

Mission Ready

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Creating a "Front Line" Corporate Culture

Ask anybody in your company where the front lines are, and the answers will vary according to responsibility and experience.

Your Customer Service personnel will insist that dealing with demanding, often disgruntled, customers is truly being on the front lines of the organization.

Your Installation Department will think it is self-evident that *they* are on the front lines - installing the product under the scrutiny of anxious customers who are eager to see every promise from the salesperson come true.

No need to ask your Sales people if they believe they're on the front line - you already know the answer. *All* sales people see themselves - with some justification - as the true warriors of the company, embroiled in a daily struggle to overcome the customer's objections, to beat the competition, and to meet ever increasing performance quotas. All other departments, they believe, exist only to support the sales effort, because "Nothing happens until somebody sells something."

While these departments may disagree over where the front lines are, there is general agreement as to who are *not* on the front lines. Secretaries, auditors, clerks, bean counters, corporate attorneys, HR people, and receptionists are not considered to be involved in the "hand to hand" combat of the business. They are thought of as the civil servants of the organization, keeping the infrastructure functioning so that the heroes in Sales, Service and Installation

can go out and fight the company's battles.

If this describes the attitudes within your company, you've got a little work to do, because your organization won't be at its best until everybody has a "front line" mentality.

As leaders, we must make every employee feel a vital part of the corporate mission. All must be aware of the critical nature of their individual contributions to the success of the organization. We must recognize and praise - not only the point person - but also all who played a role in securing the customer's business. We must shine the spotlight upon each and every member of an expanded team, which includes everyone from the receptionist who first fielded the phone call, to the corporate attorney who worked on the contract, to the person in Order Entry who placed the order into the system.

When every employee feels an active member of a larger team, engaged in a shoulder-to-shoulder battle to dominate the marketplace, your organization will be formidable indeed. It is significant that in the world's premier fighting force, the United States Marines, there are no shoulder patches to indicate an individual's unit. The emphasis is on belonging to a larger team - the Corps itself. Every Marine believes that he/she is on the front line, regardless of duty assignment. *Your* people can feel the same way, as well, to the degree to which you promote that "front line" mentality.