

## They Pretend To .....

- Al E. Bavry, President Emeritus, Kimal Lumber



We were having some Satellite work done at our house a few years ago. The technician had an accent that suggested he hadn't been in the U.S. too long...Turned out he'd left Cuba about fifteen years before, and in fact had just become a U.S. citizen. In taking a break, I asked him if he'd tell us a little about Cuba. He happily agreed. You could tell he missed his homeland and had a lot of family still there. He talked about the beauty of the island, how the mountains, etc. were so unspoiled. At one point, I asked him what life really was like living under Communism. He proceeded to tell me, "Absolutely terrible! We had no freedom. People just sat around or walked around." He went on to say, "You really didn't see people doing much of anything...not farming, or working in business, or whatever." He shook his head. "Few folks really worked. You see, they make sure you got a little food...A little pay...Just enough to survive, so you wouldn't starve...Even out in the country you weren't even allowed to raise chickens!" I added, if you had a job, you were paid. right? He laughed... "Yes...There is a saying in Cuba...THEY PRETEND TO PAY YOU.....YOU PRETEND TO WORK!!"

The wrap-up of that story is that he couldn't get over the opportunities in this great country and was working to get more of his family here and away from the oppressive Communism. I believe we're in a kind of little-understood-revolution going on in this country. For the last forty plus years the emphasis has been to "get a college degree." And that has been the mantra...If you have that degree, you're almost guaranteed a great paying job. But in the real world, that's not always true. We've educated many young people, for them to learn there isn't a utopia out there...What they have a degree in may already have too many participants...So, the person with that great education sometimes winds up as the day manager at a chain restaurant at sixteen dollars an hour...While waiting (hoping!) for his/her time to come.

In the meantime, in our industry, there is a severe shortage of what I'll call "Blue Collar" workers ...electricians, carpenters, drywallers, roofers, plumbers, Sales folks, truck drivers, and the list goes on. In our industry, it's very difficult to fill a needed position...And even harder to find someone that is really qualified. When was the last time you had to hire a well-qualified CD licensed truck driver? Good luck. And the pay, if you find that right person, is probably over twenty dollars an hour. And with the unemployment rate at a scant three percent, the percentage backs up the shortage.

I've witnessed several phenomena in the last half dozen years: Companies indulging in what I call "Panic Hiring."...Suddenly seems to become, as a job applicant, if "you could fog a mirror, and/or had a pulse" ...you had a job. Oh and by the way, "We'll pay you fourteen dollars plus an hour" ...And many promises of over-time, raises, benefits , etc., will follow.

I have a couple of *better pay attention to what's going on* messages. First, as always, the real strength of any company are its people. Of course we all know that! Second, well paid, highly motivated, happy associates rule...probably more than ever, and more then we realize. If you lose that "Key" top performer, what will you do to replace him/her? Bet you'll have to pay a lot more then you were paying. And by the way, can the new hire do the job as well as the one you "Lost?" We're in an era I feel that "Taking care of our associates the right way" is not only "Key" but absolutely necessary! In my fifty-five plus years in the industry, this shortage of workers trained to address our needs has never been more important, nor urgent. Our success today (and well into the future) depends far more on our motivated team than ever before. And *their* motivation, happiness and well-being in the tasks we've given them is our first, and absolute responsibility.

When was the last time you took a really focused assessment of this most important component of your Business? Remember, in some countries the people are paid just enough to get by, and they "pretend to work." Could that ever happen in our great country? It's time to recognize our people as the main strength of our business. Tomorrow may be too late. This most valued and necessary asset may be the least understood and appreciated...

Good luck and great selling.