

Recognizing Innovation

Keynote Remarks for Corporate Innovation Awards

Submitted by John Baldoni

First, I want to congratulate the finalists.

Your commitment to performance-based innovation, technology, and quality is more important now than ever in the automotive industry.

None of these three by themselves can be the sole means of your performance. You need to instigate the innovative spirit, apply the breakthrough technology, and reinforce with absolute quality to develop, build and deliver new and different products that add values to consumers' lives.

I suppose you could sum up that entire commitment with two words: customer satisfaction.

It is why we are here tonight. Customer satisfaction is the discerning edge that differentiates one product from another.

(PAUSE)

Our goals for customer satisfaction are aggressive... as they should be. The customer has high expectations that grow higher by the year.

We, therefore, will need the commitment of everyone: engineers, hourly workers, dealers, and of course, our suppliers, to meet our escalating goals.

(PAUSE)

Today the innovation, technology and quality within our products is a boon to the customer. Consumers know what is good and what is not. According to research they perceive differences between leading quality makes and those at the bottom... but the gap between excellent and good is narrowing by the minute.

So with the performance bar raised so high, what is a manufacturer to do?

Re-invent itself by doing three things that you have done:

- Innovate.... Innovation is not confined to the laboratory. It can happen anywhere. Rarely, however, in the office. It happens out in the real world where we meet and mingle with our customers.
- Push technology... Take new technologies and push them to new limits to come up with new applications.
- Continue to improve quality... Quality is the mantra by which those of us in manufacturing live, breathe, eat and sleep... Just ask our spouses!

Who can provide innovation, technology, and quality? Our people—the human capital upon which we build our enterprises!

Today the effective measure of business is its people and their products, which more and more are knowledge.

How else could you account for the fact that the richest company in the world, at least as measured by market capitalization, is Google. Not far behind is Microsoft. Neither of these businesses have huge manufacturing operations. Google is a search engine and advertising company. Microsoft is millions of lines of computer code.

Those two high performance companies are noted for three things: innovation, technology, and quality.

Note the familiar ring!

(PAUSE)

If you look at our businesses from the customer's perspective, there is one over-riding concern: customer satisfaction.

The job of satisfying the customer has never been easy.

Think back to the general store on in Western frontier of mid-19th Century America. The owner provided his customers with merchandise and food stuffs. More important, he satisfied their appetite for something more—a connection with civilization far to the East.

Today, civilization is as close as your fingertips. You can satisfy that urge for something new, different, exciting, and special immediately with the access to the greatest vehicle for communications and commerce the world has ever known--the Internet!

We revel in the new technology, but those of us in manufacturing are acutely aware that all of this information available to anyone anywhere makes our ability to please that much higher.

Go back to our frontier store. If one customer was dissatisfied with the goods, he might complain. But not too loudly because this store was the only one for tens, maybe hundreds, of miles around.

Today, one complaint can be sent around the world five times before it may be rectified. You know the adage. One satisfied customer will tell one or two people. One dissatisfied customer will tell eight. Now amplify that number exponentially and you have a problem.

(PAUSE)

That's the negative side. The positive side of customer satisfaction is customer loyalty.

Loyalty emerges from more than satisfaction. It comes from at least three things:

- Doing what you say you will do... 1st time, every time.
- Anticipating demands... Thinking ahead of the curve to figure out the next big thing.
- Fulfilling aspirations... Making dreams come true for the customer.

That is what each of us do everyday. Working through innovation, technology, and quality to make our customers loyal!

Your efforts at loyalty resonate with these awards. Take pride in them. Don't put them on the shelf and forget about them treasure them. Consider them as the visible symbols of your success with your customers.

People want to associate with winners. Especially our customers!

(PAUSE)

Congratulations to everyone!

It is an honor to be in the company of men and women who have put innovation, technology, and quality together with performance to satisfy our customers and make them loyal to us.

“Man,” wrote John Steinbeck, the great novelist of the human condition, “grows beyond his work, walks up the stairs of his concepts, emerges ahead of his accomplishments.”

Whether you design a component, engineer a system, build a vehicle, or distribute it far and wide, customer satisfaction is our shared responsibility. Thank you and enjoy the evening.