

In the Van-guard

For 100 years, ACIPCO has been at the forefront of American business. In a recent interview, Van Richey, president and CEO, shared his views on the company that Fortune magazine consistently ranks as among the top “100 Best Companies to Work For in America.”

On managing a 100-year old manufacturing company:

We've found that if you hire the right people, it doesn't matter if they were hired in 1905 or 2005. We have to hire people with a willingness to learn.

On employee satisfaction:

The best way to determine if you're taking care of your employees is to ask the question, "Would you want your son or daughter to come work here?" If they answer "No," then you have a problem. We are fortunate to have many third and fourth generation employees.

On being named one of the 100 best companies to work for:

Fortune magazine has honored us nine times in a row. The gratification comes not from seeing our name in print, but from the recognition we treat our employees fairly.

On the vision of John Eagan, ACIPCO's founder:

Mr. Eagan believed firmly that all people were created equally. He willingly broke laws at the time designed to segregate the races. He included everyone in operating the company. He was way ahead of his time.

Mr. Eagan eventually put ownership of the entire company, 1085 shares, into a trust with two beneficiaries: our employees and our customers. That makes every employee a beneficiary owner of the company.

We have 21 continuous improvement teams made up of employees who help guide every decision we make. John Eagan began this practice in the early 1900s, well before continuous improvement became vogue.

What's the most important business lesson you've learned?

It's simple: the Golden Rule. We asked a divinity professor to research all of the major religions and found that every one has a concept comparable to the Golden Rule.

We also believe that all of us are smarter than any of us. Many companies waste the valuable insights their employees can give because they don't ask the right questions.

On customer satisfaction:

We have two types of customers: internal and external. Every person who touches our product, prepares an invoice or types up an order is a customer to someone within our company. We have a duty to each other. This extends naturally to our external customers.

On advice to new employees:

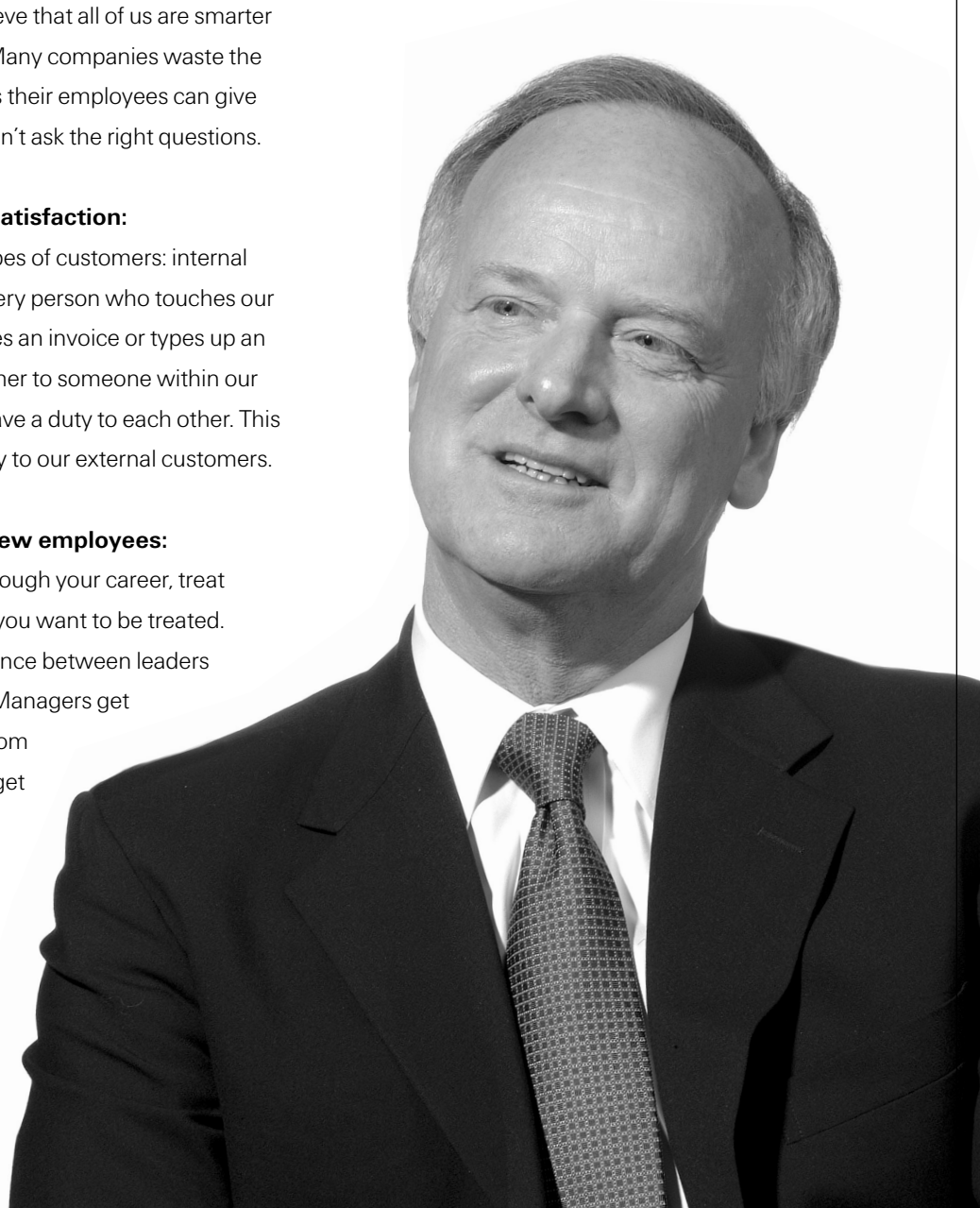
As you move through your career, treat people the way you want to be treated. There is a difference between leaders and managers. Managers get their authority from above. Leaders get their authority from below.

People want leaders to succeed and will give extra effort to ensure they do.

What's next for ACIPCO?

Whatever pipe is being used 100 years from now, we hope to be the leading manufacturer of it.

At Burr & Forman, we know that client relationships are the foundation of our firm; we are proud to have represented ACIPCO for the better part of a century.



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