

# Recognize, appreciate employees, CEOs say

By Jim Johnson  
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LAS VEGAS – The secret of building a successful team at a trash company is no secret at all, according to a long-time industry veteran who heads one of the largest private garbage companies in the country.

“I realized very early you go out and recruit the most talented people you can find and you convince them to work for you,” John J. Jennings, CEO of Waste Pro USA Inc. said. “Integrity and intelligence. They have to have both of these values. One doesn’t work without the other.”

Jennings said his company takes extra steps to recognize and appreciate its employees, including \$10,000 driver safety awards that can be won periodically.

The CEO also has a habit of making sure he’s always carrying around \$100 bills when he visits the field. He hands them out when he sees an employee doing the right thing; the company calls it the Franklin award.

“I am so fortunate to be able to work with such great people. It’s amazing what good people we have in our industry,” he said during a presentation at Waste Expo in Las Vegas. “You have to have a financial strategy, but that’s not the most important thing. Our business is people and equipment. The most important thing is we have a passion.”

Building top-flight facilities and providing the best equipment, Jennings said, also goes a long way toward attracting and retaining quality employees.

“We have just completed our eighth year in a row of less than 2% turnover,” he said. “That compares to an industry average of about 28%.”

As principle owner of Texas Disposal Systems Inc. of Creedmoor, Texas, Bob Gregory also told the Waste Expo crowd that passion must play a part in a successful solid waste management team.

“If you are not passionate about what you do, do something else,” he said.

But it doesn’t stop with passion.

“Know your core values, and know whether you are willing to hold yourself and your key employees to them. For example, as simple as don’t lie, cheat or steal. Know your life goals and objectives, both personal and business-related. Work to build teams who are like-minded in this regard,” Gregory said.

Team members also must see that their goals and a company’s goals are obtainable.

“Attempt to evaluate the potential of your product and service ideas, both within your specific marketplace and within the time span of your mission,” Gregory said. “Notice I say mission. To some of us this is a mission. It’s a calling, something we all take very seriously.”

He also urged people to not be afraid to look outside the industry and the typical management structure to find success in building a team.

“While the industry is becoming more complicated, it’s also become a land of greater opportunity,” Gregory said. “Don’t underestimate the value of dedicated team members. Be both fair and demanding of your employees and take special care of the ones that perform.” ■

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