



**Ron Schlerf**

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# Building on Customer Satisfaction

I appreciate the opportunity to serve as Chairman of the 2002 PCI Board of Directors. It is a distinct pleasure to work with those who serve on the PCI executive committee, the board of directors and PCI staff. Their cumulative experience and insight into the challenges that confront our industry are truly impressive.

I consider it a privilege to be associated with all of the producer, associate, and professional members who work so tirelessly to advance the technology and promote the advantages of precast/prestressed concrete. I have had the opportunity to be employed in the precast/prestressed concrete industry for nearly 40 years. During that time, I have witnessed countless examples of professional creativity that has driven our industry to new opportunities and greater levels of success. PCI's steady and continuing growth during the past 50 years is a strong indication of an industry that has matured and can respond successfully to any challenge.

It gives me great personal pleasure to see a completed project that reflects the best skills and talents of a well-trained company team. An even greater pleasure is to hear genuine words of pride and satisfaction from a well-served customer.

Experience has shown conclusively that companies who have a reserve of loyal customers are much better equipped to weather economic uncertainty. As an industry, we must focus on building and preserving sound customer relationships.

Accomplishing that endeavor, however, is often a formidable challenge. AchieveGlobal, the professional skills development firm, teaches us that a successful company:

- Balances the customer's need for value against the shareholder's need for profit.

- Balances the customer's need for special attention against the manager's need for productivity.
- Balances the organization's appeal to more "profitable" customers against the commitment to serve all customers.
- Balances the customer's demands against the organization's ability or willingness to meet those demands.

Our task is to turn these diverging needs into tangible solutions. To do this takes more than just caring about our customers. We must train our employees to develop the skills necessary to precisely serve the customer's individual needs and to *understand* what customers value most.

AchieveGlobal instructs employees to see the big picture and how the customer fits into it; establish an authentic human connection with each customer; render timely, accurate, and thorough service; and respond adequately to unique customer needs. Above all, our companies need to "extend a hand to repair and strengthen relationships with customers who are upset or angry. . . . The ultimate quest is not merely a satisfied customer, but a hugely satisfied, wildly enthusiastic customer whose experiences with your company are delightful and special enough to generate deep feeling and loyal behavior."

I propose that we collectively focus our efforts in 2002 toward increasing the value of an asset that is not listed on our balance sheets. That asset is a growing list of hugely satisfied, wildly enthusiastic, and loyal customers.

Kay Plantes, our facilitator for the PC-21 educational leadership series, summarizes the task with these words: "What you are is defined by the customer."

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ron Schlerf". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.