Jeff Van Essen, Nilfisk-Advance, Discusses the Importance of Efficient Business Operations

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More BSC companies are creating new ways to become sustainable and more efficient in business operations, and Director of Strategic Accounts for Nilfisk-Advance Jeff Van Essen says that this practice is important now more than ever. Read on to learn more about his first experience working with BSCs, the importance of sustainability in the industry and what he thinks contributes to a great work culture.

How long have you been working with the building service contracting industry?

I have been working in the BSC industry for about 18 years. My first time working with BSCs was in Texas when I represented CFR, an extraction equipment company based in Minneapolis. In that position, I helped local contractors solve carpet care problems. After my CFR days, I went on to work with other cleaning equipment manufacturers and suppliers like Tennant, Unisource and my current employer Nilfisk-Advance. In my career, I have had the opportunity to work with cleaning contractors of all sizes in all regions of the country, but I’ll never forget the first BSC cowboys I worked with in Texas!

What are some key trends and challenges you’ve noticed in the industry over the past year?

BSCs are under intense pressure to reduce their costs and cleaning times, yet still maintain the same level of cleanliness required by their customers. Building owners are seeking price concessions that have forced BSCs to become more efficient with the tools and time they are allocated to work with. They are also looking for equipment that allows for the ability to perform daytime cleaning.

How important is sustainability in the building service contracting industry?

Sustainability has become critical for building owners, which makes it important to BSCs. Building owners want to ensure their buildings operate at maximum efficiency and provide a healthy work environment for their employees, customers, students and visitors. As building owners seek LEED certification or simply attempt to comply with local, state and...
federal sustainability regulations, it is incumbent upon BSCs to understand these requirements and how they can contribute to achieving these objectives.

**How do you go about helping BSCs improve sustainability?**

BSCs have to be cognizant of the ways in which they can contribute to sustainability by selecting products and processes that use less water and chemicals, while also maximizing cleaning effectiveness. Nilfisk-Advance has been at the forefront of the sustainability effort in the equipment manufacturing area for years. We offer products that use far less chemical and water than standard equipment. We have more HEPA and CRI-certified carpet cleaning products than anyone else in the industry.

**What should BSCs consider when trying to make their business operations more efficient?**

The single biggest means by which BSCs can make their operations more efficient is to incorporate more mechanization into their daily cleaning regimen. While purchasing equipment inherently requires more upfront investment, the cost savings derived throughout the life of the equipment is immense. In addition to facilitating a more efficient operation cleaning equipment provides far vastly better cleaning. So all the way around, mechanization of a BSC’s operation provides tremendous benefits.

**How would you describe your management style?**

My management style is open and supportive. I solicit and encourage feedback to create joint decision making within my team. I treat my people like I would like to be treated — with respect, courtesy, fairness and honesty. I create an environment where the success of the team is more important than the success of one individual. We share the accolades. I also support my people to take calculated risks. I’d rather they try to shift the current paradigm than maintain a status quo that is just acceptable.

**What factors contribute to a great corporate culture?**

In my experience, a great corporate culture exists when a company focuses predominantly on satisfying its customers’ demands. A truly customer-centric attitude permeates all areas of the organization from product development to customer service, technical service, and sales and marketing. When everyone in the company is striving to find solutions for their customers it fosters a more healthy and productive corporate culture. It creates a culture where it’s not about “us” but about helping others.
What is your personal approach to customer service?

My approach to customer service is to have a high sense of urgency. In today’s fast-paced world, with the technology at our fingertips, there is little reason not to promptly get back to people. Treat people the way you would like to be treated — respectfully, fairly and honestly.

What book are you reading right now?

Currently, I am reading the books for the CBSE Certification test sponsored by BSCAI. I also just finished the “Little Black Book of Connections” by Jeffrey Gitomer and Sandra Brown’s book, “Lethal.”

What is the best piece of advice you’ve received in your career?

The best piece of advice I have ever been given was don’t wait — make things happen.