

Idea Exchange July 2005 - Containing Employees

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The Container Store, for example, credits much of its 20-plus percent annual growth to its ability to educate and retain employees. Each new employee receives more than 240 hours of paid, formal training in the first year, compared to an industry average of seven, the newspaper reported. This training covered multiple job tasks, from unloading trucks to stocking shelves to cleaning bathrooms.

The chain also opens its financial books to all employees and earmarks 10 percent of store revenue to payroll, compared to industry average of 3 to 4 percent, the newspaper reported.

One result of open books and thorough training is employees have a better grasp of the whole business, not just their current assignment. They are also better positioned for advancement within the company.

Salaries averaged \$42,000 for full time employees, who also received paid vacations and a 40-percent merchandise discount.

The Container Store also offers medical benefits to all employees, including part-timers. The 33-store privately held chain expects to post 2005 revenues of \$425 million.

Partner for Better Business

Do you want to gain a better share of the wild bird market? Try partnering with a local birding group. Offer your store as a meeting location. Give a presentation about the importance of a water feature when bringing birds to the backyard environment. Show them what you've got to offer and send them away with merchandise and ideas. Forging lasting relationships with these groups can make friends in this lucrative market sector and bring repeat business for your pond supplies, as well as new bird feeders and accessories.

Signs of the Times

If using color photos on plant signs, be sure to replace photos before they fade. Once the color fades, chances are the signs won't sell as many plants (because they don't look as nice) and those customers who do buy the plants may be upset that they do not get the color they expected.

One alternative to photo signs is laminated photo albums of all the plants in bloom that customers can carry with them while shopping, according to Neal Lucht of Pacific Water Gardens and Eric Wood of Lily pads in Landscapes their presentation, "Displaying and Selling Aquatic Plants," at Aquascape's 2004 Pond College.

Another option: strictly no-sell display ponds where plants are clearly labeled and never sold.

Splish, Splash

Plastic tubs are a super quick and easy way to display aquatic plants, said Neal Lucht of Pacific Water Gardens and Eric Wood of Lily pads in Landscapes their presentation, "Displaying and Selling Aquatic Plants," at Aquascape's 2004 Pond College.

They are especially ideal for showcasing specials and sales plants. For example, garden centers deciding to stock some extra inventory for a season kick-off or to coincide with on-site seminars can bring out the tubs to handle the additional plants, then store them away for the next special event.