

Soft Skills at Work: Trust should be foremost foundation for business

By MARCIA HALL, For The Capital
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During the February snow storms, my husband, Steve, and I were in the middle of a home-renovation project. We had hired Angler Carpentry LLC in Linthicum to do the work.

Late one afternoon, Mike Smith, one of Angler's three partners and our initial contact, saw the large mound of snow that had been dumped at the end of the driveway an hour before. Steve was out of town and Mike said, "Let me help you with the snow."

He picked up a shovel and we quickly removed that mound.

Here was a demonstration of the type of customer service every consumer wants to see. But it wasn't just this helpful act that was impressive. It was the way Mike interacted with us from the very beginning. He was genuine, not pretentious, and never presumptuous.

How he acted inspired trust right away. Mike and all the workers were at our house every morning at the appointed time. He kept us apprised of the status of the projects. Mike and every member of Angler Carpentry were upbeat, polite, and friendly. Their attention to detail was remarkable.

Angler's three partners clearly knew being trustworthy is one of the most important attributes a person and business must demonstrate to be successful. I met with Mike and partners Bryan Burr and David Horst to talk about this quality.

"We treat a home as if it's our home," Bryan said. "It is the way we do business that promotes business."

"We stand behind our work and provide warranties," David added.

The company has five employees with Mike and Bryan dealing with sales while David does the accounting. The three are project managers, as well.

They all mentioned that not being too large was beneficial because their size allows them to know their customers. One or more of them is normally on site and able to talk with homeowners throughout the project.

"Customers tend to feel more comfortable with us," Mike said. "We're regular people. That creates a comfort level."

This may be one reason they have done little advertising. Steve and I, in fact, heard about the company through a family member.

The partners told me stories that vividly demonstrated the trust they inspire.

"One of our customers, Tom, needed a drywall repair job," Bryan said. "He is 68 and he has become our friend. So much so that we go golfing with him."

Tom's age is significant in that the age range of the company partners is 27-32.

"We love to talk to them (customers)," they all said. "It's not work related at all."

Mike spoke about a client who travels extensively.

"One went to Turkey," Mike said. "He asked us to remodel his kitchen and gave us two months while he was gone. He gave us his house key."

"Half the time customers say to keep the key," Bryan added. "We still have one lady's key since the business started in 2006."

This degree of trustworthiness is something on which the three partners have built their business and their reputation.

"You are only as good as your name," Bryan said. "One good word can go in your favor."

Angler Carpentry employees demonstrated to us that they were reliable, and they always did what they said they would. In addition, the company went one step further by exceeding our expectations throughout the project.

"If we can do extra, that is one thing that promotes trust," Bryan said.

Angler Carpentry well understands that being trustworthy should be the foundation of any business.

CONNECT! Coalition

CONNECT! Steering Committee members are completing final preparations for the Teen Workplace Skills Boot Camp from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. April 17 at Anne Arundel Community College. High school students are being invited to attend the half-day program.

Jennifer Stillings, Naval Academy graduate and founder of worldAWAKE, will be the keynote speaker. Jennifer served for 10 years as a military officer having flown more than 40 combat missions over Iraq and Afghanistan.

Students will attend three workshops called "Getting to Great," "How to Be Heard," and "Little Things Make a BIG Difference." Exhibitors and CONNECT! members will provide tips about how to succeed in the workplace and tell students what employers expect.

Participants also will see a Dress for Success Do's and Don'ts Fashion Show presented by the South River High School Theater Group. Refreshments will be provided.

Seats are available and the cost is \$10. Students interested in attending should contact Sue Gallagher with the Anne Arundel Workforce Development Corp. at sgallagher@aawdc.org to be e-mailed a reservation form. The registration deadline is Friday.

Marcia Hall, founder and principal of Reputation COUNTS, is a work place skills and business networking trainer, and author of "Jumpstart Your Job: 12 Simple Ways to Shift Your Career into High Gear." She is a member of the CONNECT! Coalition, a project of the Anne Arundel Workforce Development Corporation dedicated to stressing the connection of soft skills to workplace success, and can be reached at marcia@reputationcounts.com.

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