

Dedicated to balance

For Reitmeier, it's all about making the future safe and secure for employees.

By Melaney Moisan
communications coordinator

Photos courtesy Reitmeier

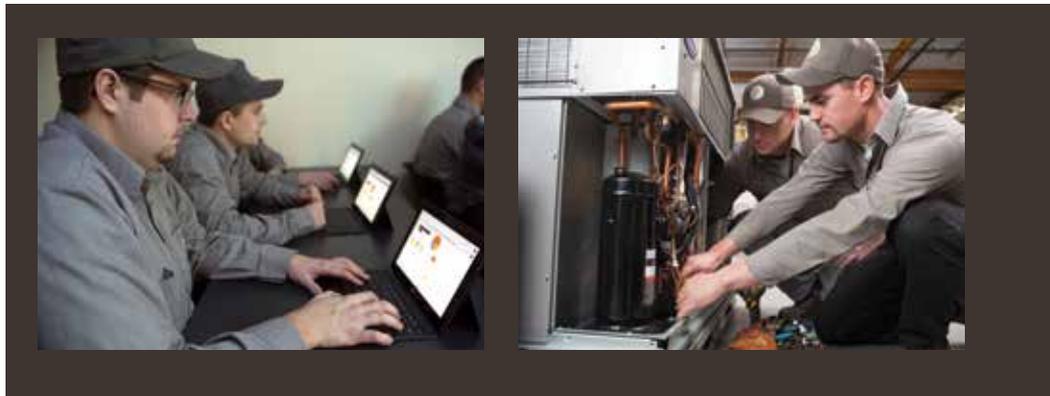
Like many businesses, Reitmeier in Tualatin was hit hard in the recession, cutting employees and focusing on survival. As the economy improved, the business began to grow, giving them a unique opportunity to completely rebuild the company culture.

"We didn't want to be like every other HVAC [heating, ventilation, and air conditioning] company," said Jeff Nusz, president. "We looked at car companies, software companies, all kinds of successful businesses, to learn the best ways to create an environment where our people could thrive and grow."

Because most new employees would come from the "millennials," people born between the early 1980s and early 2000s, they learned all they could about how to attract and retain this age group.

"We learned what made them tick, the best way to approach them, and how to teach them," said Nusz. "We had to dig down and formulate a plan. Because shop programs are no longer available in high schools and construction trades are often not someone's first choice for a career, we knew we had to start from the beginning. We wanted to bring in great people and teach them the trade. If they

At Reitmeier, new employees receive training at Reitmeier University.



Reitmeier
Tualatin
reitmeiernw.com

In business since: 1984

The boss: Jeff Nusz, owner and president

The crew: 32 employees and growing gracefully

Honors: Chosen as 2014 Western Region Best Contractor to Work For by the The ACHR News, a weekly national news magazine for HVAC contractors

are willing to make the time investment, we are willing to invest in them.”

One outcome of their planning was Reitmeier University, a two-year continuing education program for training and certifying new employees in commercial HVAC services. The program includes both classroom instruction and work in the field with a senior level technician.

“The training includes the technical information students will need to have, but it also teaches our culture,” said Nusz. “Students are in class two hours, one day a week, and the rest of the time they are in the field with a mentor.”

One thing they learned in the process of creating their plan was that millennials prefer online communication. For that reason, as

well as the company’s commitment to sustainability, Reitmeier University is completely paperless.

“We communicate with them mostly by text,” said Nusz. “They all have tablets, which they use in the classroom and in the field, and they upload classwork to the web.”

Balance and sustainability

Balance and sustainability are two words that Nusz uses frequently when describing the culture of the business.

“Balance is our mission in work and life,” he said, adding that sustainability is about building sustainable relationships, not just protecting the environment.

To help sustain relationships with employees, Nusz organizes a number of events each year, including an annual fishing tournament.

“I take five people at a time and go fishing,” he said. “It gives me one-on-one time with employees, a chance to really get to know them.”

Families are important

“We also look at how we can involve families more,” said Nusz. “We are proud of what we have and want families to know more about what we do.”

For example, if someone is working in the field and needs to attend a child’s soccer game, he or she can use a company vehicle. And office workers can work from home if they need to take care of a child who is ill.

“We are committed to each other,” said Nusz. “You only have about 18 years with your kids and that is a priority.”

Safety and health

Safety is an important component of the curriculum at Reitmeier University, and the company is committed to keeping its employees safe. To help

promote the safety message, Reitmeier has initiated a “Red Flag Recognition Program.” Employees receive a Reitmeier hard hat, and, when someone demonstrates safe behavior, he or she is awarded a sticker for the hard hat. It is not only a public acknowledgement of that person’s contribution, said Nusz, but, after a certain number of stickers, they receive a gift card, so there is a little monetary incentive as well.

In a move to help employees stay healthy, the company removed all candy and soft drink machines and now provide fresh produce and bottled waters. A field runner takes water to jobsites so the field personnel stay hydrated, and workers receive reminders via email or text messages that simply say, “hydrate.”

“People are the product,” said Nusz. “It’s all about them having safety and security for the future. When they have that, production rises and customer service rises. Besides, it’s more fun this way.”



Reitmeier emphasizes health and safety for all employees.

How Reitmeier makes employees

#1

Hold leadership development book clubs for employees, based on their positions in the company.

Provide 100 percent coverage of the workers’ health care and 73 percent of coverage for dependents.

Allow office staff to work at home when there is a need.

Allow field staff to use a company vehicle if they are on call over a weekend and need to attend events for their children.

Provide healthy snacks and water.

Operate the “Red Flag Recognition Program.”

Organize family events throughout the year.