

## Looking Past the Bugs On the Windshield

**Randy Varga owns Decking Northwest, a deck-building company in Lake Oswego, Ore.**

**PDB:** What's your business philosophy?

**Varga:** Work with integrity. What you do every day adds up. It's like the saying, if you watch the pennies, the dollars watch themselves. Know what you can do and don't take on stuff you can't do. You can't hide that, and customers will figure that out.

**PDB:** How big is your business?

**Varga:** We have 12 to 13 employees.

**PDB:** How do you find good people?

**Varga:** I run ads all the time. I'm looking for the right person, and that doesn't necessarily mean one with a lot of carpentry skills. Skills can be learned. I'm looking for clean-cut, upstanding people. I'll hire the right person even if I don't need anyone else right now. That's one advantage of running a larger company — it can absorb an extra worker occasionally.

### How do your practices and preferences stack up against other deck builders?

Answer our Quick Vote and Survey at [www.deckmagazine.com](http://www.deckmagazine.com)

**Survey:** Are you more aware now than you were a year ago of proper ledger attachment procedures? Have the building codes on this issue gone overboard?

**Quick Vote:** Will you build more or fewer decks in 2008 than in 2007?

**PDB:** Are there disadvantages to size?

**Varga:** Sure. A one-man show can solve problems one at a time, and they aren't all big ones. It's like bugs on a windshield — most of them come off easily, but there's always one that sticks. No big deal if you've got one truck. We have a bunch of trucks, and it's as if my carpenters cleaned off most of the bugs, but left the really bad ones for me. Instead of having to solve a range of problems, I get all the sticky ones.

**PDB:** How do your carpenters solve problems?

**Varga:** One of the big luxury hotels on Central Park in New York, I think the Waldorf, authorizes each of its employees to spend some specified amount of money to fix a customer's problems. I tell my employees something similar — if a customer has a complaint, you're authorized to spend a couple of hours to fix it without asking me first. Of course, I often hear about these things anyway when the employee calls for advice on how to fix it.

I also coach my customers on how to approach employees with a problem. I tell them to do that with a plate of cookies in hand — homemade are best.

**PDB:** What's the best part of the job?

**Varga:** The employees. They're like a family. I once got a thank you note from the front desk gal that was signed "Love." I don't think of myself as being above my employees, I just have a different job. I try to look beyond the headaches and the problems, and focus on the good people. ❖