



FOCUS ON:

IGA RETAILERS

THE KEYS TO COMPETE

Personalized service and employees who truly care about the customers — these are the trademarks of IGA Supermarkets around the world. But how do you communicate these traits effectively to your associates and ensure that they are treating customers with the proper respect? In an effort to remain competitive and attract not only the best employees but also loyal customers, Paxton IGA in Paxton, Ill., has implemented the "Feeling Customer Care" training program.

"We first learned about this program at a human resources seminar," said Debbie Osborn, customer service associate. "When we learned that Day & Palin IGAs in Illinois have been doing it with their employees, we visited them to see how it worked and then implemented it in our stores a few months ago." With the program, employees attend

three sessions, one each week, that cover topics such as understanding how attitudes are perceived by customers, co-workers and families; developing communication skills; discussing and demonstrating methods of providing quality service; and learning ways to handle problem situations.

As a result of the new program, employees have created a goal of providing carry-out service for every customer, even if there's only one bag to carry out. The time spent with the customer gives associates a chance to develop a relationship with the consumer and get feedback on the store and their shopping trip, all while providing a service not found at any other local supermarket. "We've had quite a few good comments on the service, and it helps carts stay off our parking lot better," Osborn said.

The program continues with a follow-up session after 30 days, as well as a

quarterly review session where employees are encouraged to brainstorm ways to improve customer service and discuss their personal experiences with customers.

Day & Palin IGAs have been running this program for about 15 years, and they have seen great results. "We get comments from employees all the time that their favorite part of working at Day & Palin IGA is the Feelings course," said Jack Weddle of Day & Palin IGA. "It's really a human relations program that teaches people better communication skills. We got the materials from a company in Minneapolis, and then modified it to fit our needs by adding some safety programs and supermarket economic training."

Most importantly, the program helps employees understand that the customer is always a number one priority, and each one should be treated that way from the moment they set foot in the store until they get back in their car with a trunk full of groceries.

For more information on this program and how you can implement it at your IGA Supermarket, contact Debbie Osborn or Candi Riecks at Paxton IGA, (217)379-3312, or Jack Weddle at Day & Palin IGA, (309)785-5387.