Taking a Look at the Full Picture

Name: Karl Gnau  
Title: Corporate Account Director  
Company: Network Services Company

Karl Gnau believes that the key to business success involves the ability to view your business holistically and build partnerships based on trust. In his role as corporate account director for Network Services Company, he provides BSCs with the services and savings they need to thrive. Read more to learn some of the most impressive traits he’s witnessed in BSCs he’s worked with, as well as the recent challenges he has seen in the industry.

How long have you worked with building service contractors?

I have been with NETWORK for nine years and worked with BSCs that entire time. Prior to NETWORK, I owned a small business focused on business productivity and talent development — putting the right people on the bus, in the right seats and providing them with the tools to fully develop their potential. Before that, my experience has been as a sales executive with Clorox, Johnson & Johnson and Oscar Mayer (General Foods).

From your travel and interaction with BSC executives, what are some of the most impressive and desirable traits that you've witnessed?

The most successful BSC companies have leaders who focus holistically on their business opportunities. They see the opportunity to collaborate with their distribution partners through a business relationship with trust as a critical element. Getting the most from your business alliance comes from knowing that your partner is working in your best interest to reduce costs through labor-saving innovations and systems — not just on providing the lowest product costs. Collaboration and trust are the key ingredients and take time to develop but are worth the effort. Those leaders with these traits see the total opportunity and not just a spreadsheet.
What do you wish BSCs would do differently?

Take the time to understand how your supply chain partner can help develop your business through their client’s satisfaction with the products and applications that recognize the importance of labor savings and sustainability, and lead to healthy workplaces. Supply chain partners can bring training and expertise that goes beyond lowest pricing. View the total picture and opportunity.

What is NETWORK’s approach to business innovation?

We have developed e-Commerce solutions that provide insights to business development, turning data into applicable knowledge and action that reduce costs and create end-user client satisfaction. NETWORK collaborates with our supplier partners to bring product and system innovations in a dynamic, complex and competitive industry. NETWORK’s core competence is our focus on the commercial real estate market from building owners, property managers and cleaning contractors.

What are some of the challenges you’ve seen in the industry, and how is NETWORK addressing those challenges?

Cleaning contractors are under constant pressure to reduce costs to retain or win new business. Price is only one element in this challenging environment. Productivity is the key to growing a profitable business in this environment. Hands-on training provided by your supply chain partner comes with NETWORK’s commitment to partner for success. We go beyond the basics of a reliable supply chain by offering local accountability and expertise with flexible programs designed to match our client’s individual needs. Technology is only part of the solution. Hands-on involvement is critical to address the inevitable issues that arise in the day-to-day of the cleaning business. The ‘human and in-market expertise’ from NETWORK is a unique attribute of our program.

What do you think is most important in keeping happy employees?

Recognition of their importance in providing services that delight your end-user customers. Training and personal development demonstrate your commitment to those closest to your customers — your employees. Retaining the best employees requires your investment in them and pays dividends through less turnover, greater reliability and excellence in daily performance.
What do you believe makes for a good working relationship with customers?

Trust! Knowing that your supply chain partner is working in your best interest. Your success is our success.

How would you describe your management style?

Collaborative, involved and aware that success is dependent upon a team effort — these define my leadership style. The power of one is eclipsed by the power of a committed and involved team. Bringing the unique strengths of committed individuals to solve problems and to create business success is my goal.

Are there any technologies you use in your job day-to-day?

You cannot succeed in this fast-paced industry without technology. I use a combination of an iPhone, iPad and PC every day. Communication is at the core of productivity. Access to information is a requirement to manage business. We have a web-based portal that provides our customers with access to their orders, sales history and pricing. We bring quarterly business reviews to our clients to address opportunities and address challenges. Visibility and transparency in information facilitates the process and productivity.

What book are you reading right now?

“My Share of the Task” by General Stanley McChrystal. It discusses Iraq and Afghanistan war theater experiences and leadership lessons.

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

Always give more than you take.