

When is a general better than a lieutenant?

When the general displays leadership and creativity

On the campaign trail, the “leadership thing” vies with the “vision thing” for sound bites. Leadership gurus will tell you that vision represents just one part of leadership.

You know the list. Countless articles, books and campaign speeches define what makes an effective leader. A list of traits usually includes promoting a vision, making others feel important, staying close to the action, admitting mistakes, criticizing others only in private—politicking aside—making a game of competition, hiring the best and delegating authority, and following the golden rule of treating your followers the way you like to be treated. There are different golden rules, depending on what list you read and how Machiavellian you are.

Last issue, we celebrated 20 up-and-coming leaders under age 40 in the glass industry. My personal list for established leaders in our industry includes a group of owners who carve out a day and a half each quarter to share best business practices. Why?

Everyone wants and needs new ideas to build their businesses. Too often, this quest ends up in the long-term “to do” file while today’s fires are put out. Using a meeting model developed by the Young Entrepreneurs group, David Fitchett, co-owner of Carolina Glass & Mirror Inc. in Garner, NC, started a dynamic group of glass company owners—noncompetitors—who gather to exchange challenges and get new ideas on how to improve their businesses immediately.

The companies range in size from \$1.5 million to \$4 million in annual sales, one location to three and 16 to 43 employees.

The owners have two to 48 years in the glass business. All but one of these guys—and they are all guys so far—are over age 40.

The Glass Professionals Forum’s November meeting at Mr. Shower Door in Norwalk, CT, yielded interesting conversation, much of it centered on human-resources topics such as recruiting talent, employee policies, pay scales and incentives, workers’ compensation, retirement plans and the challenges of managing a non-English-speaking workforce.

Between now and 2010, the 18-to-44-year-old age group of workers will decline 1 percent. This amounts to 10 million unfilled positions in the U.S. workforce. It’s no wonder these glass leaders spent so

much time on the people equation. One owner has a bonus pool where “everybody is equal.” Paid quarterly on gross sales, last year’s average bonus was \$3,500.

Another owner gives salespeople their own Jettas, plus a charge card. The Jettas are diesel, so there’s no confusion—or cheating—on the fuel bills. As for time theft, several companies now have global-positioning systems on their trucks. At first, this tracking device fostered resentment as drivers focused on managers’ lack of trust, but some realized efficiencies in completing jobs—and that meant getting home earlier.

GPF peers offered different solutions for handling the “missing tools” phenomenon. One owner supplies the first set at no charge, but makes it clear if something goes missing—it doesn’t matter how or why—replacements come out of the next paycheck.

High school students recently surveyed by the Families and Work Institute show that the future workforce differs relatively little from the current one in their aspirations. Among the attributes deemed essential in a job: meaningful work, job security and a work-life balance.

Most employees also want respect, challenging assignments and a chance to learn, recognition—a pay raise is not the only way to show appreciation—feedback on what they do, congenial co-workers, a company respected by the community, and good supervision. These wants came up in discussion among attendees.

Marketing was another huge topic, as were sales strategies and creating the right products and services mix.

Now, GPF members look to expand their scope and form three to four new groups across the country to keep fresh ideas flowing on these and many other topics. If you’re interested in learning more, please come by the Glass Industry Pavilion, booth No. 935, at GlassBuild America: The Glass, Window & Door Expo in San Diego on Wednesday, March 10 at 3:30 p.m., where GPF members will be available to answer questions. You can also contact Tonya Johnson in NGA’s member-services department at 703/442-4890, ext. 151.



Glass Peers

Bill Evans, Evans Glass Co., Nashville

Dave Fitchett, Carolina Glass & Mirror Inc., Garner, NC

Chris Mammen, Mammen Glass & Mirror, Irving, TX

David Uhey, Denver Glass Interiors, Denver

Angelo Rivera, Faour Glass Technologies, Tampa

Ken Schweitzer, Carmel Glass & Mirror, Indianapolis

Tom Whitaker, Mr. Shower Door Inc., Norwalk, CT