

Improving on the original

Marx Acosta-Rubio drives a culture worth copying through Onestop **By Anne-Margaret Sobota**

Marx Acosta-Rubio lives for his customers. The CEO of Onestop believes in satisfied customers so much that he guarantees not just the products he sells, but his customers' experience with the company, as well.

"Most of the products in America work the way they are supposed to work, so we want to warrantee things that we can control rather than things that we can't," says Acosta-Rubio of his company, which sells products including office consumables such as toner cartridges, ink jets and ribbons. "We know what really matters to you is to have a pleasant, quality-driven experience where you can call, get a snide, talk to your rep, get what you want, get informed and get the product and then not worry about it."

The company also helps its customers by staying on top of their inventory.

"We call you in advance and tell you what you're going to need, get you to place that order, so you never have to think about (it)," he says.

Onestop's commitment to its customers is paying off, as revenue increased from \$6.5 million in 2004 to \$8.4 million in 2005, with projected 2006 revenue of \$12 million.

Smart Business spoke with Acosta-Rubio about the culture he fosters among employees and how it contributes to customer satisfaction.

Q: How do you ensure a good experience with your company?

Cheerful employees. There was a (saying) decades ago, 'We don't train our people to be nice, we simply hire nice people.' And that's the philosophy we sort of adopted.

And then (being) trustworthy. If (people) don't trust you, they're not going to buy from you. You know how people trust you? Tell them the truth.

If you say, 'Hey, Bob, I can't have it tomorrow,' he's going to be pissed off, but he knows you didn't lie to him. Integrity is doing what you say you're going to do, so our clients trust us because we try to tell them how it really is going to be every time.

People don't tell the truth because they have fear. They're afraid to tell you, 'I can't get that there tomorrow because it's not in the warehouse.' So they say, 'OK, sure, tomorrow,' and make up some lie why it didn't get there the next day.

They think you won't like them if you can't perform for them. But the truth is the opposite. They may get mad, but ... one thing is getting mad at somebody; another thing is not trusting somebody.



Q: How do you stay ahead of your competition?

We do a constant, never-ending improvement. It's so important nowadays to never, ever set your standards static or lower them. If you don't change from one month to the next, you're not going to survive.

What we did a year ago is not at all what we do today, because what we did a year ago, all our competition is now doing. Next-day delivery? Who cares? It was the big thing a few years ago. It ain't so big now.

The market changes continually, people

change continually, society changes continually, competition changes continually, so our training is always up-to-date, and we do it every week. We change based on what's happening.

Q: How do you keep employees adaptable to change?

You never let them stay comfortable. You let them know that change is the only constant in your organization. Leadership is about creating disorder. Management is about creating order.

So my job is to always create disorder, to always blow things up, to change things constantly.

How can I make things better? How can we do this better? That's my job. Management's job is to always try to put order to what I've dictated.

After awhile, the company gets big enough and the culture gets strong enough where when change happens, people who bitch about it — because you've always got one or two — the rest of the guys go, 'Dude, get over it.'

So now you have the culture (taking charge) ... so leadership and management can focus on the job that's most important, which is creating opportunities and managing the strategy to get value to the clients.

Q: How do you get employees to buy into your culture?

We gotta kill the ego right off the bat. The No. 1 killer of any organization is the ego. All the backstabbing, politicizing, drama — all that is because of the ego.

When you join the military, what's the first thing they do? They destroy your identity as a unique individual to absorb you into a greater culture.

How do you do that? You put them on the phone, and you watch them get beat up. You don't help them. They've never done this before. So now they've been humbled.

They've been shamed into realizing, 'I really don't know what the heck I'm talking about.' Now they're open for feedback on how to do it right.

HOW TO REACH: Onestop, www.onestopshop.biz