



DARLING HOMES | *Luxury Home Builders*

by SHANNON DENNISTON

In his book *Never By Chance*, Joe Calloway asserts that “aligning people and strategy through intentional leadership” is what makes a company truly successful. Interaction with customers is an integral part of a business plan and must be employed on a level far exceeding the standard of just courteously answering the phone. In a down economy, integrating the employee and customer experience with enthusiasm and loyalty has become paramount in the survival of any conglomerate.

Darling Homes is a nationally recognized luxury home builder based in Frisco, Texas that operates with the same allegiance and zeal. In fact, author Joe Calloway often refers to Darling Homes as one of those unique high performing companies! Together, the Darling brothers Bill, Bob and Steve have built an award winning organization on a foundation of quality and service. Quality and service applied both internally and externally. Understanding the importance of how both tie into employee and cus-

tomers satisfaction has really set Darling Homes apart since their 1987 debut with the impressive Stonebridge Ranch community in McKinney, Texas.

What makes a Darling Homes structure more outstanding than the competition? “Respect,” says co-founder Bill Darling, “there’s a certain level of respect we show for each other in the office, and that translates into the way we treat our customers and the homes we build.” Darling Homes doesn’t just build houses for business, they build to create communities and give customers a home. It takes a special place to build that type of environment. The brothers and the upper management work to nurture their family of employees and neighborhood of customers. Builders want to know how an individual customer will live in a house, truly understanding their wants and needs. Then the team can design a home around the customer, respecting the customer and giving them what they want rather than throwing up a “cookie cutter” house as quickly as possible. The employees of Darling Homes are encour-

aged to set out and reach new heights, giving customers the ability to do the same.

The atmosphere of companionship and encouragement starts from the inside out and really flows from the top down and into the surrounding community. It began with a policy of open communication where employees learn to understand the mission and vision of the company. As Darling Homes grows, team members are asked to voice opinions and concerns for management to respond to, which adds a level of appreciation that most employers dare not show a staff of workers. That appreciation the Darling brothers and upper management show their team is reciprocated and amplified through the obvious care given to every step of building a dream home. Management finds it important to be consistent with the way each situation and employee issue is addressed so everyone is clear with exactly where management stands. Having no inconsistencies in management and policy will lessen overall conflict felt when there is



a disagreement or misunderstanding, which makes for a happier work environment. It really is amazing how much public recognition Darling Homes gets for the powerful culture the brothers have created. The external recognition the office gets everyday through customers, vendors and lenders just re-solidifies for them internally what they know is working. "We didn't set out to be known for our culture," says Mr. Darling, "but that's the way we like doing business."

As we all know, it has been a rough couple of years for home builders, but even when the company struggled with making difficult financial changes, the employees of Darling Homes created a stronger bond with one another. They were, in a sense, linking arms to make a more powerful impact on the community. "It boils down to the relationships we form in this office. We stick together and help each other work through the highs and the lows," says VP of Human Resources, Heidi Haas. Those friendships developed in an environment such as this go far beyond what is expected of a typi-



cal office relationship. While upper management encourages team building and charitable avenues for staff to express themselves, the employees actually promote events, fun activities and even spearhead their own charities. Ms. Haas talks about "how rewarding it is to see our employees embrace the charitable aspect of giving by volunteering and donating to the local community." The people who make up the company of Darling Homes have developed such a strong

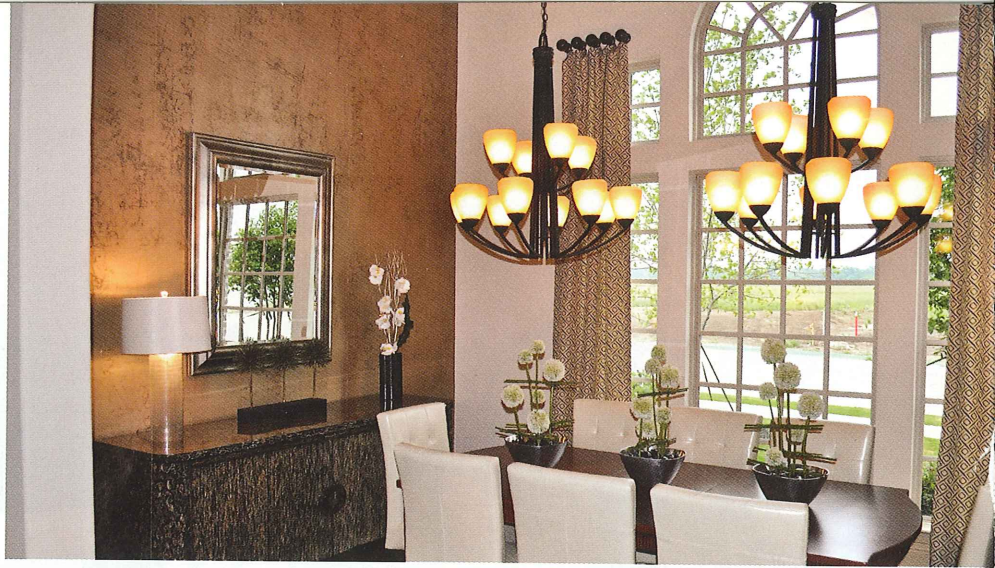
connection and support system with one another that when one employee's child suffered a traumatic accident, employees voluntarily came together to pull this individual through the misfortune with commitment to hope, friendship, prayer and spiritual strength. The team at Darling Homes proved the definition of caring in unexpected places. Without the direction of upper management or any help from the business, fellow co-workers of this parent collectively gath-

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ered together and donated funds to help cover accumulating medical expenses and needs. Another voluntary plan is the Paid-Time-Off-Bank, where employees voluntarily donate their own time to be used by employees with hardship situation. Not many companies can say they offer an environment where paid-time-off is sacrificed and donated among colleagues to better cope with trying circumstances. These are just some examples of the powerful traditions the Darling brothers have created at Darling Homes.

This unique society based on respect and camaraderie has earned Darling Homes numerous accolades such as Dallas Business Journal's Best Places to Work in Dallas/Fort Worth as well as J.D. Power and Associates' Top Dallas/Fort Worth Homebuilder in Overall Customer Satisfaction for two consecutive years. Two of the communities they are building in were recently nominated for Dallas Business Journal's Best Real Estate Deals in Dallas/Fort Worth: The Lakes / Riverside communities in Las Colinas and Newman Village in Frisco. Working under the philosophy that happy team members make happy customers is what allows Darling Homes to stand proudly among the leading homebuilders in the Lone Star State. "Our mission statement is building dreams with pride, and our team members practice and understand the mission. Through our process called DreamFrame, we start with our architecturally proven plans and then work with our customers to help them dream, and determine how to build that dream within the framework of their budget" says Corporate Director of Marketing Mike Carter. When employees care about their work, they put something extra into it and this business was created with that concept in mind.

Darling Homes provides customers with more than just a new home to live in. They work to create a community to call home.



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