

# Perking Up

*Storage owners find ways to keep employees motivated and satisfied.*

By Tom Comi

If Charles Hendricks ever wanted to host a family reunion, he certainly wouldn't have to venture too far from work. That's one of the many advantages of presiding over six storage facilities in North Dakota and working with your father, wife and two sons.

And as president of Five Star Services, Inc., a big part of his job is making sure all of his employees are happy—especially during tough economic times when maintaining staff morale is as important as ever.

Hendricks, his sons Ben (vice president of the storage business) and Jake (in-house legal counsel), his wife Patty (executive vice president) and his father Mel (consultant) do all they can to create a great working environment at a company that boasts eight full-time employees and 1,500 storage units.

"Family is very big to us, and that always comes first," he said. "We cover for each other, and give good latitude for flexible schedules and time off to have a reasonable family life. That's kind of the North Dakota way of people helping people."

Anne Ballard, co-owner of Universal Management Company in Atlanta, agrees that morale is more important than ever. Along with her business partner Norma Taylor,

they go out of their way to lift the spirits of the employees that manage more than 40 facilities in the United States.

"UMC is willing to work through their life issues, such as births, deaths and hospitalizations to keep our employees going," Ballard said. "Maintaining morale is key, especially during these poor economic times. It's crucial to not allow the managers or home office staff to sink into negative thinking. We even have Sharon Pallas and myself serving as the Attitude Police for the home office and field staff when they just need to unload."

## Rewarding Your Staff

Although many facilities and management companies do all they can to offer competitive wages, there are additional incentives and benefits they can offer to get the most out of their staff.

"We use three types of financial incentives," Ballard explained. "The first and the most basic is the \$10-per-lease commission; the second is for stores in lease-up, they get a predefined larger step bonus as they hit each targeted occupancy level; and the third is for stabilized stores, they get a percent commission for each month based on all income from all sources."

Ballard said each facility manager also receives a free 10x20 unit, two weeks of paid vacation every year, a solid medical package and Flexible Spending Accounts. But she said perhaps the most valuable incentive might be footing the cost to make their charges more effective and marketable.

"Particularly important to all of us in the industry is the ongoing training program where we send managers to free classes in their area or online webinars to improve everyone's performance," she said. "These are skills they can take with them anywhere."

Five Star Services currently offers health benefits for its employees, and Hendricks said the company also



Left to Right: Ben Hendricks, Patty Hendricks, Charles Hendricks and Mel Hendricks (not pictured, Jake Hendricks)

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throws out occasional monetary rewards and prizes to exemplary employees.

“We will give out bonuses periodically for those who up-sell our units,” Hendricks said. “We also offer one-night and weekend getaways as prizes. We are always looking for ways to get a spark out of our employees.”

And although bonuses and rewards are always nice, both Hendricks and Ballard agree that it’s also important to make staff members feel like they are part of something bigger than their specific role. Hendricks said his door is always open for his staff to voice their ideas or concerns, and he actively solicits their input on new ways to run the business.

“We have meetings in which every person throws an idea into a hat,” he said. “And the one we draw out, no matter how out there it might be, we discuss it and maybe implement it. I always want my employees to use their brain power to think outside of the box.”

Added Ballard: “To boost morale the managers get feedback and peer review on month-end company reports



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*~ Anne Ballard  
Universal Management Company*

showing how they did compared to the other stores for all the key indicators. We also have a semi-annual awards program where we gave out \$5,000, and each award comes with a plaque that they mount in their offices. Some senior staff members have covered their office walls with awards, which motivates them.”

Hendricks said far too often managers only point it out when an employee has done something wrong. In order to keep his underlings motivated, he makes a point of rewarding them with praise for a job well done.

“One of my principles is that people need to be acknowledged and congratulated, not just whipped when they do something wrong,” he said. “I believe strongly in positive feedback.” ❖

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