

Don't Fear Big Remodeler Inc.

There's a lot we can learn about business from the big dogs.

Recently, I talked with a friend and fellow remodeling company owner. He was furious that another, much larger remodeling company had, in his mind, tried to poach one of his longtime employees. I don't know if the employee was approached or that employee approached Big Remodeler Inc. In the scheme of things, I don't think it matters. My friend says, "The smaller companies train them, certify them, and package them just like the big companies. Then we can't provide them with all the benefits that the big companies can offer. They want what we have — seasoned, fully trained field crews, lead carpenters, and designers. It's not fair! NARI should be protecting us from these big, mean sharks!"



Come on, it's time to get real. What's fair and unfair in business? You say you invested in your employees to get them trained. You've paid for their CLC training. You pay for the CLC fees. You pay them a "competitive" wage. (By the way, you pay a higher wage than I do. Don't tell my people.) Even though you pay an "above-average wage," your trusted employee found a good enough

reason to talk with your competitor. Do you think that maybe, just maybe, you're not the benevolent dictator you think you are?

THE BIG GUYS

I know the Big Remodeler you're talking about. They have done amazing things in a very few years. They do a lot of things better than I do, damn it. Big Remodeler Inc. has done something that most of us aren't willing to do. They have developed a very good business plan and they've stuck to it. They've invested in good people. They have looked to other industries and used their models to develop business systems that far exceed 99% of all other remodeling businesses.

You say that it's not fair that Big Remodeler Inc. has done such a good job doing their business that you need protection from them?

RUN WITH THE LEADERS

No. It's time for you to bring your business practices into the 21st century. If you want to compete with the big dogs, you've got to learn to keep up with them — or just sit on the porch. I hear you saying, "But we give personalized service!" Isn't that another way of saying, "We stink at communicating within our own company"?

Are you paying a fair, professional wage? Do you offer health insurance? Flexible work hours? How does your "package" compare with that of your local automotive repair technician?

Are you training your team? By training, I'm not just talking about teaching the carpenters how to install a door. I'm talking about interpersonal skills, communication skills, management training, and business skills. What kind of a professional example are you setting by your actions?

Are there clear paths for career improvement in your company? Is the career path one that involves your retirement or waiting for you to stroke out?

You say, "We can't provide them with all the benefits that the big companies can offer." Why not? Won't your clients pay for "professionals"? Have you gotten the sales training necessary to demonstrate the benefits to your client of working with a true professional? Are you afraid to ask your clients for the "fair price"?

I submit to you that rather than looking to Big Remodeler Inc. with fear and loathing, you look to that accomplished professional as a goal setter and mentor. They are well on the way to figuring out what it means to be a true professional remodeler. —*Mark Scott, CR, is president of Mark IV Builders, an award-winning design/build company in Bethesda, Md.*



GOT SOMETHING TO SAY?

Each month, this page is written by a different remodeler. If you'd like to author a column, contact Stacey Freed at 585.387.0941 or sfreed@hanleywood.com.