendly, Courteous, Genuine;
- Exuding confidence and a positive attitude;
- Working to understand people in order to build trust;
- Being creative and helping customers solve problems by providing solutions;
- Always meeting deadlines; and
- Living by the Golden Rule.

Another element of assuring excellent customer service is linking the right employee and his/her associated skills with the job to be done. While Alan's business is small, the effort to find, guide and retain the right employees is even more critical than in larger businesses. One "bad" hire; one employee not appropriately guided; one inappropriate assignment; not meeting Alan's expectations even one time can result in a loss of reputation that could magnify through that neighborhood. For small businesses that rely on

word-of-mouth to sell their services every day—that can be devastating. Selecting and supporting the right employees is a daily event for small business owners and Alan can personally attest to that.

Alan's business cards say "Don't Worry; Be Happy." That is his customer philosophy in a nutshell. Every interaction must relieve his customers of concerns related to the project they have assigned to Alan and his crew, and assure that the customer ends up happy with the results. "Integrity is at the heart of our customer service philosophy," reports Alan. He believes that you can't have a "little" integrity or practice integrity indiscriminately. You either have integrity or you do not. He prides himself on behaving with integrity in every interaction and insists that his staff do the same by treating them accordingly.

One of his customers reports: "Alan did a complicated carpentry job on a decorative, load-bearing framework on the outside of my house that was dangerously riddled with rot. His work was spectacular and cost me half of what the first contractor I contacted quoted for an estimate. Alan is the kind of person you know you can trust right away. He was respectful of my budget without sacrificing the level of quality he can be proud to associate with his name. He got

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started on the job immediately, walked me through every step of the process, and worked through some brutal Boston winter weather, three stories high and facing strong winds. After blizzard Nemo, he and his partner voluntarily dug my car out from under the three feet of heavy snow that got dumped on us, after a full day of work, in the dark. On top of all that, Alan was a total pleasure to have around. No one gets service right like Alan.”

Success for Alan is a constant goal as he works to grow his business (but never beyond his ability to serve with excellence). It is measured not just by return customers but by the sense of satisfaction he and his staff have with every job, project and day of work.

Small businesses are the heart of America and Alan and his team at Happy Grass/Happy Homes emulate why. Alan reminds us that every day is a “work day” when you own your own business and every interaction is a possible customer. Behaving with integrity leads to success. ■

Alan Beauchesne is the Founder, Owner and President/CEO of Happy Grass/Happy Homes, Lexington, MA

Nivi Nagiel is an NCSA Editor

SOFT SKILLS IN THE WORKPLACE

A recent study by McKinsey & Co. of New York entitled *Education to Employment: Designing a System that Works* surveyed more than 8,000 youths, education providers and employers to get a snapshot of the reason for the gap between available jobs and the number of unemployed young people. Outcomes show that fewer than half of youths and employers surveyed believe that new graduates are adequately prepared for entry-level positions. A lack of “soft skills”—qualities such as work ethic, teamwork and communication—were often found to be lacking as well.

Recommendation: Do a better job of hiring for technical and soft skills and then nurture them through training and role-modeling.



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...the last word

The only thing worse than training employees and losing them is not training employees and keeping them.

~ Zig Ziglar

According to a study done by Cornerstone OnDemand, only 35% of 494 working adults say they have received training and development to better perform their role in the past six months. It is past time for your organization to retrieve the pre-recession strategy of continuing to invest in your most valuable and unique asset—your employees—through training and development. It has been reported that with every turnover of an employee in your organization, the cost to your business is



40% of that position's salary in overtime to cover needed functions while awaiting the position to be filled; expenses associated with advertising, interviewing, on-boarding, on-the-job-training. You are far better off hiring effectively and supporting the growth of your staff through on-going training and development. Check out the National Customer Service Association website (www.NationalCSA.com) for its broad scope of training and development programs able to be personalized to your organization and its needs. Proactivity will provide continuity of service and enhanced business success. ■

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