

Losing touch

I have noticed lately in working with medium to gigantic customers that often times as the scope and the scale of the operation gets larger that the decision makers are losing sight of their operations.

More specifically, the more decisions go up the ladder of authority the more these decisions may be off the mark from an operational or customer focused stand point.

In the supermarket industry, especially in corporate environments, decision making about operations, merchandising, etc are often made two or three layers up the ladder. Department level management is often at odds between doing what actually works, getting the job done and running their business versus corporate dictates on how to conduct business. It appears at time that most of their time is spent doing reports, meeting checklists and administrative chores rather than running their operations and taking care of customers.

Granted store level personnel may not always be the best qualified to make decisions on all aspects of the operation, but the same could be said about corporate level merchandisers who base a great deal of their decisions on looking at numbers.

Numbers don't always tell the entire story and I get the impression from some operational guidelines that many upper level decision makers haven't spent too much time on the front line of their operations. If, in fact, they had, I would suspect they would change many guidelines, both large and small.

Often times, store level management know of many opportunities to enhance sales and operations but have little or no authority to implement them and any suggestions they make apparently all upon deaf ears. The result is they rush around meeting bureaucratic guidelines while at the same time, doing whatever they have to do, on their own, to make their numbers.

The restaurant, health care, school food service and prison food service operations all suffer from the same lack of street level experience in decision

making. Often times, corporate management is guided by industry consultants rather than by experienced operators who have moved up through the ranks and know their business.

I make it a point to go on service calls and installations. I make it a point to train customers on our equipment. I answer the phone. Granted I am a very small business and the reality is that this isn't so much a conscious decision but a fact of life. However, understanding the basic blocking and tackling of your operation from the sidelines versus the press box is a real eye opener and helps you keep your business in the real world.