Scott Hietpas believes that communication and listening are key aspects of creating great relationships with customers and employees. As senior vice president of institutional field sales at Ecolab, he is intent on ensuring his customers get their business challenges solved and his team stays inspired and motivated. Read on to learn how he does just that.

“Focus on the things you can control. If we all do our best at the things we can control, life will run more smoothly.”

Tell us a little about your background at Ecolab.
I joined Ecolab in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1996 when I accepted a position as a senior financial analyst with textile care, the commercial laundry division. Since then, I have held positions in different divisions, departments and functions until 2012 when I was asked to lead the institutional field sales team. As senior vice president of institutional field sales, I am responsible for leading an incredibly committed sales organization. Our team strives to deliver unparalleled customer value in a safe and efficient manner. Our goals are to make customer operations in the industries we serve cleaner, safer and healthier. To achieve these goals, we must hire, train and develop the best talent and provide them with innovative programs that meet the ever-changing needs of our customers.

How does Ecolab provide innovative solutions for its customers?
Ecolab employs a team of scientists, engineers and marketing professionals responsible for creating innovative, new solutions that deliver safe food, healthy environments and clean water. We listen to our customers and work with them to solve cleaning, sanitation and operational problems. We design our programs to provide maximum benefit to our customers while protecting vital resources. These products and services prevent disease and infection, keep food supplies safe and protect the places where people eat, sleep, work, play and heal.
From your interaction with building service contracting executives, what are some of the most impressive and desirable traits that you’ve witnessed?

I’ve been most impressed with the passion and innovative spirit the executives have for the cleaning business. Building service contractors are constantly looking for ways to deliver better results and services to their clients. In a challenging regulatory environment, I respect the industry’s ability to adapt and succeed.

What has been the most challenging experience in your career and why?

Throughout my career, I have been faced with many challenges. It isn’t the individual situation; it is learning to deal with whatever is put in front of you. What I have learned is that the ability to communicate effectively directly impacts the outcome. Listening is the most important first step; ask open-ended questions and listen attentively to the answers. Finally, focus on the things you can control. Too often we get hung up on facets of our jobs or lives that are way beyond our control. If we all do our best at the things we can control, life will run more smoothly.

How would you describe your management style?

My management philosophy is to lead, inspire and motivate my team. This is more like being a coach. A coach doesn’t tell his team what to do for every play or every minute. They make sure you have all the skills you need, all the information to make the best decision, and they support your actions. A great coach also sees what individual players can’t — these are insights and observations that add to the overall success of the team.

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

Communication. Expressing clear and consistent direction while listening to feedback is where it all comes together. Valuing and acknowledging individual talents and ideas will inspire and motivate people. This approach to leadership results in a higher level of employee engagement.

What do you believe makes for a good working relationship with customers?

In a perfect world, every transaction would be free of issues, but that isn’t always the case. Establishing a relationship with a customer is often based on how well you respond to their challenges. Ecolab has a slogan: Everywhere It Matters. This means from the initial sales call to the delivery, installation, training or application of our programs, we’re with the customer every step of the way.

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

If you take care of the team, they will take care of the customers, and everything else will be OK.