

# INTERLOCK

THE MAGAZINE FOR ELEVATOR PROFESSIONALS

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Ten Keys to  
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Star Company

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# TEN KEYS TO BUILDING A FIVE STAR COMPANY

KENCOR'S RECIPE FOR BUSINESS SUCCESS



**F**ounded as a small family operation 38 years ago, Kencor has come a long way. At 98% customer retention, they've clearly found a winning formula for delighting customers – and in this article they share the 10 keys they have adopted for building a successful elevator business.

**KEY ONE****BUILD A SOLID CULTURE**

Richard Kennedy, the Founder and President of Kencor, attributes the success of the business first and foremost to a simple element: Culture. “We work hard on culture in this company,” he explains. “Good culture doesn’t just happen – you need to nurture it. You need to give it time. We know the value of things like motivation, drive, respect, and we proactively work towards creating a happy, healthy workplace. That’s when you get the best from people.”

The impact of that culture is unmistakable at Kencor, which was recently voted one of the top 100 workplaces in Philadelphia. Employees stay in the business for longer, they transition from one role to another as they develop and gain promotion, and some even choose to stay on in advisory roles after retirement. “We never allow people to feel stuck,” Richard says. “We let them try things, and work with them to design their future in the business. Our people are our most important assets – and if we value them, they value their work. Everybody wins.”

**KEY TWO****FOCUS ON THE CUSTOMER**

The Kencor view on customer care is strongly reflected in their core business values – half of which are about the customer. “All our decision-making is customer-focused,” explains Karen Kennedy, Executive Vice President. “We will never be the cheapest option, but our differentiator is in the service. We take a longer view than just one transaction or a single project because we want a long-term relationship with our customers. It’s not always easy, but we need to offer an accountability and a trust that says: ‘We do what we say we’ll do – and if we get it wrong, we make it right.’”

**KEY THREE****BE ACCESSIBLE**

On a normal day in the office, customer care finds its way onto everyone’s desk. Kencor has a ‘two-ring policy’ which means that anytime the phone rings twice without getting picked up, everyone should jump on the phones to answer it. There is no automated call handling system; everyone gets through to a human being. “We want to be responsive and accessible, on

all levels of the business and the executive team. If it’s important for a customer to speak to us, it should be important for us to listen,” Karen points out.

**KEY FOUR****BE PROACTIVE**

However, at Kencor it’s not just about being available for inbound calls and requests. Being proactive in connecting with customers is just as important. “I go out and see every single job in progress,” Richard says. This is quite impressive, considering that they could have up to 120 ongoing jobs at any time.

“It gives the people on the ground an opportunity to talk to me, and I get to see customers, users, site managers, and buildings. It creates a real, human connection.”

Meanwhile, back in the office, the team operates with the same proactive strategy. A dedicated Sales Executive makes daily follow-ups of all service calls. These conversations are a golden opportunity to listen to the customer, collect feedback, and identify any additional issues. “We constantly discover useful information on these calls,” Karen explains. “We don’t want to leave any unresolved issues or extra revenue on the table.”

**KEY FIVE****BE SELECTIVE**

Some of Kencor’s customers have been with them for over 30 years. Still, Karen points out that not every customer is right for them. “We do have a selection process, where we choose the ones that we are able to provide with great service. We want to work with customers and suppliers who share our values of mutual respect and integrity, and not everyone meets those criteria. We try to pick the good ones!”

**KEY SIX****BE INCLUSIVE**

Kencor is a naturally inclusive business, choosing to focus on and harness the skillsets of its individuals and offering opportunities to everyone equally. “We’ve got a great gender balance,” Karen explains. “On a management level we are close to having 50% women, and we’re continuously working hard to encourage women to pursue roles in every department. We want



to change the perception that skilled work is just for men.” Karen shares several examples of women in Kencor who have started out as receptionists and eventually moved on to become project managers, sales representatives, and dispatching managers. And as a woman herself, she never experienced any exclusion in the elevator industry. “I’ve never been treated differently; I’ve always felt welcomed,” she says. “I don’t see a glass ceiling in the elevator industry. For me, it’s about seeing an opportunity and grabbing it. Companies like ours across America are opening doors for younger generations of women who want to pursue a career in elevators. All they need to do is believe in themselves.”



**KEY SEVEN**

**TRY NEW SOLUTIONS**

Of course, company culture and customer care can only go so far. Ultimately the equipment the company provides needs to meet the customer’s standard and quality expectations – and the market’s hunger for new, exciting innovations. John Dodds, Chief Operating Officer, explains: “We monitor the technology landscape via conventions and product updates from vendors and we often get the opportunity to be a beta tester of new products and solutions, which gives us a chance to see things in action at an early stage.” However, he points out, Kencor will only really embrace technology that allows them to do what is most important to them: Engage directly with the customer. “Automation can be great, but we want to protect the trust that comes with having a personal interaction. Control and safety are our top-most priorities when it comes to protecting our customers, and that will never change. We welcome innovation, as long as it supports our ethos.”



**KEY EIGHT**

**BE PRODUCT CONFIDENT**

All Kencor’s field technicians receive hands-on product training on a regular basis. Suppliers like GAL Manufacturing and Hollister-Whitney often host training days on their equipment to make the field staff competent and confident handling the products. But the vendor’s engagement often extends from the classroom into real customer project conversations – supporting Kencor in



providing specific expertise and detailed product knowledge. “Good vendor relationships often open up successful customer relationships,” John says. “We like to take a collaborative approach to selling, where we team up with suppliers to create a win-win engagement with clients. This is one of the reasons why the recent developments in the creation of Vantage Elevator Solutions is so exciting, as it gives us direct access to a wide range of equipment under one roof.”



**KEY  
NINE**

**BUILD STRONG  
PARTNERSHIPS**

Kencor has a long-standing partnership with the Vantage group of companies – in particular GAL and Hollister-Whitney. There is a great deal of loyalty running both ways, with a history of support and commitment. However, when the Vantage acquisition was announced, there was understandably a certain apprehension to the news. “The shift of ownership and the arrival of Vantage was exciting and sad in equal measures for us,” Karen remembers. “It was the end of an era, but it was also bringing in new opportunities and potential. And we were happy to see that Vantage retained so many people from the original businesses, rather than cutting out some of that valuable expertise and experience as often happens in other buy-outs.”

**KEY  
TEN**

**GROW WITH  
A PURPOSE**

In 2011, Kencor started accelerating their growth by going from an entrepreneurial to a platform-style business. They invested in executive coaching for their leadership teams, which encouraged everyone to rise to their level of competency. While growing organically, the business also made four acquisitions over the course of five years – adding significant numbers to the workforce. “We’re proud to say that we haven’t let a single person go in any of our acquisitions,” Karen says. “We find a place for everyone, and we focus on providing a place for personal growth as well as business growth.” Kencor sponsors training for all employees, paying 100% of CET and QEI education and certification, and 50% of education for college and masters’ degree programs. This helps the business grow in a smarter way, by optimizing both new and existing resources.

FOUNDED IN  
**1981**

BASED IN  
WEST CHESTER  
**PA**

**100**  
EMPLOYEES

SERVING  
SIX STATES

**PA | VA | DC  
MD | NJ | DE**

SERVING  
**3000**  
UNITS IN  
**1900**  
LOCATIONS

**KENCOR’S VISION FOR THE FUTURE**

Whatever the future holds for Kencor, it’s safe to say they have no intention of simply floating on down the river. There is a tremendous amount of ambition and drive to build the business further. “We refuse to get comfortable,” John Dodds declares. “We are constantly reviewing our SWOT analysis, we look at new markets, and new jurisdictions. We honestly believe the old adage that ‘companies that stop growing start dying’. Of course, it’s tricky to predict the future now that technology is advancing so quickly. It’s virtually impossible to have visibility of the future of a business beyond three years, so we want to make sure we stay agile in our planning and not get stuck in a set 5-year plan that we might outgrow.”

*For more information on Kencor and their success story, contact Karen Kennedy on (800) 220-4046.*