

Phil Steinhauer's holiday surprise

How he used service to inspire leadership

It took a lot of planning for Phil Steinhauer, CEO Designscares Colorado, Centennial, to pull off the leadership training event for his entire management team one afternoon last December and keep the details a secret from all Designscares Colorado employees. Those who helped Steinhauer make it happen were Sverrir Ragnarsson, John Maxwell Certified coach and trainer; Nancy Holmes, HR consultant; friend Lori McLemore; coordinator Tessa Frederick of Johnson Boys & Girls Club, and bike techs from Giant Cycling World, Littleton.

Before planning the surprise event, Steinhauer went back to his company's mission statement for inspiration. Not only does it talk about clients as partners, but also about being partners with the community and giving back generously of time and talent. He wanted to create a meaningful experience for his management team. What started as leadership training ended up being a heartfelt donation to local kids in need.

After the morning of training, Steinhauer sorted managers into 14 teams of three. Each trio received an envelope, which remained unopened, and a box containing bicycle parts without assembly instructions. Trios were tasked with building their bicycle, and not all bicycles were the same. Teams who completed assembly first helped other teams.

"I was excited to see how this would go with our staff," Steinhauer says. "Their reactions would be spontaneous because no one knew what was going to happen!"

Bicycles were purchased from Giant and because of liability issues, Giant bike techs checked and confirmed that each bike was built to manufacture specs and was safe. Only when all bicycles were built, and 14 children ranging from ages 6 to 13 were brought into the room, were teams allowed to open their envelopes to reveal the name of the underprivileged child for whom the bike was built. The kids were selected by Frederick as being the most in need.

Each team found their child and presented him or her with a bicycle, helmet and lock. One child was overheard saying to another, "See, I told you Santa Clause would come this year!"

Designscares Colorado managers, some in tears, were so moved by this experience that a few days later at the company holiday party, they did something different. Rather than everyone chipping in and giving something to Steinhauer, they used the money to make donations in Steinhauer's name to Dumb Friends League and St. Jude Hospital.

"I couldn't have asked for a better result for developing a team," says Steinhauer.