

## JANCOA PUTS EMPLOYEES FIRST

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Jancoa Janitorial Services has learned the direct correlation between work force development and customer satisfaction. The company, this year's winner of the Greater Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce Small Business of the Year award, offers extraordinary support for its employees. But it also expects them to be accountable for their work.

"We are owners of our own department," Soraya Ardon, who heads the company's human resources office, said. "We are responsible for what happens."

Jancoa's journey toward excellence began about five years ago, when the commercial janitorial company found itself 40 full-time employees short. Owners Tony and Mary Miller wrestled with the problem of adequate staffing, which was aggravated by the company's turnover rate.

"We wondered at first how we could hire more people and then realized that the real question was, 'How do we keep the people we already have?' " Mary Miller said. "We started asking questions of applicants and the people who worked for us."

Ardon said the assessment began with questions such as "Why did you come to work for us?", "What do you like about working for Jancoa?" and "What could we do better?"

Through those conversations, Jancoa's owners identified a host of factors that led to workers' short tenure or inadequate job performance. They realized that, for many of their employees, life seemed a string of problems and entry-level jobs.

Focusing attention on their employees changed forever the Millers' perspective and business strategies.

"Our people are our product," Mary Miller said. "We have to invest in people."

Said Tony Miller: "If they don't have hope and opportunity in their life, they can't be great employees."

So the two began addressing issues that would strengthen their work force and, as a result, enhance Jancoa's ability to provide high-quality, consistent service to its customers. The company offered its workers full-time positions that included health insurance and three weeks' paid vacation a year. It started a shuttle service to provide much-needed transportation to job sites and instituted a referral bonus program to encourage employees to recruit good prospects.

"We want to have mostly full-time employees because that results in consistency," Mary Miller said. "They develop relationships with each other and with the customer. And also, we can give them benefits."



**Mary and Tony Miller stand beside photos of their employees in the hallway of their office.**

(Steven M. Herppich photo)  
| [ZOOM](#) |

After a while, the Millers began asking their employees the question "Where do you want to be three years from now?" They were surprised to learn that some could not envision a future that was different from the present.

"We don't want them to be trapped here," Tony Miller said.

The desire to help their employees to stretch themselves and to dream led to Jancoa's holistic approach to personnel development. Because many of Jancoa's workers come from minority cultures - Hispanic, African and Appalachian - the company had to look at their human resources within a broad context.

"We encompass the family, the kids," Tony Miller said. "We teach English, we teach Spanish. We're starting to teach French because some of our African employees speak it. Our managers have to become bilingual."

The two say it's been fun watching people grow and change.

Darryl Mason said he started at Jancoa 25 years ago when his father, a Jancoa employee, "dragged me out."

After many years of average performance, Mason began discovering his people skills and "sixth sense" of what needed to be done, even before customers identified problems.

"He works days as our manager at Givaudan Flavors in Carthage," Tony Miller said. "He understands their building and understands completely what they want."

Guatemala native Freddy Lorenzo worked his way up from night janitorial duties to a position as "day floater." Jancoa relies on him to fill in wherever the need arises.

Lorenzo met his wife on the Jancoa shuttle bus several years ago. Through the company's employee assistance program, they were able to purchase a home. Lorenzo's two children also work for Jancoa.

"We're a family company in every sense of the word," Tony Miller said. "We're in business to make a difference in people's lives."

"Last year, Jancoa spent over \$1 million on employee education. They spent over \$380,000 in employee transportation to and from the workplace," said Jim Simpson, field services manager for The Partner America Program, which helps small businesses improve profitability and grow strategically. "They helped 11 employee families buy homes."

Things were going well, but enrollment in the Greater Cincinnati Chamber's Small Business Awards program three years ago made the Millers realize that happy workers needed to deliver superior service: Jancoa also needed to focus on results.

Through the chamber program, the company was able to compare its standards and practices against those of successful companies elsewhere. It defined what good performance entailed and designed a 24-hour training program that each prospective employee completes before touching the first mop or dust cloth. Jancoa's quality-control managers began making weekly visits to customer sites and issuing weekly "report cards." Employee performance is judged based on those evaluations.

## A SWEEPING SUCCESS

- Tony Miller launched Jancoa Janitorial Services Inc. in 1972 when he was 19 years old. The company provides contract cleaning services to large commercial and industrial facilities throughout Greater Cincinnati.
- In 2002, Jancoa achieved about \$6.4 million in sales.
- The company employs about 250 people full time, more than half of whom are Hispanic.
- Jancoa provides transportation to about 58 percent of its employees.
- Jancoa's mission is straightforward: "We want to be the best company to work for, providing the best possible service to our customers," president Tony Miller said. "Our goal is to double our size, providing more promotional opportunities to our employees. We also want to establish partnerships with other companies."
- Starting July 1, other companies will be able to contract for the services of Dream Engineer.
- Jancoa Janitorial Services is at 5235 Montgomery Road, Norwood. Call 351-7200 for more information.

After earning a Commitment to Excellence award from the chamber the past two years, Jancoa was among the Achievement of Excellence winners this year and captured Small Business of the Year honors.

"Bottom line, Jancoa is a role-model company," David Owens, the chamber's director of educational programs, said. "The biggest thing they've done is to use the awards process as a benchmark tool for themselves. They kept improving based on feedback they got. Now they have systematic approaches to the Malcolm Baldrige criteria we base the award on: leadership, strategic planning, customer and marketing focus, human resources focus and results."

Within the past year, Jancoa took its HR commitment a step further by establishing Dream Engineer. This human development component of Jancoa works with qualified workers to help them and their family members work toward their dreams in a logical, organized fashion. It offers classes in such areas as reading, math, credit awareness and financial management.

There's a homeownership club, helping participants become community stakeholders. Services are available to those who have successfully completed 90 days' employment and demonstrate core qualities.

"Our criteria are attendance, attitude, performance, and commitment to helping others achieve their goals," Christy Bard, the organization's executive director, said. "We establish a relationship with the person and learn their dreams. We want to help inspire them to know that tomorrow can be brighter than today. It gives their paycheck a purpose."