Outrigger Honors Kenneth Choo with Lifetime Achievement Award

By Drs. Chuck and Richard Kelley

This week, many members of our ‘ohana gathered to bid aloha to Ken Choo, a veteran of our Information Technology (IT) Department. Ken’s time at Outrigger is a great story in several ways. On top of his personal story of 23 years immersed in computers, there is the tale of how his co-workers pulled off a special surprise party to honor him.

There is also an important life lesson. While casual observers would probably say Ken was in the technology business, Ken knew he was in the customer service business!

First, let’s talk about Ken’s personal story and the life lesson he personifies. Ken began his career with Outrigger as a business systems analyst in 1990. Before that he had been working with Joe Durocher at another company and was considering retiring to spend time with his family and play more golf. However, Joe moved to Outrigger to head the IT Department. We were adopting the new JD Edwards World finance system at the time, and Joe knew he could use Ken’s help. So rather than see him retire, Joe made it worth Ken’s while to join him at Outrigger to help with the project – “for a few years,” Ken thought.

As the JD Edwards World program was expanded to cover both accounting and human resources functions, Ken became our most valuable in-house expert on the system. Soon everyone knew that if there was a problem with the system or a question about it, Ken was the man to turn to. His talents became essential, and although he kept thinking about retirement, we kept him working and problem solving for more than two decades.

Yes, Ken knows “a little” about computers, but he knows a lot about customer service. Ken’s priority was to always provide his customers with service that was not just outstanding but friendly.

In the hospitality business, one might be tempted to think of “customers” as only the guests checking in at the front desk and staying in hotel rooms. While guests are certainly important customers, every department, even IT, has “customers” too, and providing them with outstanding service is critical. Ken has been a shining example of putting this philosophy into practice.

Just ask Jane Inouye in the Payroll Department, where each month there is a hard deadline to get the payroll checks out on time. Many times over the years, last-minute changes, some occurring well after regular business hours, have threatened to delay check printing unless the JD Edwards World system could be quickly adjusted. Jane knew she could count on Ken at any hour, and he would immediately drop what he was doing and solve the problem. She called him with questions late at night, on his days off, and even in the middle of a round of golf. Ken always solved the problem quickly and never uttered a word of complaint.

In fact, Ken made himself so available that until this week Jane never knew that for the last 10 years he had been working only part time! Now that’s customer service!

Further to the point, Ken thoroughly understood the Payroll Department’s needs and was known to
recommend system improvements the department had not yet even considered. Anticipating customer needs before the customer asks represents the utmost in customer service. It is the hallmark of an outstanding business.

Today, our company has migrated off the old JD Edwards World platform and onto the new state-of-the-art JD Edwards E1 platform, so Ken was finally able to take the retirement he had planned for so long.

So how did we surprise Ken in his last days on the job? Senior Vice President and Chief Information Officer Alan White invited Ken to what he said would be a special lunch – just the two of them – to thank him for his years of service and say goodbye in person before he retired at the end of the month. Ken accepted, completely oblivious to what was really about to happen.

Instead of heading downstairs to Keoni’s restaurant, Alan steered him into the OHANA Waikiki East Princess Ka’iulani conference room where a crowd had quietly gathered. When Ken stepped into the room, the quiet exploded as co-workers and members of Ken’s family applauded, honoring his achievements and recognizing his outstanding contributions to Outrigger’s success.

Taking the podium, CEO David Carey spoke eloquently of Ken’s unwavering dedication through 23 years of service. Then, in another surprise, David presented Ken with an engraved koa paddle, Outrigger’s coveted Lifetime Achievement Award.

We are delighted to celebrate Ken’s life transition, and we are enormously appreciative of his many contributions. He is highly deserving of the Lifetime Achievement Award, which is bestowed on the most exceptional employees, whose extraordinary professionalism embodies our values and exceeds all expectations. Ken truly understands the concept championed by author and speaker Harvey Mackay, “Customer service is not a department, it’s everyone’s job!”

We will certainly miss Ken’s friendly presence and his exemplary work ethic, but we wish him great success in his new adventures – not only golf, but enjoying his family, including his beloved grandson.

Aloha, Ken! And mahalo!