Bringing Psychology to Building Service Contracting

Name: Julie Garcia, CBSE
Title: President & COO
Company: Action Service Corporation
Favorite saying about leadership: “The person who says it cannot be done should not interrupt the person doing it.”

Close collaboration and intent listening are crucial qualities of business success for BSCAI board member Julie Garcia, CBSE—perhaps this can be attributed to her extensive background in clinical psychology. Garcia, president and COO of Action Service Corporation, has been in the building service industry for most of her life, but before she joined the company her father started full time, she received her Ph.D. in psychology at Carlos Albizu University - San Juan Campus in Puerto Rico. Her involvement with the company, founded in 1978, started once she finished her doctoral studies; she began her work with Action developing regulatory protocols and employee assessments.

“During this process, I fell in love with the company, the employees and the work,” she said. “I then reduced my clinical hours and dedicated myself full time to developing our business.” Garcia has been working with customers daily for 14 years now and hasn’t turned back. Read more to learn how Action utilizes marketing as well as how Garcia’s background in psychology helps in her business today.

What are some of the challenges you’ve noticed in the BSC industry, and how is Action tackling those challenges?
Our industry is dynamic and adaptability to change is required constantly. Some initiatives we are currently working on are cost savings for our customers and marketing to new business segments.

What are you doing in particular to increase cost savings for customers?
Action believes in long-term partnerships and will help customers find and fix inefficiencies within their own cleaning and facilities programs. Using tools from Lean Six Sigma, we have studied, designed and implemented cost-saving programs. Action has won the Quest Award for Service from the Puerto Rico Manufacturing Association twice for implementing costs savings of $87,000 and $65,000 to different customers. This dollar amount is how much less they paid in one year for our service category.

Can you give a general overview of how Action will be marketing to new business segments?
Actually, most of Action’s business comes from customer referrals. We do appear in publications three or four times a year and have a presence in professional organizations that represent manufacturing and commerce, our largest
business categories. Action has writers who design articles for customers and prospects divided by their business categories. These communications are designed to be informative about new development as well as requirements of the industry as a reminder that we are available to serve.

**Do you feel that BSCs, in general, adapt well to change?**
Personally, I think [they do]. Our economy, our industry and customer’s needs are in constant flux. It is our responsibility to be sufficiently flexible to those ever-changing needs.

**What values do team members at Action abide by, and how have they contributed to the success of the company?**
Action Service’s corporate values are communication, commitment and quality. The way we live our values is by investing in tools to help us communicate quickly. Action Service has communication protocols to define how to move critical information within our organization and to our customers. Commitment is the promise to fulfill the customer’s vision of service. Quality is the result of the first two initiatives.

**What are some tips you have for managing staff?**
Listen and be willing to share information. I have found that over-communicating requirements, listening for feedback and sharing rationale for decisions makes for a more consistent and cohesive team.

**How has your background in psychology helped you in your current position?**
My background in psychology helps me every day. I was trained in systemic therapy, and I think in group processes. I seek out my line employees (when I visit my biggest customers) so I can learn what their experience is with our company and with my customers. This encourages them to share knowledge and creates a mutually loyal relationship. I seek out my staff, and together we design new paths of business, of processes or of communication. I dote on my customers. We design cleaning systems and review them periodically. We establish communication plans with everyone according to his or her needs and availability. We reach out often and want to be kept informed of their milestones so we may celebrate them.

At this point, with our growth, it saddens me that I cannot greet or even meet every employee. There are also customers that I have never interacted with. If my travels take me close to a location I have never visited, I usually stop to say hello.

**What are some key principles you live by personally?**
I would like to say simplicity, but it is a work in progress. I am always looking for the experiences that add value to my business and my family, and eliminating those things that are superfluous.

**What is the most important lesson you’ve learned in the business?**
I am very involved with the operational side of the business. I visit customers often and collaborate closely with them in their development plans. The most important lessons I have learned are from my employees. The people who execute the work have much to teach us about performance. It is critical for success to listen to their input.

**What technology tools do you use on a daily basis to make your business more efficient?**
I could not live without my Blackberry and my laptop. In spite of technology, though, the most important part of my day is the interactions with employees and customers.

**What has been the greatest takeaway from your membership in BSCAI?**
BSCAI has been a source of knowledge and pride. It has been a blessing meeting other business owners and sharing challenges and accomplishments. The many seminars over the years have honed my operational and organizational skills. I recommend BSCAI often to companies that want to learn.