



MANAGER PROFILE

Compassion and Personality Are at the Core of DeMoss' Management Style

By John Dunlap

It doesn't cost a penny, but few people seem to find a way to bring compassion into their work. Compassion is a quality that comes from the heart and, as far as Karen DeMoss is concerned, should be put to use every day in the world of self storage. Throw in understanding a customer's personality and you have the recipe for a highly successful business ethic, one that has bolstered DeMoss to her role as vice president of operations for American Self Storage.

"I haven't met a customer yet that hasn't felt like a friend," DeMoss says. "Everyone deserves to be treated with respect and should feel like a VIP, no matter where they live, what they drive or what they are wearing. We all have feelings, and just a few kind words and compassion makes a big difference in a person's day."

"Be concerned when you're talking to your customers, really care about their needs, tell them that we are there to take one less thing off of their mind," she adds. "Most people don't rent storage because their lives are easy. They're moving, divorcing, remodeling, going out of town.

Photo: Karen DeMoss (center) goes over work schedule with facility managers Helen Chiono (left) and Theresa Gill from Stockton, California.

Someone may have been put in a home or passed away. The last worry folks need is storage. If we don't convey compassion and concern, or let potential customers know about our features and benefits, store/gate hours and the like during our one time to shine on the phone, some other facility will!"

DeMoss works with managers at American Self Storage locations in California and Nevada. She checks in daily with stores in Fairfield, Redding, Red Bluff, Oroville, Marysville, North Highlands, Antelope, Stockton, Santa Maria and Fontana (all California) and Sparks, Nevada.

Like so many people in self storage, DeMoss did not come into the business straight from school. Originally from Pennsylvania, the military brought her and her family to California. She raised seven children and was working as a sales and marketing director for a national water company when a manager for American Self Storage called to order the service. It turns out that DeMoss was already storing her belongings at the facility.

"We got to talking about previous management embezzling and he explained that this is why he was there now,"

See DeMoss, page 44

says DeMoss. "He offered me a job as the relief manager for eight hours a week. I was intrigued, so I accepted the position. I thoroughly enjoyed my job maintaining the property, making new customer friends, doing collection calls and feeling bad about those steep late fees that we charge. I was offered the resident manager position after a short eight months."

Her success at the Fairfield facility led to her promotion to VP of operations. And her management style is anything but heavy-handed. She prefers to work with managers, not order them around.

"I have a pretty laid back management style," adds DeMoss. "I let the managers manage their facilities, determine discounts and even trust in them to raise rents. I monitor their progress and have to prod them once in a while. Let's face it, people feel guilty when they have to raise rents, but we aren't all just in this business to pay the bills, we want to make money. I'm always available to answer questions and help the managers learn and improve selling techniques and their organizational and people skills."

DeMoss' style of dealing with customers is not only to show compassion, but also to gauge her customers' personalities, and thus know better how to help them.

"The ability to read people's personalities is a big part of great management," DeMoss says. "If you get a fast-talking

customer in your office, you don't want to seem slow or boring; on the other hand, if you get a mature, not-so-bubbly person that wants to cut to the chase and store their stuff, you need to match the pace of their speech, strive to be as detailed and professional as possible. A great manager will recognize different customers' personalities and handle them accordingly. I have to say that I have a great team of professionals that we have hired and I am proud to say they work for me."

So far, in spite of the recent economic hard times, DeMoss and her American Self Storage facilities have fared quite well.

"I've heard negatives from other companies, but we haven't been as affected as some people," DeMoss concludes. "Our occupancy is holding steady, our cash is flowing and we've even had record numbers at most facilities since last September. I'm not saying that all of our facilities are thriving as well as some. Some cities are just on harder times, and this does have some affect on customers' ability to pay. Even offering specials doesn't help because they'll move in and not pay again after the special is over. We're trying to monitor these situations and help the customers in any way that we can so they don't lose their belongings."

There you go—more compassion from a person whose belief in being compassionate has taken her, and her company, a long way. ❖

Attention Mobile Storage Operators!

TOTAL RECALL
Mobile Storage Software is the most comprehensive solution for your business.



Attention Multi-Site Self-Storage Operators!

Manage multiple sites in a single MS SQL database with **TOTAL RECALL** Self-Storage Software.

Get the Solution.

Call 1-800-377-8406
or visit www.dhsworldwide.com

