

Bruce Violette relies on the tried and true to lead his business, touting ideas like, “Do what you say you’re going to do,” and, “If you don’t take care of your customers, someone else will.” Sticking with those old ideas has helped Violette grow Business Partner, a one-stop marketing firm that merged with FranchisEsource Brands International in 2007 and posted 2007 revenue of \$9.4 million.

“It’s making sure the job is the No. 1 priority of all personnel and reinforcing this constantly,” says Violette, who founded Business Partner and served as its president before moving into a consultant role while retaining part ownership. “It’s being visible and focusing on your customer base.”

Smart Business spoke with Violette about how to live your values and create a team to spread them.

Q. How do you make sure you’re doing what you say you’re going to do?

Communication is important and making yourself visible. I spend as much time as possible interacting with employees and showing a concern for them and our customers. That whole interaction and communication process is important.

Q. How do you create that interaction and ensure open communication?

The biggest thing is coming across and maintaining a team atmosphere, where you’re not some figurehead sitting in an ivory office somewhere that is inaccessible. Just getting in there and hearing about them and the customers and portraying a team atmosphere.

Interact with them and create that team. It’s the whole approach that 10 heads are better than one. Too many times, executives almost are like political leaders; they kind of lose touch with what’s going on. Get down on a production floor, interact with your employees, personally witness some of the things that are going on and be involved.

Talk to customers and employees. You have to get out there and be involved.

Q. How do you create a team and motivate employees to keep working together?

You’ve got to have the right people. It starts in the hiring process. We look for people who can be team players. Look for employees who ask questions.

I’ve had interviews where I’m asking questions and getting short answers and nothing is coming back the other way. Look for people who can come in and be inquisitive. It’s going beyond the resume.

Q. How do you get an employee involved if they're having trouble fitting in?

It's making them more involved, asking them questions and putting them in situations. We have think-tank sessions, where we might have three employees come in and discuss current client needs.

It's bringing them into conversations, making them involved and seeking out what they think about things and trying to get them to open up and be comfortable.

Q. What is the benefit of having the right team?

You're going to have a superior product or service you're delivering to your customer. You're going to have increased customer loyalty. You're going to have better and stronger performance from the team.

Employees also enjoy doing a good job and getting an 'atta boy' or an 'atta girl' from customers.

Q. How do you create a relationship with the customer?

Being visible. There's a lot of potential as far as efficiency and increasing your business just by concentrating on your customers and uncovering missed opportunities with them. Every day when I walk in, that's the main thing on my mind. You have to understand that the customer is the boss. There will be ups and downs, but the strong companies with the strong customer loyalty that focus on these things are the ones that survive.

It's back to doing what you say you're going to do. If you quote a job for a customer and have a deadline, you're making that promise that you're going to deliver something and the quality that they're expecting on the date that they're expecting.

You don't want to oversimplify things, but simply, do what you say you're going to do. There are so many companies that are going so fast and have that 'churn 'em and burn 'em' mentality and are not doing what they say they're going to do.

If you just slow down, take care of your customers and do what you say you're going to do, you will do well.

Q. What is the benefit of creating those solid, trusting relationships with clients?

When things get tough and times get hard, that real dedication from your customer and belief in you prevents them from seeking out your competition. That strong customer loyalty is going to help you retain your customers and going to afford you leads for prospective new customers.