



TOP Small Company

A Cut Above the Rest

James Alan Salon gives more to its employees than a haircut.

WHILE customer service isn't considered a great job to most, to the employees of James Alan Salon, it's a different story.

B. Matthew Fairfax and Keith McGlashan, the owners of James Alan Salon in Shoreline, have one goal for themselves: to be the best bosses their staff ever has, just one of the things that makes James Alan Salon the best small company to work for in Washington. And with their extensive employee perks, their staff couldn't agree more.

and then a collective decision is made whether or not to sell it to customers.

"There is this whole notion of understanding how to implement change, how to get the staff on board and we don't come in and dictate things," says Fairfax. "We let them come up with ideas. One of the things we do is provide them our goals, our financial objectives, and once they know that, they come up with the creative ways of getting there."

The staff demonstrated that when Fairfax and McGlashan realized it was time to expand, and for the time being, chose to lengthen shop hours. Rather than assigning hours themselves, they gave employees plenty of notice and let them create their dream schedule.

Since employees were able to make the task their own, it became a challenge and they made sure all the bases were covered, including the dreaded 7 a.m. haircut timeslot. And, Fairfax and McGlashan proudly note that every employee got the schedule they desired.

Most salons are too small to be able to offer their employees a medical or dental plan. But, the bosses at James Alan think differently. They offer all employees, from receptionist to colorist, medical and dental plans at half cost.

"As a small business, that is one of the challenges we face," explains Fairfax. "How do we create benefits that have value to the employee and don't cost an arm and a leg? We've tried to do this, whether it's section 125 where they can set aside pre-tax dollars, simple IRA's, or a PC payment plan, we feel that if we have our employees participating in this, the

more we're doing our job. Because if we had somebody looking out for us when we were 21 years old, we could be retiring right now."

But beyond the medical and dental plans, McGlashan promised employees four years ago when he took over James Alan that once the salon reached \$1 million in revenue, he would take the staff to Hawaii.

That \$1 million mark is now \$60,000 away and the employees are doing everything they can to get them there. Of course, with the salon's past three years of 20 percent growth, it is likely they will be tanning on the beaches of the Aloha State this year.

But the benefits don't stop with a Hawaiian vacation. The business maintains a bonus program that rates each employee's cost-saving techniques, community involvement, and customer service. So extra pocket money can be earned by spending a Saturday to help a local food drive, reusing computer paper, or getting a client referral.

Each year, Fairfax sets aside an allotted amount of money — \$25,000 for 2003 — and according to what each employee scores in those areas, a percentage of the pot goes in their paycheck annually.

At James Alan Salon, McGlashan and Fairfax hang pictures of all the staff's babies on the wall like proud relatives would, laughter seeps out of the employee break room, and everyone seems generally glad to be at work.

"One of my big motto's is if it isn't fun, I don't want to do it," says Fairfax. "We want to make sure everybody here is having fun. I wish I could say it was a magical formula, but it's just because we all enjoy our job."

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Matthew Fairfax and Keith McGlashan pride themselves on being good bosses.

The reason this company stands out from the rest lies mainly within the attitude both owners have toward their staff. The salon maintains a "professional family business." This means they let their employees give input on important decisions. When it's time to try a new product line, each staff member tries the product