

LEADERSHIP

PROFILE

Ensuring Happy Employees Spurs Growth

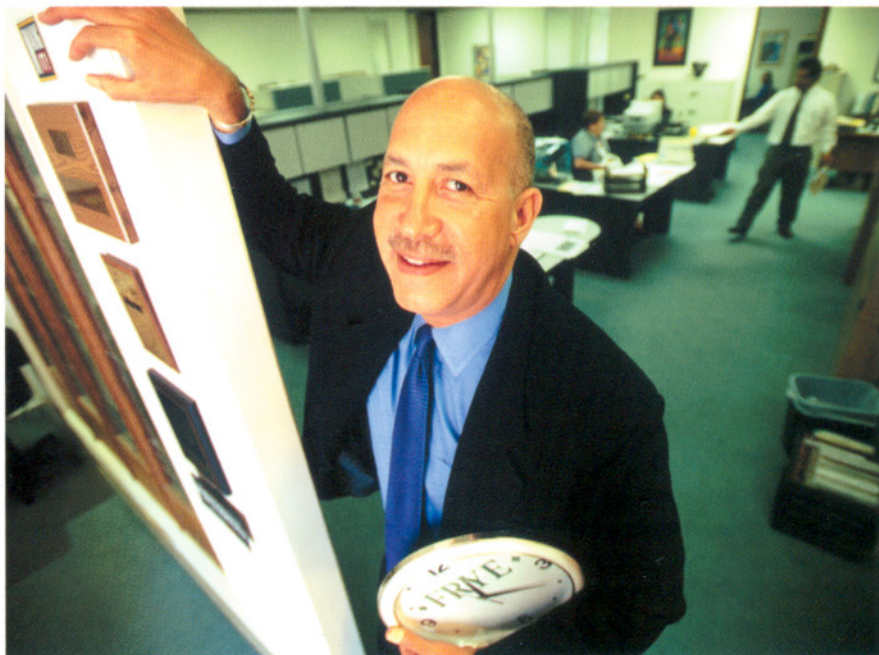
BY DEBRA WISHIK ENGLANDER

A great business treats employees as importantly as clients and customers. Hayward, Calif.-based Frye Claims Consultation and Administration could well serve as a model for other companies.

Tom Frye, 56, started the business in 1990. A certified management consultant, Frye had extensive experience in the insurance investigations field. He worked for several insurers and had served as regional administrator for the U.S. Department of Labor and deputy director of the Illinois Department of Labor.

Frye had confidence that a private firm could examine claims on behalf of larger companies, insurers and municipalities. He planned to serve only West Coast companies in workers' compensation, general liability and automobile cases. However, as a result of client feedback, the company expanded into eight states, including Texas, Arizona, Illinois and New York. Today, Frye has approximately 60 employees and expects revenues to reach about \$7 million this year.

Frye notes that his company is 18th on the list of the 25 fastest-growing minority businesses in the San Francisco Bay area. He attributes his continued growth—almost 30% annually—to both operations and staff. Frye Claims makes use of computer technology to create its innovative reports. In the past, investigators wrote lengthy reports that were often difficult to use. "We wanted to produce a report that gets the necessary information to a busy reader," he says. "We are able to say in a page or two what a 30-page report would say. We



use graphs and pie charts instead of text. We highlight names and phone numbers that are important."

Frye credits his employees for his firm's excellent growth. "I have employees who are passionate about their work," he says.

He fosters a diverse workforce with half of his six managers being minorities and staff from a multitude of countries. "Having worked in government, I'm mindful not to exclude people because of their color," he says. "I'm always open to hiring the best candidates."

Employees tend to stay with the company. In fact, the first and third person Frye hired are still employees.

What explains the employee longevity? Frye provides incentives to top performers. For example, he offers

\$25 if a substantive report is completed in 10 workdays and "wow" bonuses of up to \$500 for employees who provide extraordinary customer service.

Frye also holds year-end employee retreats. Last year, to celebrate the company's 10th anniversary, Frye and his staff went to Paris. "Because it wasn't the high season, we got incredible rates," he says. "We had the office covered, and everyone—from receptionist on up, who wanted to go, went for five days. These trips don't keep employees, but it's a celebration of their efforts that they appreciate."

Debra Wishik Englander is a New York-based business writer and editor. She has contributed to *Mature Outlook*, *Money*, *Gateway* and manages the Ernst & Young tax and finance book program for John Wiley & Sons, Inc.