

SMALL BUSINESS

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photo NANCY PERCE

Steve Fricker says Pro-Tint Inc. workers have made good on their vow to exceed management's goal for revenue growth.

Empowering employees

Pro-Tint boosts business by focusing on people issues

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STAFF WRITER

With revenue growing steadily even in a sluggish economy, the owners of Pro-Tint Inc. knew their most pressing problem wasn't cash flow.

Instead, people — specifically the attitudes and skill levels of certain employees — posed the glass-tinting company's top challenge.

"We found ourselves holding onto people because they are hard to replace, because they were good installers," says Steve Fricker, Pro-Tint vice president. "But some of them had bad attitudes or didn't know how to deal with customers."

The Kannapolis-based company had hired those workers for specific jobs but then expanded their duties as the company grew. Some employees lacked the skills they needed to handle those additional tasks.

Fricker discovered a possible solution in early 2002, when he attended a Cabarrus Regional Chamber of Commerce workshop. At that event, he heard Mary Elizabeth Murphy, managing director of STAR Resources of Harrisburg, tell how companies can become an employer of choice, attracting and keeping the best workers. Fricker and Plato Hoyle, Pro-Tint president, were especially intrigued by Murphy's approach toward making employees self-directed.

Pro-Tint hired STAR Resources in April.

As a part of the process, Hoyle took his employees on a Saturday retreat to talk about

QUICKINFO

PRO-TINT INC.

Business: Provides window tinting, glass opaquing and racecar windshield coverings

Founded: 1986

HQ: 2702 N. Cannon Blvd., Kannapolis, 28081

Principals:

Plato Hoyle, president;
Steve Fricker, vice president

Employees: 14

Phone: (800) 553-8673

Web site: www.protint.com

Pro-Tint's future. Hoyle listed his goals for the company for 2003, including a projection that revenue would increase 30%.

"They said, 'No, we think we can do better,'" Fricker says.

So far, the employees are proving correct, with sales running 40% over 2002 levels.

It's a modest but promising start toward Hoyle's long-term goal of making Pro-Tint known as one of the Charlotte region's best places to work.

"We want to create a window-tinting company where all the great window-tinting people and salespeople would want to work," Fricker says.

Hoyle founded Pro-Tint in 1986, and the company has evolved from a simple car- and business-window tinting operation. Fricker formulated an adhesive that would allow multiple sheets of window films to be added to the glass of racecars. Today, that product is sold to customers in Italy, England and France, among other countries.

As their business has grown, Hoyle and Fricker have discovered that Pro-Tint has two vastly different types of clients. There are large-volume customers, such as motorsports teams that need several shipments of windshield films each year and architectural firms whose designs call for Pro-Tint-installed decorative window film for a number of jobs annually.

But other clients often aren't necessarily repeat customers. "When we tint someone's home, we can have a lot of satisfied customers and not see them for 10 years," Fricker says.