

Guest column

# Practice Inclusion, Promote It Authentically



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**A**s featured in the cover story of this issue of *CSP*, social justice, diversity and inclusion have become high-profile concerns across the U.S. in ways not seen in many years. Certainly, they're subjects we all must address both personally and professionally. I reached out to two well-known

names in convenience retailing to share their takes on recent issues.

## The Retailer

Kevin Smartt, CEO of TXB Stores in Texas and chairman of the NACS Board of Directors, started off by noting the c-store industry has a unique responsibility because "we serve over 165 million customers a day. We are the fabric that is America, serving all types of customers every day."

We may not see eye to eye with every customer who walks through our doors, but as Jackie Robinson famously said, "I am not concerned with your liking or disliking me ... all I ask is that you respect me as a human being." That respect begins with understanding our neighborhoods and acting accordingly.

"Historically our industry

steered away from controversial topics, knowing that we would have customers on both sides," Smartt says. "We are still sensitive but have evolved to where we know we have to have a voice on important issues like social justice and inclusion, and our customers appreciate it when we are authentic ... and that we are not trying to monetize the issue."

Smartt works hard to ensure that the TXB team practices respect and inclusiveness so that there are no biases toward customers or team members. "It starts from the top down. We don't have to keep talking about it when it is embedded into who we are," he says. Issues can arise, "and when that happens, we have the tough conversation, and our blinders have to come off to open our eyes and our hearts so we can see people as people."

As an industry leader, Smartt

encourages "all to embrace questions around this issue and share best practices." Topics around social justice and inclusion may bring up contrary perspectives, and "you might not like what I have to say, but you don't know until you hear me say it. These forums help to tear down barriers and make you learn by being a better listener."

## The Supplier

Kevin Farley, the chief operating officer for GSP Retail and NACS Supplier Board vice chair, says, "There are amazing things being done by many convenience retailers and suppliers that are on target with issues that are important to the communities that they serve ... and we just don't take credit for" that as an industry.

It was Will Rogers who said, "If you done it, it ain't bragging." That's a folksy way of saying that self-promotion for its own sake is risky; celebrating positive actions

in our communities, however, is critical to driving future success.

Farley says, "There is an opportunity to promote actions that our industry is engaged in to make our neighborhoods better. Telling our story authentically creates a halo for the whole industry, and individual retailers and suppliers can learn best practices to then implement in their own areas."

The NACS Foundation provides one broad umbrella for the industry. Its recently passed 24/7

Day (July 24) "fits in with who we are as a company and allows the whole industry to come together to amplify how we are giving back to the

people and the communities we serve without bragging about it," Smartt says. The program honors hometown heroes and first responders, while collecting funds for the American Red Cross.

24/7 Day is part of a broader industry initiative called #ConvenienceCares that highlights industry efforts and allows members to share their story. Its first efforts focus on reducing hunger, improving health, creating a sustainable environment and supporting first responders.

These are issues that cut across the entire nation and that our industry can leverage to fulfill a collective responsibility to the neighborhoods we serve.

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