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## Little Acts Produce Big Results

As we ponder ways to improve customer intimacy, we are inundated with tools like CRM, VOC, RSS and a slew of other TLAs (three-letter acronyms). While the concept is making some software companies and consultants very wealthy, I'm struck by the desire to build a customer-intimate culture—one focused on delivering a positive experience for the customer. This desire reminds me of a story one of our associates recently shared with me.

After a tough day, she was treating her daughter to dinner at a local restaurant where they noticed a man clad in army fatigues dining with his own daughter. Compelled by a sense of thanksgiving and ongoing discussions about Inpro/Seal's giving program, she decided to pay for their meals (anonymously). The restaurant manager was so moved that he invited our associate to return with her daughter soon for another dinner—on the house. Walking to her car, this woman realized her bad day had suddenly turned a lot brighter. It's amazing what a simple act of giving can do.

Many organizations establish giving programs to share their success with those who need it most. In 2012 alone, for example, an estimated \$298 billion was donated to charities through corporate giving. Besides the obvious monetary and service benefits for the receiving entities, there are significant benefits for contributing organizations. Giving programs boost employee morale, empower associates to make decisions, create positive business images and establish strong ties to communities. Each of these benefits has a positive impact on individual employees and companies as a whole.

One often-overlooked benefit involves the ability of a giving program to translate into a customer-centric culture that puts customers front and center in everything an organization does. Key components in this type of culture include responsiveness, can-do attitudes, humility and a clear focus on overall customer needs. Let's look at these elements from the perspective of a giving program.

At Inpro/Seal, one of our most successful initiatives is "Jean Day Wednesdays," which allows employees to wear jeans for a \$5 donation. Each quarter, the company matches those contributions, and the total amount is given to a charity or benefit fund selected by the employees. Within the past year, we've donated thousands of dollars to community-based and individual charities that are near and dear to our associates. Another of our initiatives lets employees in the plant donate canned goods to a local food bank in exchange for being able to wear their favorite sports teams' apparel. With so many associates participating in these programs, minimal individual giving has become something big at our company.

**It's amazing what a simple act of giving can do. We've seen it for ourselves.**

Watching such donations sent out as a result of their efforts has helped generate a strong can-do attitude among our associates. In turn, they are gently reminded that no matter how difficult their own days are, there are others in the world—including some in our community—who are facing greater challenges. I've seen firsthand the lessons learned as Inpro/Seal employees focus on the needs of others and discuss the charities and benefit funds to which our collective contributions should go.

At our headquarters, we display a quarterly giving plaque with a quote from Maya Angelou that has become a slogan for us: "When you learn, teach. When you get, give." I believe this philosophy helps drive the strong customer-centric culture for which Inpro/Seal is known. If your organization hasn't yet done so, I encourage you to embrace it soon. **MT**

The opinions expressed in this Viewpoint section are those of the author, and don't necessarily reflect those of the staff and management of *MAINTENANCE TECHNOLOGY* magazine.