Jill Frey: ‘You Are Nothing if You Don’t Have a Team’

Jill Frey, president of Cummins Facility Services, believes in the importance of having a great team. Building strong relationships among her employees is a top priority, and she says knowing what drives them is key to creating a mutually positive rapport. Read on to learn her perspective on key trends in the industry as well as how she’s handled the challenges she’s faced.

How did you get your start in the industry?

I have been in the building service contracting industry for 17 years and knew from the first day that this business was right for me. I started in 1994 after I graduated from the University of Toledo. The business was previously owned by my parents, Ron and Myra Cummins. My parents thought I was crazy and wanted me to do something else, but I think being a BSC is in my blood. I attacked the opportunity, and I am still trying to win the battle every day.

Your business is 100 percent woman-owned. Do you think more women should get into the BSC business?

Absolutely! I always support women-owned businesses, although it is still a male-dominated industry. You have to know what your goals and expectations are and push
through to succeed. It's critical to understand your own personal strengths and weaknesses, and everybody has both. In my case, it's blond hair and a Minnie Mouse voice! I have to be that much more professional and prepared to be heard and, more importantly, understood. I suspect many businesswomen understand what I'm saying. Credibility is essential if you want to win the day.

What is your advice for balancing the management of your business and providing a great customer experience?

The customer always comes first. They love to see management and owners on site. I visit our accounts often, as do our managers, because this provides a great customer experience, and it allows us to not only truly understand what's happening on the ground, but also to build key relationships.

What are some key trends you’ve noticed in the industry?

I’ve noticed less pure national bidding and more regional contracts. I am finding more customers like a smaller, more personal and customized experience. The key is to leverage your current accomplishments and drive that success into increasingly varied aspects of your clients' businesses based on your unique domain knowledge.

What is your industry outlook for 2014?

Fantastic! A lot of people are using BSCs more every day. The BSCs have a great knowledge of the industry, and we are able to provide ROI for many facilities.

What has been the most challenging experience in your career?

Not having the right people riding or driving the bus. I cannot stress this enough. When I was younger, I didn't always understand this business fundamental — and I learned the hard way. In any business, there are risks — both operational and strategic. The risk of having inadequate human resources to deal with the challenges and opportunities presented is no longer one I'm willing to take.
How did you handle it, and what did you learn from it?

I had to reassess my staff and be honest with myself. I had to make some of the decisions we as business owners dread, and we had to make some difficult changes. In addition to people, we had to embrace technology to help better the talent we had. This experience has helped improve my company. The resulting business-process improvement has made our revenue and earnings more dynamic and predictable, and it provides a timely scorecard so that we can measure our progress against our stated goals. It is not all about making sure the toilets are clean — you have to run the business, too!

How would you describe your management style?

I would say it is consultative. I manage firmly and in a way that builds strong team relationships.

The decisions I make are in the best interest of the employees as well as the business. Loyalty from my office staff is always 100 percent, which is a huge part to the success of the business.

What are some tips you have for employee retention?

Enjoy your employees and know what drives them. Build a relationship with them by letting them get to know you and, more importantly, getting to know them. That one-on-one relationship is so important.

How do you create a great company culture for your employees and team members?

Try to appreciate everyone. All the employees have an important job, and they all need recognition no matter what the job is that they do.
What has been the greatest takeaway from your membership in BSCAI?

This is hard to narrow down to one thing! I’d have to say the friends I have gained, experience, knowledge and support. It’s such a great community! I would not trade it for anything.

What is the best piece of advice you’ve ever received?

That’s easy! An important person once told me: Surround yourself with the best people; get the most wonderful staff — knowledgeable and driven — and compensate them well. You are nothing if you don’t have a team.