



PROPANE EXCHANGE

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DATES TO REMEMBER

March 22, 2010	Spring Membership Mtg. Marriott Hotel Charleston, WV
April 10-12, 2010	NPGA Southeastern Conv Atlanta, GA

NEWS FROM PERC



PERC Makes Changes to Propane MaRC

Restriction Prompts Changes to Propane MaRC

The Propane MaRC (www.propanemarc.com) (*registration required*) remains your source for safety and training materials from the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC).

But the Council has begun removing education materials from the site, including marketing and advertising resources that are designed to promote the general benefits of propane to consumer audiences.

The move comes as the Council restricts its activities to research and development, training, and safety matters. The results of a propane price analysis by the Commerce Department triggered the restriction under the Propane Education and Research Act of 1996.

As a consequence under the law, the Council's activities are restricted to research and development, training, and safety matters. This effectively prohibits the Council from launching any new consumer education projects or programs. The restriction also applies to projects under the state rebate program.

News Flash:

The National Propane Gas Association has moved its headquarters office. The new address is 1899 L Street N.W., Suite 350; Washington, D.C. 20036. All phone numbers and email addresses remain the same.



PHMSA Comes Under Fire from House Committee

The Department of Transportation's (DOT) Pipeline and Hazardous Material and Safety Administration (PHMSA) came under fire in early September at a hearing of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, which has oversight over the agency.

Among the criticisms of the agency, Committee Chairman James Oberstar (D-MN) cited the lack of oversight by the agency with regard to safety matters and its awarding of special permits to industry trade associations.

Chairman Oberstar stated that the agency has "too cozy of a relationship with industry" that essentially detracts from the agency's safety mission.

With regard to special permits granted to industry associations, of which NPGA has been granted two by PHMSA (5% rule and the farm cart special permit), an audit performed by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) within DOT noted that PHMSA has no way of knowing which members of the association are actually using these special permits.

Further, it is not clear that those members who do use the special permits have been issued any violations in the past that would warrant a restriction on their usage. (Note that NPGA was not mentioned at any time during the hearing, it was more of a general assessment of PHMSA's handling of association special permits.)

NPGA is monitoring this matter closely as we expect there to be some fallout from PHMSA as a result of this hearing and the OIG audit. We will continue to provide updates on how PHMSA plans to address issues surrounding special permits granted to industry associations.

GAS EQUIPMENT COMPANY CHANGES LOCATION

WVPGA Associate Member Gas Equipment Company has relocated its Richmond, VA Sales Office & Distribution Center from 4310 Eubank Rd to a new location at 12660 Bermuda Triangle Road in Chester, with a new local phone number (804) 717-5723 and Fax number (804) 717-5727. The (800) 368-4013 number will remain.



Success Depends On Employee Loyalty

"The customer's experience is all created and delivered by your employees," said McCarthy. Consequently, the only way to build customer loyalty is through loyal employees."

It's a constant battle to retain customers in today's competitive marketplace. "Businesses offer gifts, incentives, bonus points...but ultimately, 95 percent of the reason a customer comes back is the experience they had when they did business with you," said Dennis G. McCarthy, author of *"The Loyalty Link."*

A customer's experience consists of factors like whether your retail stock is displayed attractively or conveniently...your staff is truly helpful...an order is packed properly...a delivery is correct and on time.

"The customer's experience is all created and delivered by your employees," said McCarthy. Consequently, the only way to build customer loyalty is through loyal employees."

To win in today's marketplace, you have to do more than simply satisfy your customer. You have to exceed the customer's expectations, said McCarthy. You have to create a bond strong enough to withstand the efforts of your competitors to woo your customer or client away from you.

To bridge the gap between service that merely satisfies and service that exceeds expectations, you must have employees who are willing and able to provide the extra measure of dedication, care and effort, said McCarthy. This extra measure of employee service McCarthy called *"discretionary effort"* -- what employees choose to do as opposed to what their job descriptions obligate them to do.

McCarthy's description of a loyal employee: "When given the chance to exercise discretionary judgment, the loyal employee is one who chooses the good of the customer and the good of the employer above his own."

For example, when a customer or client asks for service at quitting time, a loyal employee chooses to stay and help the customer or client, even though he could choose to quit and leave for the day. "The actions of the employee who's not loyal," said McCarthy, "will say, in effect, 'Too bad. The customer can wait until morning. I've got plans.'"

TIPS FOR SUCCESS WITH EMPLOYEES

- *"Be clear about what's required on the job," said McCarthy. "Orient the new employee. Communicate the strategy of your organization. Describe the attitudes that are expected in things as simple as how to answer the phone. Teach them who your customers are and why you're in business."*
- *"Give them the right 'tools' and training -- explain your products and services to employees so they can be knowledgeable and helpful to customers. Provide on-going feedback and coaching, on-going psychic and monetary rewards," said McCarthy.*
- *"Employees can't give what they don't get," said McCarthy. "I can't be yelling and jumping up and down, and then expect employees to be kind and empathetic with my customers. Show interest in each employee as a person. Do you know their interests, needs, their kids' names?"*
- *Provide employees with flexibility wherever you can. Treatment needs to be fair, but not always equal, said McCarthy. For example, if you can, adjust working hours slightly for an employee if it makes their day care arrangements more manageable.*
- *"Help employees gain a sense of ownership," suggested McCarthy. Let employees see how what they do gives back to them. Let them participate financially, by being rewarded when they meet or help meet certain goals.*

McCarthy pointed out that in today's economy there are fewer midlevel managers overseeing employees, so customer service is at the discretion of the front-line employee more than ever. "It's fundamental to change the mindset of each employee from one of just getting the job done to one where they'll get the job done well," stressed McCarthy.

Customer service is affected by who your employees are...how they're trained...how they're treated...how aware they are of your customers' needs...and how easy or difficult the culture and working environment make it for them to meet those needs.

"If you want employees to put forth the extra effort that ensures customer loyalty, you need to focus as much on your employees as you do on your customers," said McCarthy. "In the same way that you can't afford to take your customers for granted in today's competitive marketplace, you can't afford to take your employees for granted, either."

But loyalty isn't something you can buy -- not for the long term. Money alone is rarely enough to keep employees motivated and committed to your business and your customers.

So how do you make loyal employees?

Number one, said McCarthy, is to hire the right people...not warm bodies. Be selective. "We're going to say whether an employee is loyal based on his behaviors and attitudes," noted McCarthy. "And those behaviors and attitudes are impacted enormously by two things: The organizational culture...and the employee's day-to-day experiences."

So, create a culture of loyalty that encourages employees to go out of their way to serve customers, said McCarthy.

McCarthy described how Aaron Feuerstein, the 70-year-old owner of Malden Mills in Lawrence, MA, set an example of going the extra mile for his employees and garnered tremendous employee loyalty in return. The morning after a fire completely destroyed his textile factory before Christmas in 1995, Feuerstein told his employees they'd still get a Christmas bonus and at least another month's pay and guaranteed them their jobs back at the completion of rebuilding. Feuerstein said of his employees, "They are my greatest assets."

Then, said McCarthy, ask yourself (as employer or manager) some questions, like: "Are my behaviors credible?" or "Do I promise and not deliver?" or "Am I consistent?"

Finally, "If you've done all the steps and an employee still won't...or can't, you may have to remove that employee," said McCarthy. "It's damaging to others' loyalty to allow a laggard to stay."

*Article courtesy of NetPay Payroll Services,
Mechanicsville, PA*

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