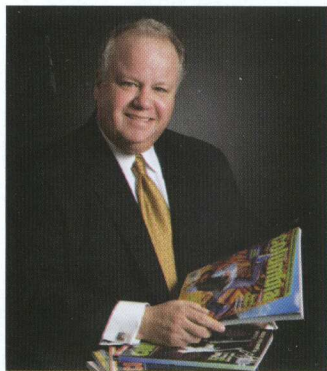


Working In Columbia: The Stuff Of Dreams

In this issue of *Inside Columbia*, we give you a rare look inside the offices of Carfax, a company founded in Columbia in 1984 and now based in Centreville, Va. Thanks to a clever advertising campaign and a prolific presence in car dealerships across America, Carfax may be the best-known national company with deep roots tied to Columbia. With its unique corporate culture, Carfax is widely recognized as one of the best places to work in America and it would appear that the company's phenomenal success is tied directly to



the deep satisfaction of its workforce.

Reading about Carfax, I couldn't help but reminisce about a company called DataStorm Technologies that was founded in Columbia and was also highly regarded as a great place to work. This company was the talk of the town with its casual-attire dress code, lavish

employee outings along with a number of creative, and often unexpected, perks. Though DataStorm is long gone, its employee-centric culture lives on in the companies created by former DataStorm employees.

Socket Internet founders George Pfenenger and John Dupuy were DataStorm alumni and have crafted their own corporate culture where the emphasis is clearly on the health and happiness of their own employees. Earlier this year Socket added a nutritionist to its staff to help employees make healthier lifestyle choices. The company has also recently dubbed an employee as their "Manager of Employee Satisfaction" to help keep the company focused on the needs of the staff.

A few months ago, Pfenenger sent me a copy of a book called *The Dream Manager* by author Matthew Kelly. A national best-seller, *The Dream Manager* is a parable about a company struggling with many of the same problems many small-business owners encounter on a daily basis. As it turns out, Pfenenger had been given a copy of the book by Triston Brownfield, one of the owners of D&H Drugstores. Always happy to share a good book that I believe possesses a particularly relevant message; I promptly ordered 30 copies of the book and delivered them to a number local CEOs and company presidents.

What impressed me most about the message of *The Dream Manager* is that it tells the story of a fictional company that chooses a radically different approach to dealing with a few of the age-old challenges many companies face in trying to build success. Instead of working around the problem, this CEO turns his company's problems inside-out and finds an employee-centric solution to the company's woes.

In a nutshell, the company hires a manager that is singularly responsible for helping employees identify their long-held ambitions and subsequently mapping out a plan for achieving their goals. This Dream Manager then coaches employees through the achievement of their goals. Without giving away too much of the book, the result of this process creates employees that are not only content, but completely engaged in the company's success.

Though the book is a parable, one can easily imagine a real world application of the concepts introduced in the book. If you look around mid-Missouri, you can find a number of examples of companies, beyond Carfax and Socket, who put their employees first and have experienced great success in doing so.

At first glance, many company leaders might understandably wince at the complexities associated with hiring a person to manage the dreams of its employees. Kelly goes to great lengths in the final chapters of the book to explain how this concept can be replicated in the smallest of companies. In many cases, it's as simple as talking to your employees about their dreams and ambitions.

I'm pleased to tell you that *Inside Columbia* magazine has teamed up with some of the best employers in town to bring Matthew Kelly to Columbia on Oct. 9. Thanks to the generosity of great local employers like The Callaway Bank, Socket, Aflac and our media partners, you have a rare chance to hear the author of *The Dream Manager* tell the story himself and find out how you can engage your employees like they've never been engaged. For more information on this special event, visit www.INSIDECOLUMBIA.net.

I hope to see you on Oct. 9. ■

Fred Parry
Publisher
fred@insidecolumbia.net