



Plymate, Inc.

Company Defies Uniformity

By Symone Salisbury

A commitment to quality, coupled with a little levity, governs Plymate Inc.'s daily operations. The company specializes in rental and direct sales of business uniforms and floor mats in central, south central and southeastern Indiana.

Plymate delivers leased uniforms to customers weekly and then launders them. Clients include service industry representatives such as electricians and manufacturers. Garment preparation and laundering takes place at two adjacent facilities in Shelbyville.

"We can't really differentiate ourselves based on the product or the way we process it, states CEO Todd Plymate. "It's really about our people and the difference they make. Investing in them and respecting them and taking time with them is a more fun way to do business, but it's also a better way to do business."

Mat Man, a mascot for the company's floor mat business, illustrates the humorous approach to conducting business. That playful attitude extends to the workplace. Quarterly company-wide staff meetings have included joke-telling contests and a presentation of employees' bonuses in which the CEO poses as a banker cashing checks.

The co-worker of the quarter (company leaders refer to their associates as co-workers) is honored at staff meetings. Selected by peers, recipients receive a plaque, gift certificate, exposure on the company web site and a designated parking spot.

Staff members have several opportunities to take ownership in company processes. They receive monetary incentives, for instance, according to customer retention. Regardless of his or her position, each employee accompanies a Plymate truck driver annually on a delivery route. The goal is to foster interaction among office workers, drivers and customers.

"For them to put a face with a name means so much to them," comments Terri Warnecke, vice president of sales. "I think they care more because they have that opportunity to learn about how the customer values us and our service."

Plymate's leaders believe that communication between workers and customers contributes to the strength of their partnerships.

"We've done a lot to train our leaders to be strong communicators," Warnecke asserts. "I think if you interviewed our co-workers, they would say, 'It's easy to talk to my boss. They want me to grow as an employee.' With 75 employees, you can do that."

Todd Plymate adds, "You can, but I don't think everybody does."

Another point of distinction, Warnecke argues, is how the company embraces what could be considered a challenge, instead making it a valuable asset.

"We do not have a national presence," she contends. "It's also our differentiator and why I think we excel. I think we compensate by targeting the independently owned companies that have autonomy to make local decisions and who have had major disappointments with large national companies."

When asked what movie quote best describes the company's leadership philosophy, Plymate responds, "Maybe it's 'you can handle the truth' (opposed to the "you can't handle the truth" line Jack Nicholson proclaims to Tom Cruise in "A Few Good Men") because I think co-workers can handle the truth. I think if you're open and honest, you're going to be in a better place."



You Should Know

The Plymate of the Month program recognizes one of Plymate's customers with a company description, logo and workplace photos on Plymate's web site. Company summary on Page 55

Uniform engraving (below) and rental are only a few of the services Plymate provides. "Mat Man" (right) illustrates the company's dual focus on quality and fun.

