

## Lake Jackson Mayor Bob Sipple: Customer Service Advocate



By Rachael Pitts

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Bob Sipple wears several professional hats in the City of Lake Jackson—that of mayor, business owner, lecturer, and most recently, motivational speaker. The common thread woven into each of these hats is a true passion for customer service.

“I have been very blessed to work early in my sales and sales management career for companies that offered a great deal of customer-service training,” Sipple explained. “I became infatuated with the instructors’ passion to help people and decided this is something I would really enjoy. Making a difference is something I wanted to do.”

As his career progressed, Sipple found more and more evidence that frontline service employees were not receiving basic customer-service training. He points to two possible culprits. First, when new employees are trained, most of the effort is spent on the mechanics of the job and not nearly enough attention is given to interpersonal skills. “Employees must not only have a grasp of product know-how, but they must also be able to communicate effectively and

productively with their customers,” Sipple said. “Customer service is not a born attribute.”

Second, even when employers do spend money and energy on customer-service training, it isn’t always effective. The message may be in place, but it isn’t being delivered on a sustained basis to all employees in the organization.

For city government, Sipple believes elected officials must lead by example and doggedly reinforce the importance of quality customer service to all employees. “All city employees must realize they represent the city at all times, and it is important that they conduct themselves accordingly,” Sipple said. “Citizens do not complain when handled responsibly and politely. They want to be sure they are getting the best service for the taxes paid. Elected officials can foster this by first practicing it, then showing the city employees their appreciation for their efforts in this regard.”

“Management must take the time and make the effort to communicate, educate, and motivate on a sustained basis to all employees at every level,” Sipple explained. “This

## City of Lake Jackson in the Mayor's Words

Lake Jackson is located in Brazoria County and is home to more than 27,000 residents. Our city is unique because it has great character. Our famous streets, "This Way" and "That Way," as well as all the other "Way" streets, are really interesting to our visitors. They want to know how the names came about.

The city is well run, thanks to an outstanding city manager and staff. Each and every employee enjoys their work, and it shows in their efforts and their conduct.

Over the last several years, the city has received several awards on its management and its financial aspects. We have many civic organizations and commissions that are well-attended by our citizens, including the highly recognized Keep Lake Jackson Beautiful and Senior Citizens Commission.

We have many blessings but are not without challenges. Our primary challenge is growth. We are land-locked, and our future growth opportunities will be limited. Another big challenge we face, like cities all across the state, is aging infrastructure. Our leadership, staff, and citizens, however, are dedicated to our city and will face challenges together.

commitment takes a tremendous amount of time and effort, but if your goal is to deliver exceptional customer service, it must be done. Most people still like doing business where they are respected, and respected employees respect customers."

We have often heard folks say that government should be run like a business. Sipple agrees, and believes that most cities do. An important component of running a successful business is how well employees interact with customers.

"Unlike the federal government, we do not have the luxury to spend more than we make," Sipple pointed out. "We work very hard to provide services to our constituents at the lowest possible tax cost. When revenues are down, we go without, but not at the risk of diminishing the quality of our customer service. I want every citizen of Lake Jackson to experience and recognize what our employees do and the professional and courteous manner in which they do their jobs. We will not always satisfy every citizen all the time, but we aim to help citizens understand what we do, how we do it, and the value of their taxes."

Sipple and his wife Lori have been married 48 years. They have three children and nine grandchildren. Sipple worked as a salesman for 15 years and in sales management for 30 years. He has served on the Lake Jackson City Council as mayor since 2006. He also lectures each semester to University of Houston students working on their master of business administration and master of health science degrees. In addition to launching a motivational speaking service in 2009, Sipple also found the time and energy last year to start a second venture, JBS Industrial Sales.

In his free time, Sipple trades in his professional hats for running shoes. With 26 marathons to his credit, Sipple runs, on average, four miles a day.

And when Sipple starts something, he usually succeeds. His motivational speaking service is already off to a great start. He has spoken to several companies, rotary clubs, high schools, business associations, and trade associations. And his success is good news for the customers in all of us.

For more information about Mayor Sipple's customer service training, go to [www.everybodycountstx.com](http://www.everybodycountstx.com). ★

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