

never finished

MATTHEW KIRCHNER, President/CEO
kirchner@abqc-usa.com



A colleague of mine, recently shared this story with me. Not long ago, one of his direct reports entered his office and requested a raise of 15%! The employee provided a list of all the additional tasks he would willingly perform, if only the company

would meet his demand for additional compensation. Almost all of the items on the list already fell under the employee's existing responsibilities.

Shortly after hearing this story, I attended a ballgame with a business associate. He explained to me that he would be willing to put forth more effort, but he didn't feel he was being paid enough to do so. I had to explain to him that he had it backwards.

Clearly, neither of these individuals had a good understanding of how to get ahead in the finishing industry. Are you at a crossroads and wondering how to put your metal finishing career in fast forward? Here are some recommendations:

Understand the economics of metal finishing—Owners of metal finishing operations take risks to make money. Being employed by a profitable company is a good thing. Long before becoming the key lobbyist for the metal finishing industry, The Policy Group's Christian Richter earned an economics degree from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Richter told me, "Profitable companies have the wherewithal to make investments in their futures. Break-even and money losing companies do not. The investments that profitable companies can make, help to provide growth opportunities for employees."

One of the best ways to create professional

growth opportunities for yourself is to do whatever you can to positively impact the profitability of your employer. The fact that profits are harder to come by in the today's environment of global competition and pricing pressure makes your role in helping to create them that much more critical. Constantly be on the lookout for ways to grow sales or lower cost. When you find one, approach your supervisor with a written idea.

Be maniacal about customer care—Customer satisfaction is the job of every employee in a finishing operation and regardless of your position, you have an impact. Those in customer service can always do a better job of keeping the customer up to date. Shop floor personnel help keep delivery promises made to customers. The maintenance department ensures that capacity is available to process parts when the customer needs them. Waste treatment operators help achieve regulatory compliance which gives customers the confidence that your finishing operation is there to stay. Quality personnel maintain systems so that customers receive conforming product. Keep customer needs at the center of everything you do and your manager will take notice. Finally, when you hear someone in your operation complaining about a demanding customer or an "unreasonable" expedite, have the guts to remind them that those demanding and unreasonable customers help to keep you all employed.

Set yourself apart—Early in my career the board chair of a company I managed offered some of the simplest yet most valuable advice I've ever received. He said, "Prepare just a bit more than everyone else, and you'll almost always get your way." Many people prepare very little. Use this to your personal advantage.

(continues on page 98)

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(continued from page 8)

When your supervisor schedules a meeting about implementing a 5S program, spend 15 minutes online and learn what it's about before the meeting. Say your general manager wants to discuss mixed parts in customer orders. Make a list of the five most likely root causes and show up at the discussion with your list. The next time the boss calls a summit to plan next year's business development programs, arrive with some thoughts about emerging trends affecting your customer base. You will be amazed at how quickly the focus of the discussion will center on your ideas.

Preparing just a little more than your coworkers has three very positive results. First, you demonstrate a passion for a goal your supervisor is trying to achieve. Second, you set yourself apart from your associates as someone who is willing to exceed expectations. Finally, you may suggest an idea that, once implemented, will have an impact on the financial success of the organization thereby creating professional growth opportunities for everyone. All of this will be remembered come salary review time.

Toot your own horn—Done tactfully, there's nothing wrong with reminding the "powers that be" of your contributions. I send an e-mail to my advisory board at the close of business every Friday. Its main purpose is to keep them informed about our business. However, I'm never shy about advertising our successes. In addition to being a powerful information sharing tool, it's a weekly reminder of the efforts and accomplishments of our management team. Consider taking 10 min to send an "update" to your supervisor once a week.

Want to move up in your metal finishing organization? Don't approach the boss and beg for a raise. Instead, help your company to make more money, always put the customer first, prepare a little more than everyone else and provide a regular reminder of how your efforts have added value to your employer's business.

