

Employee Ownership and Being a Best Place to Work

By Chip Cargas



Since our company was named the #1 Best Place to Work in PA in the medium sized company category in 2006, I frequently get asked, "What's so different about Cargas?" Sometimes people assume we have great benefits and that's all you need to be a great place to work. Actually, most of our traditional benefits are average, not high or low, so it's not the benefits. The award is called "Best Place to Work in PA", not "Best Benefits in PA". So what is it about the work?

Let's approach this by asking what category of business people are known for their enthusiasm and engagement in their work. The first category that comes to mind is entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs are in the thick of the action, they know what's going on – plans, goals, results, problems, successes. They get to make decisions and take risks. They share generously in the success they create. They are owners.

If you want to create a great place to work, create an environment where all employees get to experience the thrill of being an entrepreneur. This will attract great people and keep them engaged. That's what we've done at Cargas and it has made all the difference. But make sure you walk before you run. Ease into a multi-pronged approach that includes communication, collaboration, and compensation.

- **COMMUNICATION:** Share the real numbers that matter – company level sales and profits, departmental performance metrics, and individual production versus goal. Infuse a heavy dose of education about what the numbers mean.
- **COLLABORATION:** Make sure ideas for improvement are considered, implemented when they make sense, and discussed even when they don't make sense. Celebrate when you exceed goals.
- **COMPENSATION:** Share the success generously in ways that are tied to performance and are easy to understand. We have outrageously simple cash profit sharing that's a huge motivator. When you see people thinking and acting like owners, you'll know you're on the right track.

After you've got that going well, and if you're really adventurous, take it to the ultimate level: employee ownership. We're 10 years into employee ownership and we've reached a milestone I never expected to reach: more than 80% of our employees are owners, and the first step is buying stock with your own money.

Developing an ownership culture takes years of hard work, but the net result is an energized team creating shared success for employees, customers, owners, partners and the community.

Learn more about Cargas and our culture at www.cargas.com.
You can download a copy of our **Teamwork Booklet**
by clicking on HR and then on Teamwork Booklet.

Chip Cargas is Chairman and CEO of Cargas Systems, an employee-owned business software and company with offices in Lancaster and Pittsburgh. Chip is the winner of the 2006 Small Business Person of the Year award presented by the Lancaster Chamber of Commerce. Chip is currently on the boards of Union National Financial Corporation, Assets Lancaster, and RGS Associates.