

LIFE AT WORK

Prime examples

I've really got to figure out what to do with the stacks of management advice books that grow like salt rocks from my door to my desk. Sent by publishers, picked up at bookstores or plucked from the library, I read a lot of these types of books, though I've got to admit I sometimes wonder if any of the leadership suggestions du jour printed between their covers are actually being implemented anywhere.

I've occasionally been teased—on the street, at conferences, around my family's supper table—for being overly optimistic. Do I actually believe that businesses are taking the recommendations that workplace columnists report and putting them into practice?

Sure I do. For proof, all you've got to do is take a look at this year's Top 100 list. Baton Rouge is full of smart companies who are doing things right. Here are a few examples.

Over the past several years, much has been written and spoken about getting centered on what it is you or your business is really about. At the core, the gurus ask, what is it that anchors you?

Companies that understand who they are go further than those who get stuck on function or operations. Over the past few years, accounting firm Postlethwaite & Netterville has grown based on this principle.

The firm once known only for number crunching now offers its clients management consulting and information technology services. Clearly, this company dug a little deeper and discovered that businesses looked to it for wisdom and advice. It responded by deepening what it had to offer.

strong culture.

Feedback. From customers, for staff or products, in any form it



comes. You've heard it. Feedback. It's good for business. But it takes a bit of chutzpah to actually put it on display, which is what Tony's Seafood has done. Click on its Web site, and you'll find an array of dishes for order. Click on the dish, and you can read customer reviews akin to those found on Amazon.com.

How many times have you heard that you ought to hire managers only after you've made sure they have the core competencies needed to be successful? Few companies actually take the time to find out whether those they place into leadership positions have that maddeningly complex blend of skills that'll make them leaders.

This year, though, Community Coffee and a handful of other local companies decided to place select employees into a management incubator program, so both the companies and the workers could figure out if the boss thing would work out before shifting responsibilities.

After the dot-com soap bubble went flat, recommendations abounded on figuring out inexpensive ways

Advice: Sometimes it's actually taken.

In much the same way, Price LeBlanc Inc. knows that its business is about people and service as much as motors. Customers come for the cars, but they also come to visit Price, the person, who has continued to build on personal touch for decades.

Culture, that buzzword that has flown like a buzzard from college campuses to business boardrooms, can be a tough one to nail. Ferrara Fire Apparatus has it. Visit their Web site and you'll find snapshots that the company's customers have taken of Ferrara fire trucks in action. Flames leap. Smoke spills out. The company's at the center of the action, but not exactly orchestrating it, burning its brand into the minds of anyone who cares to peek. That's the sign of a

to motivate staff. Enter Innovative Emergency Management, which has managed to grow, in part, by stirring its workers with a no-frills, wear-comfortable-clothes work environment that makes it easier for staff to pull the all-nighters needed to sustain big growth.

So you see? My optimism isn't rooted on shifting sands. Look around you. There are many quality companies who are living what Harvard teaches, right here in our big small town.

AMY ALEXANDER is a free-lance writer in Baton Rouge. She covers management and workplace issues. E-mail her at AmyRAlex@cox.net.