

## Harrie Parker Sells Solutions

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While still a chef at heart, he clearly found his calling. Now a 10-year veteran of PERFORMANCE Foodservice Virginia (PFV) division, Parker writes annual volume approaching \$4 million from 32 active accounts. Most are independent white tablecloth operations, plus a few country clubs and hotels, and most rely on Parker and PFV as their primary, if not exclusive, supplier.

"A lot of the customers I have now I've had for 20 or 30 years," Parker says. "Part of what I love so much about my job is the great accounts I have and the day-to-day interaction with them. They've all become good friends."

Parker keeps those friendships, as well as his sales, strong by maintaining close personal contact with his accounts and by focusing not on selling but on delivering ideas and solving problems. "A lot of my sales calls with customers don't produce orders," he says. "They produce solutions. We talk over problems or challenges they may have and things that I need to take care of for them. There's so much more to this business than just taking orders and watching them be delivered. You have to stay involved with the customer. When you do, it breeds trust and loyalty to you and to your company."

Parker says his work as a chef, even though many years ago, continues to be a real asset on the street in terms of product knowledge and understanding customers' challenges. He also leans on PFV's team of product specialists to provide support to his customers. "We're fortunate to have in-house specialists who are knowledgeable and really accessible," he says. "They help me keep my customers current with new items and they go the extra mile to try to provide advice on how to fit new products into their operations."

To keep himself up-to-date on products and trends, Parker relies both on publications and the Internet. "I really value trade magazines," he says. "We get all kinds of new product information from manufacturers, but I find it helpful to read about the trends and about what's working and what isn't for operators. I also use the Web to browse manufacturer Web sites."

With most of his accounts being upscale restaurants, Parker has worked hard to help counter sales declines during the recession. Many have had to do some re-concepting, he says, and all have had to make strategic adjustments to keep customers coming in the door. "It's been my job to offer suggestions for what to do and then to provide the

products to make it happen," he says.

Examples of strategies he's helped to implement include a campaign promoting 10 lunches for \$10; introducing underutilized, value-priced cuts of beef such as sirloin butt; and creating early-bird dinner specials. "You have to do something, and these things have worked," he says. "I have white tablecloth restaurants that are knocking out very strong numbers. Their check averages may not be what they used to be, but they have traffic in their restaurants and they have cash flow. Without that, you're history."

Years as a DSR

35

Annual sales volume

\$3.9 million

No. of active accounts

32

Type of accounts

Predominately upscale independents, hotels, country clubs

Territory

Williamsburg, Newport News, Hampton, VA

Items carried

8,000

Biggest attributes

Problem-solving skills, culinary experience

Favorite category

Center-of-the-plate, especially red meat

Learned the hard way

Listen more than you talk

Best thing about being a DSR

Day-to-day interaction with customers

Top Trends Seen

Catering to aging Boomers with smaller portions, more healthful options, full meals (vs. a la carte)

Mojo Motto  
"Service what you sell."