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Nursing success

How Ladeira Poonian drives iBASEt's growth by fostering an environment of respect and appreciation.

By Anne-Margaret Sobota

When Ladeira Poonian's husband died suddenly in 1998, she took over the business he had founded, although she had little executive experience.

But the CEO and chairman of iBASEt brought something just as valuable to the table — a great knowledge of people. Poonian, a former nurse, has since built the company around a culture of caring and nurturing.

"The more that you are involved with your employees and the more you care about them, they will take care of you," Poonian says. "They always say you can draw a lot more flies with honey than with vinegar."

While a gentle person by nature, Poonian has also proven herself a fighter. At one point, she helped solidify her control of the company by raising enough money to buy out another investor. And along the way, she transformed iBASEt from a telecommunications consulting company into a \$38 million company providing integrated, paperless solutions for complex manufacturing and maintenance process management.

Smart Business spoke with Poonian about how motivates employees and drives success.

How can a corporate culture contribute to a company's success?

Our company focuses on an achievement and support culture with a strong emphasis on teamwork. Upper management aims to motivate rather than micromanage the employees.

We try and break down the barriers between upper management and the rest of the employees.

We are all part of what I like to think (of) as a family. We all are part of the team. No individual is better than the next. We encourage employees to get along with each other so that they can be more efficient and productive in the workplace.

I always want feedback from employees about their experiences working at iBASEt. I consistently meet and greet iBASEt employees to make sure they are happy and they are happy working here. What they tell me is, 'You know what I like about this company? We are taken care of as a whole. You come and you talk to us. You discuss things. If there are issues, you work on it right away. We get results.'

How is that beneficial?

You have to know your employees, know what will help to keep them productive. You want to meet their needs, too.

I found that knowing your employees, respecting them, complimenting them, acknowledging them, knowing their name, knowing about their family, knowing a lot about them as a person, being able to look at them as, not that you are the owner of a company but as their equal, you gain their respect. It's very important to motivate and to encourage employees so that they can really feel good about themselves and know that we care about them.

How else do you motivate employees?

Rewarding employees is a very important part of motivating them. If they really do a good job, we ... recognize them among their peers. When they have done something well, you acknowledge it. We want employees to enjoy where they work.

Promoting from within is a great motivator. They know that there is a pathway for them. 'If I am very productive and I am very good, I can go up the ladder.' That is important for employees.

We also have flexible hours. If they are productive and they are meeting their deadlines and meeting their goals and are not taking advantage of the company, we will work with them.

If they want to exercise, they can go and exercise. If they want to go to the doctor, they can go and they can come back and make up the hour. One of our employees goes biking at lunch for about two hours, then comes back and finishes his work.

One has to be flexible. You cannot say you are 9 to 5, and that's it.

How do you keep employees adaptable to change?

We never remain complacent in what we have. We must innovate or die, (so) we look for ways to consistently educate our employees.

For example, our IT department attends many IT courses to understand how to handle the enormous growth that we experience.

We also encourage communication among members of all various levels and expertise. We try to have team members hold sessions to educate each other so people can familiarize themselves with other technologies.

HOW TO REACH: iBASEt, www.ibaset.com