

BUSINESS TOOLS

INSIGHTS

Do you encourage or require your employees to donate to charity?

“We don’t do either, and it’s not that we discourage them. We raised



Mark Dunbar,
president,
Dunbar, Bender
& Zapf Inc.

over \$5,000 for cancer research through dafodil days, and we do food bank-type of things a couple times a year.

We let people know it’s happening, but it’s not mandatory. We also donate retirement plan administration for probably a half-dozen nonprofit organizations such as Bethlehem Haven.”

“We deal with early intervention, clients from birth to age 3 to geriatric.



Christie Ann Conrad,
owner,
Crossroads
Speech and
Hearing

There’s a variety of needs you bump into. I would expect all of our employees to pay attention to those needs or bring them to Crossroads’

attention so we can help. As part of our mission, we make pro bono donations of manpower to the communities we serve.”

“Yes. We’re an online enrollment platform for cancer and critical illness, and we



Kathryn Glover,
founder,
PinkPowerLadies.com

get out into the community and do more than the average insurance agent. We promote wellness, and we have

a breast cancer awareness walk in October. We’re all professionals, and sometimes we’re voices in the community for cancer and critical illness insurance.”

— BY KRIS B. MAMULA

Circuits finds creative use for solar panel system

BY MALIA SPENCER

When Adeodato Vigano set out to open his own printed circuit board shop, he wanted it to be the best.

To be the best, it meant building from scratch a state-of-the-art facility and devising a way to curb what could be high costs associated with the vast amount of warm water the business would require, Vigano said.

Part of the manufacturing process requires bathing products in warm, running water. The Circuits plant uses 15 gallons of

Circuits LLC

Manufactures flexible circuit boards

BASED: Murrysville

FOUNDED: 2008

EMPLOYEES: 16

REVENUE: \$1 million

WEBSITE: www.circuits-corp.com

■ CHALLENGE:

Address the high power costs associated with the manufacturing process.

■ SOLUTION:

Use a solar thermal system to heat the water needed to manufacture the boards.

water a minute, which translates into several thousand gallons a day — and it needs to be at about 70 degrees. During the summer, the water out of the tap runs close to the proper temperature. During the winter, however, tap water in Pittsburgh is about 40 degrees, Vigano said. So, for about six months out of the year, the water must be heated 30 degrees. Typically, electricity is used to heat the water and that can cost about \$10,000 a month, he said.

To address this potentially expensive cost, Vigano and his team opted to design a solar thermal heating process to heat the water during the winter and spring.

“What we figured out when we started is, you need two to two-and-a-half hours of direct sunlight to store enough thermal energy to heat the water we need to heat,” he said. “It so happened, on average, Pittsburgh has



JOE WOJCIK

Adeodato Vigano, president of Circuits LLC, stands near a glycol-based solar panel system used to heat water needed for the company’s production of flexible printed circuit boards.

two-and-a-half to three hours of sun per day in the winter time.”

The \$50,000 thermal heat exchange system is powered by eight solar panels and, within one year, the project paid for itself, he said.

During the winter of 2010, the company had to draw electricity from the power company three times. This winter, the company didn’t need any electricity to heat its water.

“(We) saved about \$50,000 this winter by not heating things up,” Vigano said.

It’s also led them to use the system in the offseason to help reduce the volume of wastewater produced and sent to the waste disposal company, thereby reducing the amount of money paid to the removal company.

At the Green Building Alliance, the

organization has seen more small and mid-sized manufacturers come in with questions on how to improve a firm’s corporate culture on sustainability, said Valerie Beichner, vice president of development for the alliance.

Like Circuits, many companies walk through the door of green practices and energy savings with an eye on the bottom line, but it’s often a move that leads to a deeper culture shift.

“What we see is these companies not only enhance their products to be green, and get certified as green, and use it in marketing, (but) they are taking it further,” she said. “The industry has pushed and pulled in the direction (where) they want to see a green product coming out of a green company.”

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Do you worry about clients? Some simple steps for keeping them happy

Sometimes I don’t sleep. I think it started when my oldest got his driver’s license. My eyes didn’t fully shut until I heard his key turn in the lock.

Today, that child is in the Czech Republic studying abroad. I still worry.

My son tells me the only person who worries more than me is my mother. And that made me wonder. When our clients have pressing issues, how much sleep do we lose worrying about them? Granted, clients are not children, but if you thought of them the way you think about loved ones, you would probably treat them more like family than just people who help

pay your bills. That means hovering just a little to let them know you care.

- Check in, follow up. Even if you are not involved in a client project, it never hurts to keep tabs on what people are up to. It’s easier today than ever before thanks to LinkedIn, Facebook or the ability to follow people on Twitter. Checking in from time to time can mean sharing a helpful article or video instead of trying to sell them something.
- Respect relationships. Let’s say a former client calls out of the blue to seek your expert advice on something. Give it and give it for free. A quick conversation that helps them can reap years of benefits.
- Personal attention. As your business expands, it’s natural to step aside and assign other people to handle certain client tasks. But don’t forget what it was like when you

were their go-to person who answered all of their calls and went the extra mile to please them. Make sure they know you’re still fully attuned to their needs.

- Tell them what they need to know, not what they want to hear. When readying for any type of interview or professional conversation, it’s as important to prepare for what you don’t want to talk about as what you do hope to discuss.

Like children, clients need your help. It’s why they hire you in the first place. So, if you want them to know you have their back, be honest, tough and put their best interests before your own. You’ll sleep better and so will they.

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ON PEOPLE

Karen Friedman