

Hendricks: 'It's all about treating people right'

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You could back up a red, white and blue ABC Supply Co. semi-tractor trailer and likely not have enough room for the awards the Beloit-based distributor of roofing and building supplies has racked up.

But there's one that would most definitely be right up front in the cab.

ABC recently received the Gallup Great Workplace Award 2007, one of only 12 companies in the world to earn the honor.

Yes, it's from that Gallup, as in the "Gallup Poll" on this or the "Gallup Poll" on that.

The award was based on worldwide research and Gallup's massive database of more than 10 million employees and workplace evaluations.

The Gallup folks found that the world's top-performing companies lead the global economy by engaging their workforces.

"Studying more than 10 million employees worldwide allowed us to set an extraordinarily high bar for this award," said Tom Rath, who leads Gallup's workplace and leadership consulting practice.

"The winners have gone far beyond just offering nice perks and benefits. They have created an environment that truly engages people every day throughout the organization, and it is that kind of engagement that helps to drive real business outcomes."

That's not news to ABC founder Ken Hendricks. It's more of an affirmation of what he's believed since starting the company 25 years ago.

The company has one guiding principle: Take care of contractors better than any other distributor by understanding their businesses and offering products and services carefully selected to meet their unique needs.

"It's all about treating people right and showing respect," said Hendricks,

who has an open-door, open-phone policy with ABC's nearly 6,000 employees at 350 stores around the country.

"I do it and our employees do it. Say what you're going to do and then do what you say."

On the surface, that sounds sophomorically simple. It is, Hendricks said.

But on a deeper level, many companies don't put it into practice.

"We have no hierarchy here," he said. "I talk with people all over the country, and many of them are always asking me where I find all these great employees."

"I really don't; they're the same people as those working everywhere else."

But the main difference, he said, is that each employee is respected, paid fairly and is actively involved in the wild success of ABC, the largest wholesale distributor of roofing in the United States and one of the nation's largest distributors of siding, windows and other building products.

The company is closing in on \$3 billion in annual sales.

"I've said all along that we'll build this company together, and that's exactly what we've done," Hendricks said.

Other Gallup winners in the United States included the venerable Campbell Soup Co. and the omnipresent Starbucks Corp.

Hendricks learned that ABC was the only privately held company to win the award, which was made by the company that makes the Academy Awards.

And as an Oscar should, this award will top the mantel at ABC above all others, many of which have come in the last 12 months.

"It's absolutely No. 1," Hendricks said. "We've made the Forbes and the Inc. lists, been named the fastest growing business, been named the international business of the year and been named the best company to work for in America."

"But this one is all about our people. One person just can't do it alone."

Jim Leute is the Gazette's business editor.