

MICHAEL KENT CEO, PROMOWORKS LLC

Michael Kent is a big believer in the idea that employee satisfaction plays a big role in a company's ability to succeed in the marketplace. As such, the CEO of PromoWorks LLC, a Chicago-based marketing services provider, pays extra attention to creating a culture aimed at giving his staff a sense of comfort, fulfillment and belonging. Founded just eight years ago, PromoWorks posted 2006 revenue of \$172.5 million and was recognized earlier this year as the nation's No. 2 promotion agency by *PROMO* magazine. Kent, who is proud to know each of PromoWorks' nearly 400 full-time employees by name, says a leader's approachability and openness are significant factors in developing an environment in which employees have no doubt that their contributions are recognized and appreciated. *Smart Business* spoke with Kent about the benefits of creating a family culture and the importance of leading by example.

Set the vision and reinforce it to everyone in the organization. My leadership style is one of setting a vision at a very high level with our managers and guiding them down the path of driving that vision to the rest of their departments and their employees to get a cultural buy-in from the entire organization. I'm not a person who is hands-on on a regular basis. We've got great people and great leaders, and my job is to set the vision, set the values, set the tone of the organization and support them in driving home that message, those values and that vision to the rest of the employees.

It may seem elementary to some extent, but we do management meetings with the department heads monthly, we do all-employee quarterly meetings in a town-hall setting, and we also have a company newsletter that's distributed monthly that highlights certain departments and the latest initiatives from a business standpoint.

We've grown over 1,000 percent in the last five years, and we are close to 400 full-time employees and 33,000 part-time employees. Having that touch point with your CEO gives employees a sense of buy-in, in that it shows that management and leadership cares. They care enough to take the time to lay out their vision and values for everybody from the top of the ladder to the newest employee. We've found that having that type of connection with the employees while still empowering your managers to lead the day-to-day operations gives you a full range of support from a brand-new person all the way up to your partner.

Make work feel like home. Culture is a benefit in that what it does is create an opportunity for people to look at their jobs not as a job but to look at it as a career and to look at it as an integral part of the success of the company.

Let's face it. The two biggest things we do from a time perspective in our daily lives are work and sleep. We all think about the time we want to get out of work and go home and spend with our families, and



that's extremely important, but the way that I look at our company and our culture is that this is their second family.

We want to create a culture here where people are excited to come to work to see their second family on a daily basis, they want to contribute to their family's success and want to feel like they are a contributing factor, instead of somebody who shows up and punches a clock and then leaves and goes home.

We have really created almost a family culture internally in that we do a number of things extracurricularwise for the company outside of work. We have a number of softball teams, bowling teams, volleyball teams, basketball teams during the various seasons, we have a number of company functions with clients where everybody participates and is involved, so that everyone feels like they're part of the business and that they're a contributing factor in driving the success of the company.

Leave no man behind. We're not necessarily a family business, but what I mean by a family culture is that in these town-hall meetings, it's almost like a 'no man left behind' type of attitude.

We want people to participate in the success of the company, and in doing so, in having these town-hall meetings and having company functions where we can interact with each other outside of work, we create bonds beyond just the 9 to 5 of the workday. There is a culture here that everyone has each other's back.

Not everyone is going to be on their A-game on a daily basis, but when you have a culture of support, such as what we have here, that's able to substantiate itself throughout the business cycle. There's a real camaraderie and dedication to a common goal of achieving extraordinary results through ordinary processes.

Lead by example. If you can't perform a task or are not willing to step up and do it, why would your employees want to do it?

You walk the talk and you maintain a large amount of humility and common sense as you're approaching the business because as your companies grow, the newest people that come in to the company view the CEO and the senior management as a group that's not approachable or maybe untouchable. That is the complete opposite of the approach here in that I'm just as comfortable leading a high-level board meeting or client call as I am hosting our company picnic.

One thing that all key leaders share with each other is a vision for what they want to accomplish and a passion to be able to execute it. A leader's actions speak louder than his words.

People can see your vision because you have communicated it to them, and your passion is evident in the way you conduct yourself to accomplish that vision.

HOW TO REACH: PromoWorks LLC, (888) 310-3555 or www.promoworks.com