

Service sells... cutting wages doesn't

Last year my wife and I spent part of our annual “driving” getaway in an older inn near downtown Lake Placid, New York.

The attention to detail and professionalism we received from a couple of young employees at check-in was more than impressive. I even felt confident enough to just take the keys, without previewing the room as I always do, after the pleasant young clerk said, “If you’re not happy with your room just call down and we’ll make sure you are.”

It was evident that staff members had been well-trained to deliver optimal customer service to the inn’s guests.

I recently invited some out-of-province associates to meet over breakfast at a hotel near my office. When one of my guests ordered French toast, the nervous young server asked whether she wanted “white or whole wheat.” Surprised that French toast was available in whole wheat, my guest chose that. When the server returned with nothing but two slices of toasted store-bought whole wheat bread on a large plate it became painfully clear why our Atlantic tourism industry is weakening.

Formerly our best tourists, our American neighbors are getting a better bang for their buck staying at home, especially now that our dollars are on par. Tourism operators south of the border are investing in their young workers and training them to provide exceptional customer service.

I don’t know what tourism operators are doing in other parts of Atlantic Canada but in PEI a few are trying to convince the provincial government to adopt a two-tiered minimum wage strategy. Instead of respecting and working with our youth to strengthen our economy, they’re trying to peel back their wages.

We’re due for a change in attitude about ourselves, our youth, our place in the world, our capabilities and our expectations of government. It’s time to drop our parochial worldview and realize we’re part of the global economy, competing and trading with local and international players. That our local economic levers affect, and are affected by, a large variety of outside factors.

We need to believe in the capabilities of our core industries (agriculture, fisheries, manufacturing and tourism),

but we also need to seek out new opportunities and develop a spirit of innovation. We need to respect our young workers and train them in service and delivery. That’s where our focus has to be to make our region successful again.

Let’s develop our young people into positive contributors to our community and encourage them to pursue their ambitions here in Atlantic Canada. I believe each of us has unlimited potential to improve our society. If we unlock the potential of our youth while simultaneously building sufficient economic activity and structure to grow our working population, our community will thrive.

The potential to build our society lies within the abilities, ambitions, resources and needs of our community and if there’s anything I’ve learned in business, it’s that anything is possible through ingenuity, hard work and cooperation.

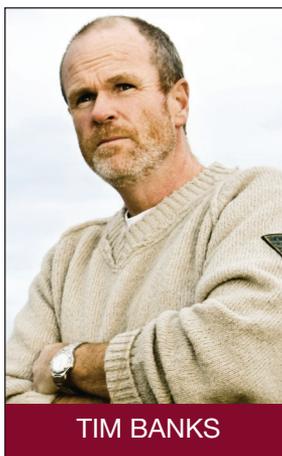
Business leaders need to step up and mentor young entrepreneurs, providing opportunities for them within our companies, guiding them towards establishing innovative new businesses. By ushering young people into the business community we’ll strengthen our position in any economic climate.

Atlantic Canada is a great place to live and visit, offering a quality of life unparalleled in the rest of the world. Our environment, our scenery, our heritage and our people all contribute to a wonderful community that I am proud to belong to. But we all must prepare for change. We can have a strong economy with many rewarding jobs and vibrant businesses. We can have progress and prosperity now and in

the future if we strive vigorously to get it. Why not start by training our young people to better serve visitors to the region instead of pulling back their wages?

At breakfast one morning at the inn in Lake Placid, I asked for a local newspaper. The employee apologized for not having one but within the hour she tracked me down and gave me a copy someone presumably had fetched in town. A sign on an employee service door at the rear of the property said, “Through These Doors Pass The Most Exceptional Employees in the Adirondacks. Winners of a 4 diamond AAA Award for every year from 1985 to 2009.”

Why can’t we be there? | **ABM**



TIM BANKS

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