Paul Burke, 3M, Discusses Importance of Being a Resource for BSC Customers

Name: Paul Burke  
Title: BSC Account Manager  
Company: 3M

Paul Burke’s career path as the building service contractor account manager at 3M started in a pretty unlikely place — TV. “I worked in TV for 15 years, starting as a cameraman then moving on to on-air morning anchor, to weekend weather personality and TV host,” Burke said. “I transitioned into TV sales and marketing and liked it. My neighbor worked for 3M, and when he was transferred, he recommended me. And the rest, as they say, is history.”

As the BSC account manager at 3M, Burke is responsible for developing business relationships with the BSCs he works with, being a resource for contractors and providing solutions in all aspects of their business. He said that 3M offers a range of 60,000 products and that one of his passions is helping BSCs address the challenges they are faced with on a daily basis. Read on to learn what he wishes BSCs would do differently, as well as his ideas on providing solutions for his customers.

Throughout your years working with building service contractors, what would you say has changed in that time?

Building service contractors are being asked to do more with less. This challenges me to provide quality solutions that save labor, time and money. I love it when we can accomplish that and still provide the ‘wow’ when a BSC sees how our solutions perform firsthand.
What do you wish BSCs would do differently?

Be more receptive to looking at innovation, and stop jumping to price. Change for some contract cleaners is difficult. Success happens when innovation is given a chance … and we can go from a cost conversation to an investment conversation.

How do you drive business innovation within 3M?

We continue to work hard to listen to the customer and create solutions that will help them in the long run. Our products are developed based on need. In the BSC industry, we understand labor is the single largest cost. If you can provide innovation based on a need, you have a winner. Imagine reducing labor cost cleaning floors by 20-50 percent. I get excited when we are able to take a care of problem for our current and future customers.

What are some things you consider when helping a BSC solve a problem?

I go in with the idea that the customer is right when they voice that they have a problem. Then I peel back the onion and start asking questions, which will usually take you down the path of what the issue really is. For instance, if they are using a certain chemical to remove water stains and they say the cleaner does not work, you discover the pH on the chemical is the wrong one to do the job. So they are right — that particular chemical may not work properly but another one will get the job done.

What do you think is most important in developing relationships with your customers?

Trust — nothing else really matters. At times, it can take a long time to build that trust. Trust can be earned by listening and responding to the customer. I use the eight pillars of trust I learned in the book, “The Trust Edge” by David Horsager: clarity, compassion, character, competency, commitment, connection, contribution and consistency. I also have to always understand that my agenda is not the customer’s agenda. Be flexible; know your competitor as well as yourself, and be a resource.

Once you establish that trust, how do you continue to build that relationship?

Listening is the key. It is not about what we have to offer but what the customer needs.
What are some trends that you see developing in the BSC industry?

[I’ve seen that] BSCs are always looking for new ways to earn revenue. Many started as a customer cleaning service but may have moved into lawn care, snow plowing, security and more. The revenue target keeps moving and BSCs are chasing it.

How would you describe your management style with your employees?

I am more of an amiable and expressive type of leader. I want to win and have fun doing it, and I make sure those around me are enjoying the sales journey as well.

What book are you currently reading?

I just finished, “The Trust Edge” and I’m now reading, “In Search of Excellence” by Thomas Peter and Robert Waterman Jr.

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

When someone says ‘no,’ that is when the selling begins.