



Management style at Seattle's Brown Bear Car Washes featured in Seattle Times' Pacific Northwest Magazine

SEATTLE, Washington—Vic Odermat, founder of Seattle-based Brown Bear Car Washes, was recently featured in the March 13 issue of the Seattle Times' Pacific Northwest Magazine in a story focusing on diverse—yet successful—management styles in today's workplace.

Odermat—a former U.S. Marine—follows a management style similar to the military where there is a commander—and the lieutenants and the troops who carry out the duties. Employees are expected to adhere to a specific dress code and to be obedient, disciplined and hard working. In addition, management is expected to not only oversee their workers, but pitch in when the car wash operation is busy.

The result of Odermat's management style is a disciplined company where employees take pride in their work, expectations are clear, high performance is rewarded, and good employees are likely to have a job for life.

In 1995, Odermat signed a long-term lease that transferred all the Brown Bear Car Wash sites and operations to Tosco Refining and Marketing Company. At the time Odermat's Car Wash Enterprises (CWE) entered into the lease with Tosco, Tosco was the Seattle-based operator of the British Petroleum retailing network on the West Coast. Tosco had originally planned that Brown Bear Car Wash would be expanded within Washington and other Western states.

After Tosco took over the car washes operations, the work ethic Odermat had instilled in his employees began to deteriorate. Wait times lengthened, employees stood around and smoked in front of customers and the famous Brown Bear dress code: white shirts and black ties was abandoned.

In late 2003, Odermat reclaimed Brown Bear from Tosco's corporate successor, ConocoPhillips. Odermat immediately reinstated his former management style and the dress code. Some employees left as a result of the new rules. But many other long-time upper management employees returned after having left the company while it was under Tosco's management. One key employee who weathered the lease years and returned to his former position under Odermat was General Manager, Tom North.

CWE owns and operates 20 tunnel and 14 self-serve car washes in Washington State, and is one of the largest privately held car wash chains in the U.S. CWE has a long history of supporting civic and community projects in the region, including the award-winning Northern Trail Exhibit at the Woodland Park Zoo.

Odermat is a past recipient of the "Industry Leadership Award" by the International Carwash Association on its 50th anniversary. He was cited for his distinct level of commitment to employees, the car wash industry and civic activities.

Odermat is a past board member of the International Car Wash Association and currently serves on the board of the Western Car Wash Association.