



## CORPORATE CULTURE

# Putting People First (Really!)

Sure, you think you put people first, but do you have a program that formalizes it like this one?

“One of our offices has a very aggressive goal for selecting and developing—we don’t call it recruiting and retention—sales associates, and this particular manager was struggling to get things done,” says **Rei L. Mesa**, president and CEO of **Prudential Florida Realty**, headquartered in Sunrise. “We said, ‘Let’s apply the People First culture as a support team.’ Office appointments with productive sales professionals that we were trying to get [were] lined up immediately. It turned things around.”

Mesa says putting people above profits creates a more productive and, subsequently, a more profitable company. “That doesn’t mean that we don’t have a business plan, budgets and strategic meetings on the financial side. But we realize we need the people to execute those plans and those goals, and that’s the People First philosophy, or culture.”

To formally codify the idea in his company’s culture, Mesa turned to Jack Lannom’s People First training program and earned its certification in May. Mesa wouldn’t divulge the fees for People First

Putting people above profits creates a more productive and, subsequently, a more profitable company. —Rei Mesa

certification, but adds that implementing a people-focused program requires very little other cost. “We didn’t have to hire any additional positions or allocate any additional resources for this initiative,” he says. Here’s how he does it.

### Change home and office

A people-oriented business culture must tie to people’s homes and personal lives, says Mesa. “If things at home are not doing well, that’s going to impact your professional life—and vice versa. So the whole process [involves creating a balance in both] your professional life and your home life,” he says.

### Have corporate courage

Mesa admits that this humanistic, holistic approach is not for everyone. “It has to be a culture for the entire organization,” he says. That might mean giving up revenue by parting ways with a top producer. “You see the way that person behaves in his or her professional life, how he or she treats customers, how he or she treats other sales professionals, and you ask yourself, ‘Why is that person still here?’ [It] takes courage to make that decision. Long term, it pays big dividends to disassociate with people who don’t represent your organization and culture.”

### Use power phrases

Lannom’s People First program helps to get everyone on the same page by provid-

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**GREAT IDEA** Brokers often grow their business by acquiring other brokerages. Measuring just the financial part of the acquisition is a “huge mistake,” says **Rei L. Mesa**, president and CEO of **Prudential Florida Realty** in Sunrise. “If we don’t feel that the culture is a right fit, we don’t offer to buy the company. If the culture is not compatible, then the sales professionals end up leaving.”



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## Putting People First

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ing thought structures called The Pyramid of People Power. Mesa says using these words and reinforcing their meaning to a people-first culture makes all the difference. From top to bottom of the pyramid, the words are *Yes! Thank you, I need you, I believe in you and I am proud of you.*

“Yes! means you expect success,” says Mesa. “That doesn’t mean preparation goes out the window. But, it generates an attitude that binds the customers and our prospects with our company.”

Everyone in the organization is encouraged to use the phrases in sincere and timely ways.

Balance comes, says Mesa, when the same phrase and sentiments are used at home. “My daughter, who just finished her freshman year exams, kept telling me, ‘Dad, I can’t tell you how many times I thought about your words *I believe in you* when I was going through those exams.’ *I believe in you* is a motivational [phrase].”

To reorient thinking, Mesa’s organization uses replacement words for older



business terms. For example, *Purpose Partners* describes anyone tied to the company mission, from employees to vendors to allied service providers. “I’ve asked our sales associates and our teams to change the word *competitors* to *colleagues*,” says Mesa. “We do depend on [them] for our success. We’re going to be aggressive about competing, but that doesn’t mean that we can’t treat others with the People First philosophy.” Job titles get revised too, such as *desk manager* for *receptionist* and *leadership-team leader* for *branch manager*.

### Train everyone

Mesa accompanied all 110 employees (including those in the company’s subsidiaries) through Lannom’s People

First training program. “It’s a team effort with everyone included (to create unity),” says Mesa. Because of their independent contractor status, sales associates are handled differently. Mesa toured his 50 offices explaining Lannom’s People First program and his vision for a people-focused company. He explained ways associates can immediately use the Pyramid of People Power concept to improve their professional and home lives, and invited them to sign up for People First–produced training webinars.

“I got hundreds of emails from our sales professionals about how they’ve applied some of the things I’ve talked about in their personal lives,” says Mesa. “In our world we have two customers—internal customers (our sales professionals) and external customers (the buyers, sellers, tenants, landlords and everybody we do business with). This culture and philosophy brings everything together.”

In the end, says Mesa, “every company has a culture—some like ours, by design, and others, by default. I’d rather do it by design.” ○