

Business ethics means investing in people

"It's the Mom and Pops that are going to bring Rochester back," says Angella Luyk, president and founder of Midnight Janitorial, an office cleaning company.

Luyk's now 6-year-old company was the 2009 recipient of the Rochester Business Ethics Award, and won the equivalent national award last year. "Our company is like a family," she says. It sounds like a cliché, but Luyk and other recipients, finalists and participants in the RBEA are following the traditions that made Rochester's homegrown industries so successful.

Treat your workers well. Treat your customers well. And give back whatever you can.

Every company has to concern itself with profit. And the bottom-line pressure from Wall Street is very powerful. The whole idea of quarterly earnings is "very detrimental" to business, says Alan Ziegler, co-chairman of the RBEA and owner of the Brighton-based Futures Funding



mhare@DemocratandChronicle.com

MARK HARE

Contact him at:
Democrat and Chronicle
55 Exchange Blvd.
Rochester, NY 14614
(585) 258-2351

Corp., which develops pension and profit-sharing plans for other companies. It's still true, Ziegler says, that by investing in people and communities, businesses create a more stable and profitable future — but not necessarily the quickest growth.

The RBEA was established in 2003 as an affiliate of the American Business Ethics Award started a decade earlier. Each year, one local company is named an award recipient and others are named as finalists. The application process is rigorous and designed to help companies look carefully at ways to hold CEOs accountable, give a voice to clients and employees and provide

a clear and safe path for whistle blowers. (To learn more, go to www.rochesterbusinessethics.com.) That process provides "validation, credibility and soul-searching," says Ray Isaac, president of Isaac Heating and Cooling, a past RBEA recipient. "And there's always that little guy on your shoulder asking if this is what an ethics award recipient would do."

"We're very upfront about it," Isaac says. "We put our employees first." That means making sure they have whatever they need to do their jobs. It means treating them well and fairly so there is no reason for resentment. That, he says, will translate to satisfied customers.

Luyk's company cleans high-end offices, and her customers know they will pay more for first-class service. But *her* customers want to take care of *their* customers — and they know that spotless restrooms, clean walls and baseboards and a gleaming

appearance build confidence. When they buy her service, they also pump more money back into the local economy. Most of her 40 employees are immigrants or have a disability. She expects turnover and is never happier than when one of her workers is able to move on and buy a first car or home.

She wants to encourage community service and discovered that because her employees are low-income, they have very little time to give, so she pays them up to four hours a month to give back — to volunteer at Salvation Army, or Junior Achievement, wherever they choose. "I don't need to make millions of dollars," Luyk says.

She wants to share the wealth, promote fair play and loyalty. She wants her business to put people first and still make money. That's the way great Rochester companies have always been successful. It's called investing in the future. It still works. □