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Cascade Engineering: Finding the Sweet Spot

Grand Rapids-based Cascade Engineering is in the business of trash. Yes, literally garbage. The more that we throw away, the more that they theoretically profit from one of their key products – the plastic waste containers that are used to transport our garbage. So then why is Cascade, a company that should be thriving off of our increasing consumption, prophesizing the benefits of going green? According to its CEO Fred Keller, “taking resources from the environment, making things out of it and then sending it to the landfill just doesn’t make good economic sense anymore.”¹

Keller, who founded Cascade in 1973, has been known to list the following in order of importance in his organization – #1 people, #2 planet, #3 profits.² This triple-bottom line is key to how Cascade Engineering has found the sweet spot that intersects all of these areas and has been recognized by *Fortune* magazine as one of the “25 Best Small to Medium Companies to Work for in America.”

Background

Cascade Engineering is a developer and manufacturer of injection molded products for the automotive, solid waste and industrial markets. The Cascade Engineering Family of Companies employs approximately 1,100 people globally and 600 in the Grand Rapids, Michigan area. Sales for 2006 were \$232.7 million.

According to its Company Policy Statement, Cascade is committed to continuously and systematically:

- Improving quality, cost and delivery through employee involvement
- Developing metrics that link Cascade, our suppliers and customers
- Making our community involvement a benchmarking model
- Taking responsible environmental actions including compliance with environmental regulations and pollution prevention

Recently, Cascade’s Vice President of Business Services, Kenyatta Brame said, “in this organization, we’re saying making money is important - that allows us all to have jobs - but equally important are how you treat your people, and the impact, the footprint you leave on the world.”²