

Farbman Group honored for its flexible workplace

BY CAROL MARSHALL
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Long before gasoline hit \$4 per gallon, Farbman Group/NAI Farbman started working with its employees to cut their commute times and offer maximum flexibility. The company has offered the abbreviated workweek, among other workplace flexibility perks, since 2005, to attract and keep employees.

"Southeast Michigan is, for better or for worse, a pretty spread-out region, and commutes are long. We have for some time, whenever possible, allowed people to work when they want to work, and where they want to work, which gives us a competitive advantage," said company President Andrew Farbman.

So flex-time, remote work and job sharing are just a few of the perks that Farbman offers the firm's 200 workers, whenever practical, based on the demands of the job. The company started looking five years ago at ways to give itself a competitive edge in attracting and retaining quality workers.

The measures have led to greater efficiencies, and have created a happier and more productive workforce, Farbman said.

On average, Farbman Group staff accounts have increased their portfolios by 25 percent, or 250,000 square feet, since implementing the workplace flexibility programs. Deposits in accounts payable have increased by 32 percent, or by 500



Andy Gutman, left, and Andrew Farbman of the Farbman Group. | MARK BIALEK

per month, and the number of invoices processed had grown by 675 per month, or 20 percent, Farbman said. Further, Farbman property managers have increased their portfolio sizes by an average of 17 percent or 175,000 square feet.

"Turnover hurts a business so dramatically; we want to keep that to a minimum," said Andy Gutman, CFO.

And even in an economy that is an "employer's market," the initiatives are valu-

able, Farbman said. "Having employees is one thing, but having the best employees is another," he said.

The flexible initiatives have not only worked out for the company and its workers; they also have attracted attention and recognition from American Business Awards, which named Farbman Group/NAI Farbman a finalist in the categories of Best Overall Company and Best Management Team.



The Farbman Group offices. | MARK BIALEK

The 2008 awards ceremony is June 12 at the Marriott Marquis Hotel in New York. Farbman Group was selected from more than 2,600 entries from companies nationwide.

The awards recognize not only the company's innovative employment practices, but also its annual growth, Gutman said.

Farbman said he focuses less on top-line revenues quarter-to-quarter than he does on the elements that lead to revenue growth.

"We're focused a lot on square footage and on accounts. We focus on the number of calls we're making and the number of responses we get, and the number of accounts and listings we get. You can't control the outcome of the game, but you can control how hard you play," Farbman said.

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PROPANE ►

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Blue Bird Corp. and Texas-based CleanFUEL USA.

"At the fleet level, liquid propane is 35 percent cheaper than gasoline. It also cuts carbon emissions by 50 percent, and it's a local source of fuel," Venezia said. "It reduces greenhouse gases, and there is a large supply."

Icom North America signed a 3.5-year lease at 54790 Grand River in early June, and has already moved to its new headquarters, Venezia said.

"The state of Michigan made it worth our while to come here, and our larger customers are here so we wanted to support them," Venezia said.

The location was formerly occupied by Whaley Steel and has been vacant about eight months.

The property owner is Union Bay Associates LLC, and was represented by Joe Pellerito and Jon Savoy of Lee & Associates.

Phil Konopitski of Friedman Real Estate Group represented Icom. "They're the kind of company Oakland County has been trying to attract, being an alternative-energy company that deals with propane fuels," Konopitski said.

The company employs five workers, and during the next few months plans to hire about seven more.

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INNOVATION ►

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is expand that to all areas of business. That's a key area of differentiation between the Soviet Union and what's done today."

The structured innovation course at Lawrence Tech, he explains, works with a variety of engineers and teaches them basic innovation skills, "which helps them to think about inventive-level problems differently and restructure those problems so that they can be solved."

At The Wireless Source, a mobile phone recycler based in Bloomfield Hills, officials were trying to figure out how to encourage more people to recycle their disabled cell phones, said Bob Sullivan, CEO and president.

Nearly 130 million mobile phones are retired each year, but only 10 percent of them get recycled, he said.

By following structured innovation principles, the company came up with nearly 140 ideas and immediately instituted about 20.

"As we broke it down into these smaller and smaller pieces, we found that some of these were quick but

high-impact solutions. And we implemented them right away," Sullivan said.

One idea: providing retailers with prepaid envelopes to give to customers encouraging them to send in their phones for recycling after the devices were deactivated. While few retailers had participated before, Wireless Source officials came up with the idea of creating an online registry for the envelopes that would make the retailers eligible for prizes.

The Wireless Source had about 15 retailers when they first started with the envelopes program. But when they added the online registry, "we had 660 stores register in the first day," Sullivan said. "And we ended up with about 92 percent participation overall, which was huge."

Lawrence Tech's Mechanical Engineering Department is considering making the structured innovation course a requirement, but it remains an elective for now, said Devdas Shetty, dean of the College of Engineering.

Being able to solve complex problems and advance technology will be critical to young people entering a global economy, Clarke says.

"It's just critical that we bring structure to every area of business."

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