SALES AND SERVICE

Excellence

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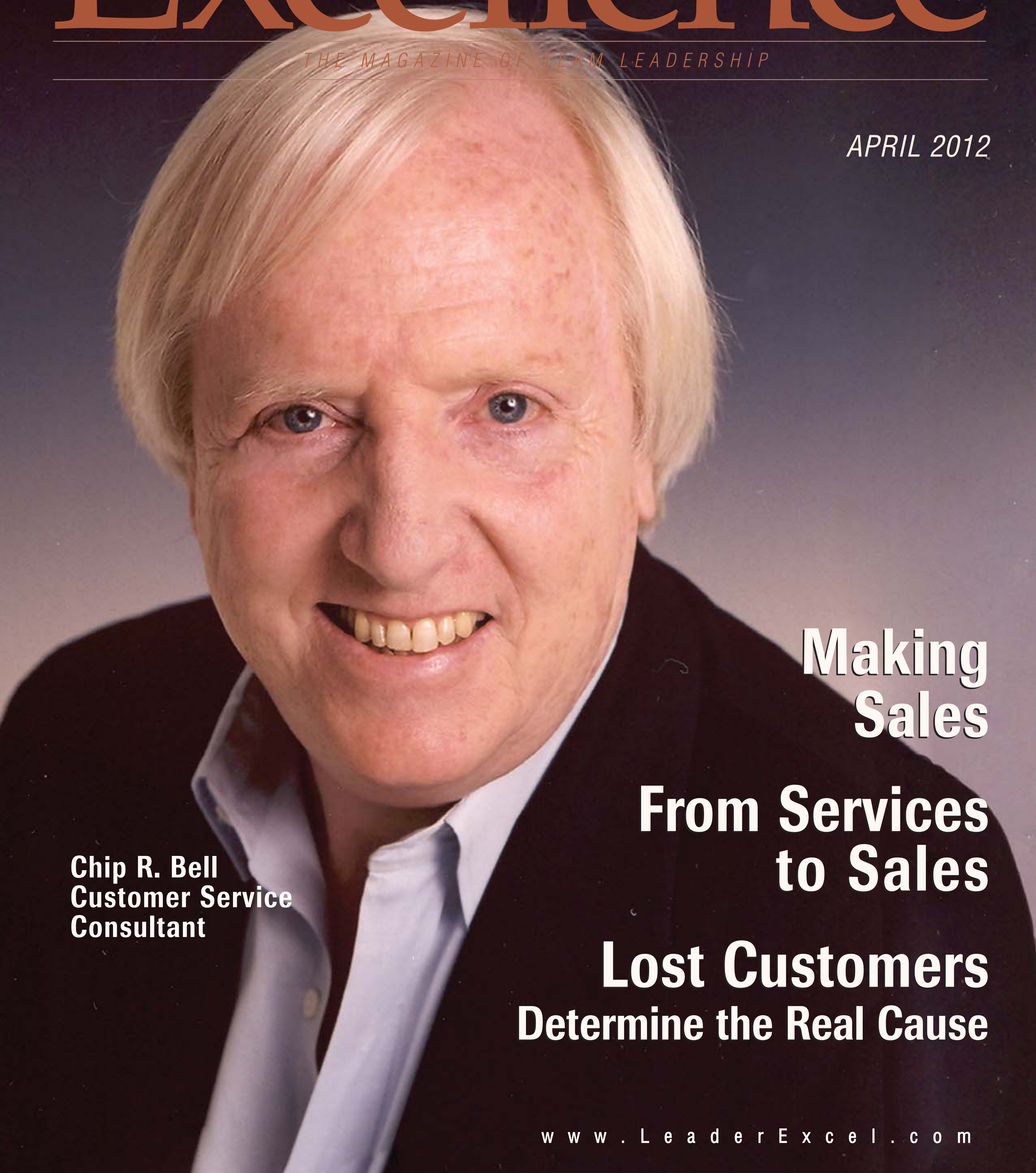

Making Sales

From Services to Sales

Lost Customers
Determine the Real Cause

Chip R. Bell
Customer Service Consultant

Sales and Service
Excellence
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MARKETING/STRATEGY

Marketing Strategy

Blind spots, bias, and bravado.

by Doug Williamson

AS LEADERS TRY TO COPE with the demands of a changing environment, they're often frustrated by the inadequacy of their strategy. They sense that their strategy seems to *fall short* of what is necessary to meet the challenges.

There is a lot of bad strategy. Many leaders operate with a *primitive understanding* of what *strategy* is, what it means, and what it can achieve. They often confuse *bold ambition* with *good strategy*. They make great pronouncements to the market, their customers and employees about how they will be the biggest *this* or greatest *that*, but *pronouncements* are not *strategy*.

It's time to make different choices. The demise of *charisma* and *bravado* provides the fuel for energizing strategy. In its place, is the rise of *candor*, *coherence* and *courage*, combined with a *conviction* to overcome blind spots and biases.

Hallmarks of bad strategy include: abundant *fluff*, *exaggeration* and *hyperbole*; failure to address core challenges or wicked problems; mistaking cascading goals and detailed objectives for strategy; and setting weak objectives that do not change the basic condition.

Encourage Strategic Honesty

Developing coherent, game changing strategic plans, and setting a clear, bold, long-term direction, have long been considered the highest priority and responsibility of senior executives. In the current economic conundrum, ***two questions come to mind***: 1) How effective is the strategic planning process? and 2) What gets in the way of improving the process and outcome?

Few organizations would receive *Top Grade* for their strategy, but why can't the rest achieve that same dominating *credibility*? Most strategies may be *good enough to get by*, but they are not *good enough to differentiate*, to set the pace and to dominate the space. In fact, they're not *strategies* at all, but *tactical goals*, clustered together under *strategy*.

Serious *strategy setting* is about clearly identifying the *wicked problems* your company needs to address to gain a competitive advantage, and declaring intent to tackle them in a focused way.

By its nature, a strategy setting discussion is an argument, a point of view. It should, in fact, attract criticism and maybe even ridicule. It should destroy old ideas, paradigms and beliefs. To build a great strategy, there has to be vibrant debate. If the objective is to craft superior strategy, then there is a desperate need for greater honesty in the discussions surrounding it.

Strategy is serious business. It deserves *total candor*. Candor must be encouraged, developed, modeled, supported and rewarded. Sadly, that is rare. Bad strategy has something to do with dishonesty about the strategic challenges—a conflict-avoidance tendency, a belief in pumping up assets and good news, rather than admitting liabilities and sharing the bad news. This reveals itself as a failure to state the worst fears, admit the underlying challenge, or call out the primary challenge and ask people to rally around solving it. Too often, the tendency is to strive for a vanilla-coated form of consensus that may feel good, but does not produce superior results or competitive advantage. No matter how painful the *worst truth* is, it's better than the *best lie*.

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Identifying Pivot Points

Military and political history is full of examples in which a leader (*often against all odds*) uses a set of bold strategies to out maneuvre the opposition. Victory is won because at a particular moment the leader made a critical decision that, in retrospect, became the evident and eventual pivot point. The deciding action shifted the momentum and ensured the victory. So it is with business strategy.

These pivot points are not accidental or random decisions—they're deliberate, defining moments of unique and disproportionate advantage. They arise when a decision is made to *focus efforts* on a single *outcome* or *bet*. This focus provides the leverage necessary to tip the scales. Having a singular focus enables you to take advantage of the pivot points. When you try to mitigate all risks associated with the big decision, you never make the commitment necessary to take full advantage. Rather than aggressively exploiting opportunity, you hedge your bets. You search for a full understanding and perfect balancing of all variables, before acting. This isn't how the best firms manage to dominate their space or change history.

Strategy should be a clear, crisp, deliberate choice and receive disproportionate *attention*, *focus*, *effort* and *resources*. The *entire enterprise* must focus on a particular course of action, the foundation of which lies at the farthest reaches of our understanding.

There is a huge difference between *strategy* and the *goals*, *objectives* and *tactics* we see in most *strategic plans*. We are easily seduced into calling something a *strategy* when it is not. *Strategy* should be about *problem solving*—identifying the most thorny, *wicked* problem and deciding to apply maximum attention and effort to it. It requires the courage to acknowledge the problem and then to make it the center of everything that is done.

First, a proactive, candour-seeking leader must help others admit or acknowledge the problem. Often, this never occurs, because leaders and followers are afraid to dig out the weak points and put them on the table.

Second, a courageous leader must have the necessary, sometimes painful, exploratory discussions to find the deeply hidden *secret*, rather than hope the problem *will just go away*.

Third, the bold leader must have ruthless focus to take advantage of the pivot point once discovered—then devote *everything* to resolving it quickly. The best strategic discussions address how best to get *unstuck*.

Opportunity Sensing

There is a unique aroma that comes with *sensing opportunity*—part adrenaline, part *fear*, and part *excitement*. In business, these moments are rare. The *strategic challenge* is to channel the adrenaline on a common cause that replicates the emotion of anticipation. Since these *unique opportunities* tend to present themselves at inconvenient moments, it's easy to *take a pass*. Good strategy never allows that to happen!

Opportunity sensing is about taking advantage of the anomalies, about staking a claim on an unknown piece of land, knowing that it just feels right. Leaders who get comfortable with this line of thinking can take advantage of opportunities presented by the disequilibrium of today.

Five Steps to Take

The greater the uncertainty and instability in the market, the less willing leaders are to stare down *devils*, to deal with the things holding them back and to tackle *issues that make a difference*. ***Strategy is about developing a radically new point of view***—a new way of looking at the world and defining *success*. Opportunity arises as views shift, affording chances to *destabilize* and *disorient* the competition. Take ***five pointers*** to develop *strategy*:

- ***Dig much deeper.*** To get straight answers to the *wicked problems*, you need to *dig deep* to find them. Select the right people to help you think, probe and discover and provide them with the *air cover* they need and deserve.
- ***Ask tougher questions.*** Mining for the hidden issues, dilemmas, and incongruities requires asking more penetrating questions that explore the unknown territories—and then following this line of thought.
- ***Call it out.*** *Organizations tend to take on the characteristics of their leader*. To shift the way *strategy* is conceived, *the leader must model new behaviours*. This means making a visible commitment to calling out the superficial arguments and ending timid, evasive responses to the tougher questions. Raise the bar. Increase the standards. Demand better.
- ***Ensure ample air cover.*** We can be *easily distracted*. Soon, we have a complex maze of conflicting, opinions, priorities and messages. *Eliminate the excuses* people use to divert their energy and attention. Sharpen the messaging. Simplify the strategy.
- ***Go big or go home.*** Business is about balancing *risk* with *market need* and *opportunity*. In recessions, many leaders try to lessen the risk by reducing their field of vision. They justify a *hunker-down strategy* by promoting it as *the safest thing to do*. But strategy is an offensive weapon. So, get out of the bunker and *get back in the game*. **SSE**

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ACTION: Take these five strategic steps.

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Retain Women

To retain more customers.

by Caroline Turner

MOST PEOPLE DON'T CHANGE, or go along with change, because it's *the right thing to do*. They need a *compelling reason* to change. Likewise, most businesses don't change their cultures so that they retain women because it's *nice for women*. They do it if there is a *compelling business reason* to do so. The bottom line reasons to achieve gender diversity in leadership are exactly that—compelling.

You can only achieve *sustainable gender diversity* by having an *inclusive culture*—and that requires that you grasp the business value of inclusion and gender diversity and present a *clear business case* (in terms of *costs that can be avoided*, and *big gains that can be captured*).

Here are five benefits of *inclusiveness:*

- ***Engagement, inclusion and results:*** An organization where a diverse workforce is highly engaged is an *inclusive workplace*. According to Gallup, organizations with inclusive cultures have *39 percent* higher customer satisfaction, *22 percent* greater productivity, and *27 percent* higher profitability.
- ***Decreased turnover:*** Turnover has major direct and indirect costs. Companies with inclusive cultures have *22 percent* lower turnover.
- ***Easier recruitment:*** An organization with a reputation for being *a good place to work* for diverse groups recruits better talent. That saves money and time.
- ***Better decisions:*** Decisions are better when they come from a group with diverse backgrounds and perspectives. Heterogeneous groups get better results because the tension or discomfort leads to *more careful processing of information*.
- ***Diverse markets:*** Businesses with diverse workforces have an easier time tapping the diverse marketplace. The buying power and influence of *minority* groups are large and growing.

Making the Business Case

The case for a gender-inclusive workplace includes:

- ***Gender diversity and returns:*** Several studies show correlations between *gender diversity* in leadership and the *bottom line*. Companies with gender diversity in leadership experience higher return on equity, operating profit, and stock price. Having both men and women in leadership benefits the bottom line.
- ***Women in the hiring pool:*** Women are now half of the workforce and hiring pool. The pool of educated workers will continue to have more women than men as women earn more undergraduate and graduate degrees. To have the most skilled and talented workforce, a business must attract and retain women as well as men.
- ***Women's market:*** A diverse culture that mirrors its markets tends to do better. The women's market is key to many industries as women are important decision-makers, customers and potential customers. Women influence more than *85 percent* of retail decisions. Women are decision-makers in more business-to-business relationships. Women-owned businesses are a growing sector of the U.S. economy.

- ***Bang for the buck:*** Increasing *engagement* of women yields the most bang for the buck. Gen X and Millennials share women's need for flexibility, desire for closer workplace relationships, and preference for less hierarchical structures. *Making a culture work better for women also makes it work better for all*.

Why Women Leave

When I left the C-suite, people were surprised. I was at the top of my game. My kids were out of college. *But I lacked the passion it took to keep it up*. I couldn't name a cause of my decision to leave. It just felt like it was time to move on.

I began to reflect on what caused me to leave. I learned that *inclusive cultures have higher productivity and profitability*. I learned that companies with *gender diversity in leadership* have higher returns. So, in the interest of both women and their employers, I wanted to understand why women leave and how businesses can keep them.

While women's role in the family is a significant factor in the attrition rate of women, equally important is the job dissatisfaction that women express.

Most women who take *off-ramps* (detours from their career) cite child care and elder care as the reasons. But, family responsibilities often become a cause of a decision to leave only when there are other factors. If a woman does not like her job, she may be less willing or able to juggle work and family responsibilities. If she is engaged in work, the juggling act may be worthwhile.

Employers can increase retention of women (and men) by designing flexible and alternative work schedules and assuring that they are not stigmatized. But what has the greatest impact on retention of women is to *assure that women are engaged*. *Engaged* employees feel a sense of *belonging*, *inclusion* and *community*. They like their jobs.

Women are likely to feel engaged in a culture where they: 1) have full access to formal and informal networks, and 2) feel valued for their way of achieving results. Obstacles to both can involve the *comfort principle* and an *unconscious preference* for how results are achieved. The comfort principle can bar women from inclusion in social activities, good projects and mentoring relationships. It's the natural tendency to spend time with (and mentor and give work to) those most like ourselves. Being aware of this tendency and its impact can lead to greater access for women.

Women may not feel valued if performance criteria are influenced by unconscious preferences for masculine ways of doing things. Our culture tends to identify *leadership* and *excellence* with masculine approaches. Being aware of differences in *masculine* vs. *feminine* approaches to work, and appreciating feminine ways of achieving results, can result in women feeling more valued.

Another factor that causes women to leave a job is feeling *stalled*. People who feel *stalled* are likely to disengage—and move on. The *comfort principle* can interfere with access to assignments that build *experience*, *confidence* and *exposure*.

Changing deeply held beliefs is harder than *changing practices and procedures*. But that's what is required to *engage* and *retain* women—and capture the payoff of gender diversity in leadership. SSE

Caroline Turner, former SVP of MillerCoors and author of Difference Works: Improving Retention, Productivity and Profitability through Inclusion. *Visit www.differenceworks.com.*

ACTION: Seek to retain more women.

SALES/RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships Rule

Nothing beats person-to-person.

by Joanne Black

THE INTERNET AND OTHER *technology breakthroughs* have changed the way we do business. New technology is created at warp speed and customers expect immediate decisions. This cycle of speed and sophistication creates an intensely competitive marketplace, placing greater demands on our companies to act and react quickly. Think about how often you check and respond to email on your smart phone.

Ironically, buying decisions are still based on personal relationships. Customers make buying decisions based on whether *they like and trust you and your organization*. Relationships of trust matter. Salespeople know that trust can be difficult to achieve. Alas, sales has a bad rap. Most consumers view salespeople as arrogant, in your face.

Great salespeople do right by their customer: They listen, offer suggestions, are empathetic, ask good questions, and refer someone else if their solution is not a fit. Yes, they're willing to walk away, but not before they help you out.

Earn Trust and Deliver

Robert Hurley, author of *The Decision to Trust*, outlines ***five principles***:

• ***Show that your interests are the same.*** We trust *people who serve our interests*. So, always focus on your customers. Clients don't care about you—they only care about *what you do for them* and how your solution impacts their business.

• ***Demonstrate your concern for them.*** Do *the right thing*, even if you make a risky decision. Be willing to walk away if your solution is not a fit. Share information, even if the news is bad. Someone needs to say what's really going on.

• ***Deliver on your promises.*** Follow through and execute. Do what you say you'll do. The *fortune* is in the *follow-up*.

• ***Be consistent and honest.*** Trust comes from honoring your word. When you make a promise, deliver on it. No one cares about your *good intentions*.

• ***Communicate frequently, clearly and openly.*** Since *trust* is about *relationships*, err on the side of frequent and open communication. That means not just email, but phone and in-person conversations. How do you build *trusted relationships*? One word: Referrals.

I believe in the power of referrals and the power of being honest, forthright, and serving my customers. The most trusted companies have lower turnover, higher revenue, profitability, and shareholder returns. Trust is an everyday action item. How do you demonstrate trustworthiness?

Customers buy with emotion and justify with fact. If your customers don't like you or feel comfortable with you, they won't buy from you. You need people to like you within the first few seconds to get off on the right foot. *Fancy gizmos* can't do that, but a *trusted referral* and *personal connection* will.

Would you prefer to do business with someone you've met only via a cold call, or someone you've met through a friend or colleague with whom you have a respected relationship? Relationships power our lives.

The most energizing and exciting part of sales work is your relationships with your customers—the interaction. Salespeople like learning about a customer's situation and matching their solutions to the needs of their customer.

Whatever your position, you sell. You don't have time to wait until marketing creates case studies. And, for the most part, you don't need them (few clients read them). Yes, they are nice to have to build credibility and prove you know your stuff, but not to close a sale.

Position, set, deliver. Prospects and clients want to hear about *the results you've delivered for other clients*. Deliver these insights with *compelling stories*. Tell what challenge they faced, what action you took, and what impact or result. **SE**

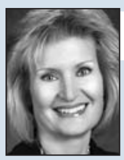
Joanne Black is the founder of No More Cold Calling. Visit www.nomorecoldcalling.com.

ACTION: Craft five stories to share with clients.

SALES/PITCH

Elevator Speech

Follow 8 tips for a great one.



by Dianna Booher

AN ELEVATOR SPEECH IS A sales call in a sentence. It either *confirms* or *destroys* your image—affecting your results. If you find yourself stammering and stuttering instead of selling yourself and your services, consider these ***8 tips***:

1. State what you do in terms of a benefit. Example: "We help salespeople really engage their buyers when they deliver a sales presentation or a written proposal."

2. Make sure the benefit has a "hook." The hook causes listeners to say to themselves: "Oh, yeah? We have problems with that too. I wonder how he/she does that . . . ?" People don't really care what you do—they care about what you may be able to do for THEM.

3. Add a credibility builder. You may mention well-known clients to establish that others value your services. Consider key results achieved for clients, such as a certification process *just completed* to achieve the same effect. Example: "Our clients—IBM, ExxonMobil, and Frito-Lay—tell us that they've improved their closing ratio by 20 percent."

4. Deliver your speech as if off the cuff. Never sound *purposeful* or *canned*. Work in some conversational glitches. Stumble on a word, use a colloquial phrase, or bridge from the conversation at hand with a spontaneous segue. Attend to your phrasing, speaking rate, tone, and demeanor. They all provide context to make the message sound as if you're talking friend to friend.

5. Be quotable. Make it *memorable* so the other person can pass it along. Use a *phrase* that sums up the essence of your offering succinctly. You might deliver your memorable quote in a casual way like this: "I often tell clients that when they need to *talk to the top brass*, our presentation programs open the door. How well do your people do that in the C-suite—routinely *talk to the top brass* with class?"

6. Prefer the vernacular to jargon. Sound as if you're talking to your brother, not a prospective boss or client.

7. Keep it brief—not more than 15-30 seconds. People have attention spans geared to 15-second, 30-second, and 60-second TV ads. And those employ screen changes to hold attention. How often do you flip the channel or leave the room for a snack?

8. End with a question. Engage the other person in a dialogue. Example: *How difficult do your employees find it to do X around your office?* If you just end the *speech*, you'll likely get a pleasant nod or polite "Hmmm." Silence leaves both of you uncomfortable. But with a question, the person can either respond briefly, change the subject, or talk about challenges you can help him meet. **SSE**

Dianna Booher is CEO of Booher Consultants, an executive coach, and author of 45 books, including Creating Personal Presence. *Visit www.booher.com.*

ACTION: Perfect your elevator speech.

Be an ROI Seller

Ask challenging, open-ended questions.

by Howard Dion

PEOPLE MAKE BUYING DECISIONS for only one of two reasons: 1) they believe they can gain a benefit, or 2) they believe they can avoid loss. When the *decision-maker* understands the benefits directly attributable to your deliverables, you have a better chance of closing the sale. Or, when the *decision-maker* understands what risks can be eliminated or reduced, you have a better chance of closing the sale. I did not say *you would close the sale*—only have a better chance of closing the sale.

Sounds simple, but in reality, it's complex. You must first identify the buyer's pain points and then help the buyer crystallize the source of the pain. You must also identify the *personal* and *business* agendas that are driving the decision-making process. And, you must illustrate the positive business impact of your deliverable on the appropriate *Key Performance Indicators* that are linked to the pain points.

To become a ROI seller, you must understand this thinking and get very good at asking challenging, opened-ended questions that uncover the information. You must also be good at *relationship development* and *build rapport and trust* in a short time.

Sales Language

What helps move the process along is a sales language—words that you can focus on during the sales process.

- ***Business function:*** A commercial or industrial enterprise can be broken down into separate business *functions* (Sales & Marketing, Finance, HR, R&D, Quality, Customer Service, and IT) that when viewed together represent the whole enterprise.
- ***Pain points:*** These root drivers originate in a business function that is considered vital to achieving a goal, objective or strategy. When there is a malfunction, when something does not meet expectation, there is pain. Although the pain can originate in one business function, it can spread and impact other functions as well. When the pain gets severe, the owner of the root driver goes to market and looks for a solution to the problem.
- ***Key Performance Indicators*** (KPIs) are the statistical links to the pain points. KPIs are the metrics that define success and failure.
- ***Personal agenda:*** These prime buying motives impact the well being or personal desires of the individual.
- ***Business agenda:*** These prime buying motives impact the success or failure of one or more business functions.

Harry's Story

Here is a short story that illustrates my point.

Harry sells consulting projects and then delivers what he sold. Three weeks ago, he responded to an inbound lead that surfaced on his Web Site. He made contact the next day and discovered that the potential buyer was looking for a consulting firm that could help with a specific operational problem. The prospect, John, is the president of the company. Since John's office was in driving distance, Harry pushed for a face-to-face meeting. Below are the highlights of what happened during that first onsite meeting.

After a brief introduction, Harry asked John *why* he was looking to hire a consulting firm. John explained that he wanted to invest money in his business so he could expand his footprint to the west coast of the U.S. "However," he said. "I do not want to borrow money from a bank. I want to improve my profit picture so I can fund the West Coast expansion internally over the next 12 months." Harry and John then talked about the KPIs where John saw a problem. Harry was not surprised when John said, "I need to increase billable hours and reduce administrative costs and staff overtime hours." Harry could have stopped there, ended the meeting, returned to his office and submitted the proposal by the end of the week. But that is not what he did. Instead Harry asked John two challenging ***why questions***.

"John, I have two questions. First why are you against borrowing money from a bank, and second, why are you so focused on having a footprint on the West Coast?" John leaned back in his chair and was quiet for a few minutes. Harry said nothing; he just waited for John to reply. After a minute, John answered the questions. If Harry spoke first, he likely would have let John off the hook and the conversation would have gone in a different direction.

"I need the profit dollars for marketing; and if I have a bank loan, I can't invest as much in marketing. In addition," John said, "my most dangerous competitor just opened an operation on the West Coast. The owner of that company and I worked together in the same company when we got out of college. The fact that he got the drop on me makes me angry. Actually," he said, "that fact is very motivating." Harry and John continued to talk for another forty-five minutes and here is what Harry learned as a ROI Seller.

The business functions at play for this deal were: marketing, sales, customer service, and technical service delivery. The pain points came from flat revenue growth and lower than expected profit margins. The critical KPIs were revenue growth and profit margins. John's personal agenda was very specific. He wanted to beat his old friend in the market share game. The business agenda was not about opening an office on the West Coast, it was about being able to control his business so he could execute his desired growth strategy.

Harry told John that he wanted a day to think about their discussion, and scheduled the second meeting before he left. At that second meeting, Harry presented the ROI KPI (*the amount of new business sold during a 12-month period after the opening of the West Coast office compared to the investment made with Harry*). Together, they came up with ***three KPI metrics*** based on John's profitability goals: *dollars sold that would be below expectation*, *dollars sold that would meet expectation*, and *dollars sold that would exceed expectation*. They expanded the consulting agreement to include sales process training, which Harry quickly outsourced to a colleague when he returned his office. By closing the sale, Harry became *the collaborator* that was destined to help John succeed. SSE

Howard Dion is Managing Member of Matrix Consulting Group and author of A Doer Seller's Guide for Being Successful at Sales. *Call 215-752-9389 or mobile: 215-840-4571.*

ACTION: Collaborate to close the sale.

SALES/CONVERSION

Services to Sales

Beware six ineffective behaviors.



by Marshall Goldsmith, Don Brown, and Bill Hawkins

As we developed content for *What Got You Here Won't Get You There in Sales*, we spoke to *hundreds of buyers* in our customers' organizations and in organizations new to us. As we uncovered why *what gets you here won't get you there* in sales and service, we discovered some ***bad habits*** that result when people try to push outcomes!

Countless industries are drafting service providers into sales—in call centers, car dealerships, medical and dental offices, and even on airplanes. It seemed like a natural fit. We need to sell in a new way, and we have people on the payroll who already give us a new conduit to the customer: *Let's turn service into sales!* Thousands of service providers became salespeople overnight. We can't lose, right?

Perhaps. Whereas the single biggest success factor for a sales veteran is *comfort*, we find *mindset* to be *the success factor for new salespeople*. What is the *mindset* toward *sales* of *service people* drafted into *sales*—95 percent of the terms they associate with *salespeople* are derogatory. They are pulled into a profession that they find *dishonest*.

Remember that *mindset* is more than a simple opinion or point of view. It is the *basic assumptions*—the genesis of our behaviors. Some organizations find a way to tap into the base assumptions of their service providers to move them from service to sales. They do this by transferring the service provider's focus from *problems* to *people* and by separating the *customer's service agenda* from the *sales agenda*. Where we find an effective transition from service to sales, we see a *partnership* using solid, compatible analytics and an honest acknowledgment of the task at hand.

Where we find *disaffected salespeople*, we find organizations simply dumping sales pressures on top of service duties (at times even competing with *service* and *satisfaction* objectives).

The development of the customer contact technologies of voice recognition, real-time on-screen delivery of customer data, market penetration, and sales conversion analytics—even social media—has contributed to the use of those technologies in up-selling, cross-selling and *service-to-selling*.

Communications has contributed to this surge of *unconventional outbound selling* in that *the methods work*; organizations are *achieving results* by using them. This is what drives the service-to-sales dilemma.

Six Ineffective Behaviors

Six habitual behaviors are most ineffective for new sales draftees:

1. Vocal filler—overuse of unnecessary or meaningless verbal qualifiers.

2. Selling past the close—the irresistible urge to verbalize and execute *every possible step* in the sales process.

3. Explaining failure—behaving under the erroneous belief that simply being able to assign blame, fault, or guilt is enough to satisfy the customer.

4. Never having to say you're sorry—the personal inability to apologize or accept responsibility for personal or organizational error.

5. Throwing others under the bus—sacrificing a colleague—often anonymous, often vulnerable and innocent—by blaming him or her for your functional failure.

6. Propagandizing—over-reliance on organizational rhetoric and themes.

Mindset makes all the difference. So, sales draftees, take a tip: what got you here won't get you there! SSE

Marshall Goldsmith, Don Brown, and Bill Hawkins are coauthors of What Got You Here Won't Get You There in Sales. *Visit www.MarshallGoldsmithLibrary.com.*

ACTION: Take care in converting service to sales.

SALES/CURIOSITY

Cultivate Curiosity

It will help you close the sale.

by Bryan Flanagan

One of the great tools we have as sales professionals is our curiosity. Curiosity may have *killed the cat*, but curiosity will help you *make the sale*!

Yes, you need to be a *curious* salesperson to be a *serious* salesperson.

Case in Point 1: Several years ago, we had an on-going yearly contract with a Dallas car dealership. It was a great relationship. Toward the end of the year, I met with the training director to discuss plans for next year. I said, "Rick, let's talk about next year's training."

Rick said, "We already have. We've decided to *move to more on-line training*."

"Rick, that's great. We do that."

Rick said, "We didn't know that. So, we signed a contract *with someone else*!"

Bummer! Man, hearing that from a good client will ruin your day! I asked what happened. Rick told me another company had come in and inquired about future needs. The other company sold them on their training.

What happened? Plain and simple: I got outsold. When I stopped being *curious* with this account, I failed to use one of our great sales tools.

Case in Point 2: When I urged senior sales reps on an agro-sciences sales team to be curious, one rep tried this with one of his customers. Here is the email I received from him two weeks later:

I began the actual sales call with: "What are your short-term goals and how can we work together to achieve them?" After Greg finished laughing at me (remember, I've called on Greg for 15 years), I assured him I was serious. We had a great discussion. He called in his CFO, COO, and Marketing Director.

As I dissect this example, I see five salient points: 1) the salesperson had been calling on this person for 15 years and ***had never asked him his goals***—he was not being *curious* with his existing accounts; 2) his customer was so shocked that he believed the salesperson wasn't serious; 3) the customer probably had not been asked about his goals by other salespeople, either; 4) the customer was impressed, he called in others (CFO, COO) to participate in the sales interview; 5) by using this approach, the salesperson separated himself from the competition.

Two selling principles support this:

1. We are only as good as our information. How do you get information? You ask *high gain* and *high impact* questions. *Learn to be an appropriate questioner.* If you're not a good questioner, hope the prospect is a good answerer!

2. Whoever has the most information, has the most influence! Again, you must ask appropriate questions in order to have competitive influence. SSE

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ACTION: Use curiosity to close the sale.

Sales Success

Seven behaviors sabotage it.

by Darryl Rosen

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE between a smart, successful sales pro and a stupid, ineffectual one? Not that much. All sales pros make plenty of dumb mistakes that sabotage their success. The main difference is that smart sales pros realize it's usually their behavior—not the company, product, or customer—that's the root cause of their poor performance.

Your worst sales flops can usually be traced back to a problem with your attitude, your preparation, your delivery, or a character trait—such as patience or politeness. Were you really listening, and did you ask questions? Did the customer feel respected, nurtured, and special?

Many things can go wrong during a sales encounter, but one of them shouldn't be your behavior. After coaching hundreds of sales pros, I've identified ***seven behaviors*** that consistently drive sales performance down.

The smart and motivated salesperson can easily reverse the most frequent selling mistakes by making small changes in his or her behavior. It's about evolving a little bit each day. Think *evolution*, not *revolution*. Change one behavior this month and another next month. Over time, you and your sales team will be better off.

Seven Behaviors to Avoid

Here are ***seven behaviors*** that you will want to avoid or change.

1. Appearing ho-hum about your products. Can your customers tell how you think and feel about your company and its products? Selling is the transference of your feelings for your products to your customers. To be effective, your enthusiasm has to be both genuine and infectious. Do you have to love your products? Not necessarily. Do you have to like your products? Not really. But you do have to honestly believe they will benefit your customers. Your expression and words should convey this. Enthusiasm sells.

2. Giving up on a difficult customer. Do you dread allocating precious time to accounts owned by your competition? Sure, it's simpler to go where it's more comfortable—to fish where the fish are biting. But giving up on a difficult customer sends the wrong message. Instead, creatively assess what you offer that's better and different from your competition. Don't stress price and price alone. Anyone can deal on price, and that advantage only lasts for so long.

Also, don't disparage your competition—if you do, you're implying that your customer has made a bad decision. Finally, don't portray yourself as second fiddle to the competition. Play the part of the "preferred provider." Be creative, and keep cultivating new and challenging relationships.

3. Thinking all customers are the same. In theory, all customers should be treated with the same level of

importance. However, this isn't realistic given the increasing amount of time needed to manage accounts properly. That's why the most effective sales professionals endlessly communicate, confirm, check, and recheck *high-volume accounts* or *businesses with the most visibility*. A mistake here matters most. You don't have to snub the smaller clients, because one day they could rise up and become an important player. But especially try to avoid preventable mistakes with the accounts where you can least afford breakdowns in execution.

4. Winging sales calls. All salespeople succumb to the curse of complacency now and then. But remember that extra preparation yields higher results. Be prepared for every single sales call by: reviewing, practicing, and articulating the call's objectives; going over relevant product knowledge; anticipating customer roadblocks; refamiliarizing yourself with the customer's needs; revisiting past calls and re-strategizing issues; bringing the proper sales tools; reviewing what's happening with your competition; and leaving any emotional baggage from prior sales calls behind.

5. Signaling that your prices are too high. Some sales professionals inadvertently signal their personal thoughts on their company's pricing structure with their demeanor. Don't use language suggesting bad news is coming: "You're not going to like this . . ." Don't look down, break eye contact, or mumble when saying the price. And don't make guesses about what you think the customer is willing to pay. Your body language tells the customer exactly how you feel about the product and price. State the price just as you'd say what time it is: matter-of-factly and definitively. That's the price. Period. No hidden message.

6. Not giving customers your undivided attention. If you're talking to a customer or she's asked you a question, do you allow yourself to be distracted by a vibrating iPhone or the ding of your email alert? There's nothing as disheartening to a customer than to be slighted by a sales professional.

Pay attention to the person you're meeting with and not to anyone or anything else. Help them feel heard by asking clarifying questions, such as: "Can you be more specific?" "Can you share some examples?" Customers who feel that you're really zooming in on them and their needs feel it and respond positively.

7. Selling with no imagination. Do you look for opportunities around the edges? Especially in a challenging selling environment, like the one we're in right now, if you veer away from using the same strategies over and over, and try to look at situations a little differently, the results can be excellent.

Take time to brainstorm new and different ways to get customers interested in your products. Talk with your team to come up with alternative selling strategies for the same products you've been selling for a long time. Is there a fresh way to think about them and present them?

Avoid These Seven Behaviors

By avoiding these *seven selling saboteurs*, you'll soon notice big improvement in your sales. Realize that your own behaviors lead to flat sales and poor performance. *That's* what makes a smart sales professional. SSE

Darryl Rosen is a coach for managers and sales professionals and author of Table for Three? Bringing Your Smart Phone to Lunch *and* 50 Dumb Mistakes Smart Managers Don't Make! *Visit www.tableforthreethebook.com.*

ACTION: Avoid these seven behaviors.

Brand Turnaround

Do you have what it takes to lead?

by Karen Post

DO YOU HAVE THE SKILLS, mindset and traits to save a sinking brand? Lead with courage, and you'll likely turn it around. Manage with mediocrity, and your brand's life may be very short.

Leading a brand turnaround is not easy. It takes a *special person*—one who can battle through brand bumps, uncertainty and the stress that comes with *product recalls*, *scandal*, and *controversy*.

Having observed brands worldwide, I've noted how leaders act and react during catastrophic storms. Those who pull through display *focus*, *resiliency*, and a *sense of urgency* to meet goals and to turn around a brand in trouble.

I studied over 75 brands in trouble. I looked at their paths to recovery and characteristics that propelled the charge forward. ***Eight common behaviors emerged:*** 1) *courage* (they don't fear uncertainty); 2) *resilient/tough* (they *fight* while *under fire*); 3) *candid* (they're honest); 4) *charismatic* (they empower, inspire and excite); 5) *humble* (they are modest and value others); 6) *gracious* (they appreciate all stakeholders); 7) *creative* (they use imagination to solve problems); and 8) *generous* (they share the rewards).

Attributes in Action

Suppose you own a vegan restaurant whose brand is under scrutiny because one of your signature dishes contains an animal ingredient. How would you deal with this? Take ***9 tips***:

1. Detach yourself without losing sight of lessons learned. Momentarily abandon your emotional connection to your brand, and look at the situation as an outsider might.

2. Focus on making things better (avoid blame). Even if a vendor told you that the ingredients contained *no animal products*, don't point fingers (it *wastes energy* and makes you look like you're *focusing more on blame* than *addressing the problem and committing to a solution*).

3. Have a clear vision of the future that addresses the triple bottom line: *finance*, *society* and *environment*. Your *recovery plan* can't simply be to *fix your menu*. How will you do this? What can you do to cut costs? How can you not displease many people involved? Will your solution harm the environment?

4. Leverage your strengths and those of your team. If your *Marketing Director* is a calm, pleasant speaker, have her be the *brand spokesperson*. If your GM is a customer-service specialist, assign him to talk *personally* to patrons about the issue. Lead the way to recovery.

5. Embrace new tools, including social media and digital communications. Whether or not you do *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *YouTube* or *blog*, you may want to start. Designate a team member to manage the platforms and interact directly with consumers to show that *your brand cares*. Create a video on *YouTube* to express your concern and apology.

6. Take risks and accept failing forward. If something doesn't work, try a different route. *Persist* no matter what, since *you are the one in the driver's seat.*

7. Launch and learn. Trust what you think is right. Don't *second-guess* yourself. If your first thought is to create an apology video via *YouTube* and offer all *Facebook* fans a coupon, go for it. If your video gets negative reviews and the coupon isn't a fix, try something else.

8. Love the game and play to win. Leaders are passionate people. No matter how much stress the customers and media may cause, stay true to yourself and *remember why you took the leader role*.

9. Mix, mingle and listen to all stakeholders. Have an *open mind* about who might come up with a good solution. Don't close yourself off to anyone. You may see some relationships crumble, but be respectful—then move forward.

The road to recovery starts with you, so *tap into all these traits* you possess. SSE

Karen Post, aka the Brand Diva, is a branding/marketing expert, speaker and author of Brand Turnaround *(McGraw-Hill 2011). Visit www.brandingdiva.com.*

ACTION: Lead a brand turnaround.

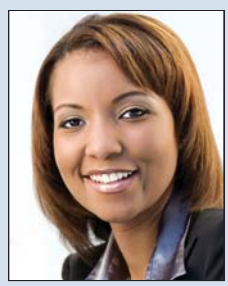
Customer Loyalty

Consumers seek brand delight.

by Robert Passikoff

THE IMPORTANCE OF *BRAND differentiation* continues to escalate. As consumers search for *meaningful experiences and interactions*, it is *delight* that defines their relationship with brands.

In retail, attributes relating to *shopping experience* and *store reputation* exert the strongest impact on *customer decision-making*, *category-expectations*, and *engagement* with brands. While expectations for *delight* vary by category, ***retail brands that best create customer delight are***: Abercrombie & Fitch, Ace, Amazon.com, Asics, Costco, Dillard's, Office Depot, Walgreens, and Wal-Mart.



Consumer expectations keep accelerating. Many pundits looked at the pressures on price and wrongly concluded that brands lost their value. The opposite is true: *Real brands are more valuable than ever* (the success of luxury brands is evidence). Brands lacking *meaningful differentiation* are punished by the economic/behavioral shifts, becoming *category placeholders*. In searching for *delight*, consumers don't look for commodities.

As consumers and categories change, brands must change. Every category shows a rise in either the *importance of* or *increased expectations* when it comes to the *brand-based attributes* that impact the *customer experience* (things that generate *delight*). Given the level of commoditization in product/services and pricing/promotion strategies, it's no surprise *consumers are looking to strong brands to offer a difference*. Consumers know the brands, know what they do, and know what they're willing to pay. *Satisfaction* is the cost-of-entry while delight is the new differentiator.

Customer experience is key, whether it's *experience with the products*, or how products are put into the hands of consumers—from rapid delivery to product introductions—including service and support. *Consumers want a higher experience*.

This year consumers' sky-rocketing desire for *experience* and *authentic brand values* are exerting the strongest impact on customer decision-making and profitable engagement with brands. Brands that can meet, or exceed, consumer expectations become category leaders. This only matters, of course, if marketers keep score by counting *sales and profits*, not merely track *awareness levels*.

At a time when brands struggle to differentiate themselves and profitably engage with customers, we find that products and services that respond with a meaningful consumer-centric view of their category—delighting the customer—based on predictive loyalty metrics, stand to gain the most, and become brand leaders. SSE

Robert Passikoff is president of Brand Keys and conducts the annual Customer Loyalty Engagement Index. *Visit www.brandkeys.com.*

ACTION: Provide customers with brand delight.

Influence and Relationships

You build them first to change them later.

by Dan Neundorf

IN AN ERA OF ECONOMIC RE-cessions and rebounds, one constant in sales gets overlooked: the relationship between you and your client. Many companies overlook this factor and instead focus on rigid sales programs.

Rigid sales systems, however, just are not effective. In a flooded economy weakened by the financial state of the market, you need your pitch—indeed, your sale—to stand out. That's only possible if you have the freedom for creative and independent thought. That will allow you to build an actual relationship with your client.

Many sales are lost because clients or customers don't believe that what you're selling them is justified or in line with their experiences! Why would someone buy a new car from you when their older car is perfectly sound? Since their experience with the current car is positive, replacing it wouldn't be justified. The key to making this sale? Find a way to alter the customer's perception by building a relationship that can be influenced, perhaps by suggesting a lease arrangement.

DEBA is the process that leads up to the purchase, and the parameters within which a salesperson can operate to wield influence. Each step of the DEBA process affects the steps that precede and follow it. This enables you to function within the dynamics of client relationships by understanding how the roles are constantly changing.

D: Data—Create awareness of the product or message through the spread of data or information. This can be done in many ways: advertising, word of mouth, giveaways, sales tags. If the client doesn't know about the product, what kind of experience or interest can you generate in it? None. Data is the foundation for your relationship, one built on truth and information and seen as mutually beneficial.

E: Experience—Generate a genuine interest in the product *based on the data* in combination with the customer's experiences with similar products or with past practices. This can be tricky. People can hold to irrational beliefs based upon their experiences. For instance, a traumatic childhood incident could be incorrectly linked in the client's mind to a certain color of a product, thus causing their resistance. It is up to you to help them uncover these irrational beliefs for themselves, much the way a psychologist leads a patient down a path to self-discovery.

B: Belief—Create a desire for the product. To do this, the clients must believe that the product works, and believe that they need the product and that if purchased, their problems, whether real or imaginary, will be lessened or eliminated. This belief is based on the *experience;* to influence it, *a relationship must be built* through data transfer and trust.

A: Action to buy—*Influence the prospect to take action* by working the preceding steps, changing roles and shifting the prospect's belief system as necessary in order to alter his or her experience with data and influence.

Obviously, more than a simple, formulaic sales system is involved. The steps of DEBA and changing roles rely on a profound relationship. A good salesperson doesn't simply herd cattle to slaughter. Instead, *this is a process of building influence through consensual relationships* that are based on each unique situation.

Changing a *no* into a *yes* becomes operative when you understand the dynamics of client-salesperson relationships. Using the DEBA process establishes these relationships, and provides the framework within which you manipulate data, experience, and beliefs in order to influence action.

Expect to encounter some resistance. Arm yourself beforehand with this knowledge. That way, you can prepare for any resistance and learn how to turn it to your advantage.

Tackling resistance is part of a salesperson's job. You can either make it work for you or eliminate it by thinking about the situation or person at hand instead of the results you desire and the actions you are taking to attain them. Focus on building and maintaining a personal relationship based on the transmission of data and the tweaking of beliefs by providing good experiences. When the *D*, *E*, and *B* of DEBA are implemented, they result in the *A*, or action to buy.

First, determine *what kind of client you have*. Some people are risk-takers, others tend to be risk-avoiders. Other people will do whatever they can just to maintain their status quo. Ascertain which type you are dealing with by asking questions to discover as much information as you can about their needs, values, and ultimate desires, then linking that information to your product or proposal. This will involve sharpening your listening skills.

When you encounter resistance, *don't panic*—breathe and relax. To overcome resistance, remember: *People are more likely to believe something is true if they have discovered it on their own.* Customer's beliefs are often faulty, improperly based on their prior experiences. The resistance is not against *you* but against beliefs rising out of old experiences. Help clients see the light on their own, rather than to push your own agenda.

Because most irrational or erroneous beliefs are based on prior formative experiences, you must lead clients to the answer, rather than directly give it to them. *This is the most effective way to change someone's beliefs*, or to exert your influence. Want proof? Think back to when you were learning math. Whether you used an abacus or beans or apples, you were allowed to physically see why 2+2=4, rather than just being told to accept it. That experience of coming to the conclusion yourself shaped your belief.

This method helps the client to save face, a key to *influencing* them or changing their belief system. Influencing this way enables you to build your relationship with the client—not as a salesperson or teacher but as a peer. This change in roles happens so fast and discreetly that the influence parlay goes unnoticed by the client, but will be substantially reflected in your sales figures.

You can strengthen this relationship further by knowing that *being correct has nothing to do with human value*. When you strengthen the relationship, *you strengthen the influence you wield*. And, your influence with the client directly correlates with your sales numbers. SSE

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ACTION: Play your DEBA card in sales/service.

Engaging Employees

Seven factors play integral roles.

by Rich Enos

TODAY, WITH SO MANY PEOple working from home, feeling isolated or alienated from office-based teammates becomes *an occupational hazard*. Since our inception in 1999, we've worked to develop a certain culture. From surveying staff, to revisiting and re-emphasizing our core values, to establishing a *Culture Squad* that ensures that our core values are top-of-mind daily, we tried to build an *esprit de corps* culture with our home-based staff. We find that ***seven factors*** play integral roles in engaging employees, regardless of their location.

1. Communicate company values clearly and often. New employees take cues from their veteran office mates. In this respect, out-of-office employees are at a disadvantage. So *we ensure they understand exactly what is expected*. In meetings with managers, employees can discuss progress toward key metrics and more subjective contributions.

2. Foster a culture of candor. We encourage *open communication* and *honesty*. Daily 15-minute *huddles* enable field staff to vocalize to peers and team leaders any challenges they are facing. In turn, team leaders bring these issues to a regular end-of-day management team huddle. Our management team is aware of minor and major issues daily.

3. Play. *Have fun* is one of our core values. We're always looking for ways to make working at StudyPoint enjoyable. We've tried everything from scavenger hunts within our CRM platform to cartoon caption contests. Many of our enrollment-oriented contests are raffle-based, with prizes being awarded live on a company-wide conference call. Hearing coworkers cheer as a colleague wins an extra vacation day or an iPad boosts everyone's positivity.

4. Coach and train. To ensure that everyone on our team has the support they need, we assign *everyone* at StudyPoint a manager, coach, and mentor. Each serves a different role in developing team members. We've also created a culture that uses data to identify potential performance issues. We've invested heavily in communications technology to ensure that coaches and managers can observe behavior and offer both positive and constructive feedback. A key step is *selecting a coach whose track record has the respect of the team.* Coaches work with the team to create an environment of empathy, offer employees a sounding board, and advocate for those who show the most promise.

5. Water the grass on both sides of the fence. A major peril that can impact morale is an *us-versus-them* mentality between home and office-based staff. *It's easy for the grass to look greener on the other side*. So, we began company-wide activities that could span geographical distances to include everyone.

6. Mix things up. To ensure employees interact regularly with someone from another team, our weekly huddle schedule combines functional team meetings and territory-focused meetings. *These calls surface key issues* at the intersections of the work each team does and build the social bonds.

7. Let them show off. To celebrate accomplishments, we put a system of virtual *pats-on-the-back* in place. Email *Wins* are sent to *celebrate achievements* or *share positive feedback* from customers.

There are three key take-aways: 1) if you let your staff have a say, they'll find ways to make work fun and meet goals; 2) when you offer a *great employee experience*, you make your staff more productive, your recruiting and retention easier, and your bottom line better; and 3) *you'll enjoy your work more* if you know you're leading *people who enjoy their work*. The things our team does to make StudyPoint an *engaging workplace*—from the obvious to the zany—are a part of our culture and an *essential connection* for our home-based staff. SSE

Rich Enos is CEO of StudyPoint (www.studypoint.com), a leader in the private tutoring industry.

ACTION: Engage field people in these seven ways.

MANAGEMENT/ENGAGEMENT

Get Engaged

to your employees!

by Bob Kelleher

NOW IS THE OPTIMAL TIME to *get engaged*—to your employees! Yes, *your employees* are truly your greatest asset. So, why stay stuck in *dating* mode with your employees? You can't afford to pay *lip service* to employee engagement. So, take out the proverbial diamond ring and make a commitment to building a strong, long-term relationship with your employees.

Most companies (*80 percent)* are investing in employee engagement. While *job satisfaction* is needed to play, *engagement* is needed to win. Yet, of the 83 percent of employees who report being *satisfied* with their jobs, *only 68 percent felt passion and excitement about their work*, and *only 52 percent felt completely plugged in at work*. Most engaged employees (86 percent) say they often feel happy at work, compared to 11 percent of the disengaged.

Companies with *high employee engagement* see increases in their bottom line: On average they improved 19.2 percent in operating income, while companies with lower levels declined 32.7 percent.

Highly engaged organizations reduce staff turnover and improve performance.

Three C's of Engagement

Diamond rings are evaluated based on the 3 C's of *cut*, *clarity* and *color*. I see three ***Cs of Employee Engagement*** that all leaders should embrace:

• ***Communication is the cornerstone of engagement:*** Recognize the power of a robust communication plan, one built on *clarity*, *consistency*, and *transparency*. With today's technological advances, we're dealing with information overload. You now need to tell people a message *13 times* before they *hear* it. So, learn how to leverage the various communication venues available to you (especially social media) and how to tailor communications to reach vastly different generations in the workplace.

• ***Customize your engagement:*** Tailor your communication approaches, rewards and recognition programs, and training and development investments to the unique motivational drivers of each employee. *Treat people the way they want to be treated*.

• ***Create a motivational culture:*** you can't motivate employees long term; *you must create motivational cultures* where employees can flourish. A key engagement driver is showing empathy. You only get the *discretionary effort* of your employees when they are first convinced that *you genuinely care about them as people*!

If you are just *paying lip service* to *employee engagement*, everyone knows it. And employee motivation, productivity, *and the bottom line* will suffer. SSE

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ACTION: Practice the 3 Cs of engagement.

New Age of Marketing

Six ways to make your brand stand out.

by Timothy R. Pearson

MARKETING IN THIS NEW post Great Recession, data-abundant, Internet-oriented world order requires more than a superficial understanding of the customer or consumer—and more than simply *getting on* the new technology. It requires understanding that *the old ways of making brands stand out are dead*.

There are *new ways of doing things*. And, when executed properly, they can help you reinvent your brands to win in the global digital marketplace. So, recognize that *the fundamentals* have changed—as have *the means and methods* to define targets, to create more productive encounters that provide more opportunities to sell, to develop deeper insights, and to exploit singular points of difference.

Memo Marketers Missed

You need to reinvent your brands to keep pace with the changing marketplace. You need to know *what your brands are at the core* because if you don't, target audiences won't know either. The result of failure is that these highly segmented and globally scattered audiences simply *won't buy your products or services*.

The memo marketers missed is rooted in ***six essential and critical rules*** (and *23 principles*) that encompass a new way of examining, undertaking and optimizing *brand growth initiatives*.

Rule 1: Reinvent before you innovate. Why should a brand innovate only as a last resort? Simply, because innovations are a high-risk strategy that, more often than not, fails. Often, *outside the box* thinking isn't linked to consumer preferences or to the core essence of a brand. It's based on the mistaken notion that the company knows what consumers want from the brand better than its customers do.

Marketers mistakenly believe innovation is a response to consumer or customer needs. Not so. A brand's core essence is the underpinning for *reinvention*—not innovation—and is based on consumer and customer insights and results that *produce* sustainable competitive advantages. Reinvention creates profits—at much lower risk and less expense than a strategy that is solely innovation driven.

Rule 2: Build before you buy. Today, you need to fully understand the emotional benefits, functional benefits, product attributes, occasion appropriateness, and user imagery of the product or service to create the *optimal* architecture for a brand. It is imperative that marketing and the enterprise as a whole, share an understanding of the architecture, and how it is created and built for the long term.

The *multi-step process* of determining *brand architecture* begins with the *brand attribute or characteristic*, defined as *an objective, tangible feature of the brand*. This means defining why a brand is important to the target consumer or customer. Inevitably, this leads to the benefits that result from using the brand. Benefits are both functional—tangible, noticeable results or outcomes, like time saving or easy-to-use—and emotional—a psychological impact, like how it makes someone feel good or virtuous for using it (for example, using a *green* cleaning product).

Once you understand the *functional and emotional benefits* of the product or service, determine the *key drivers—the attributes or benefits that influence the decision to purchase or use a product or service*. To do this, look at the competition and define what the drivers are within the competitive frame of reference, including the functional and emotional benefits that are revealed by stated versus derived research.

Rule 3: Serve before you service. You need to know how your messages, executions, offers, and incentives are best and most effectively received (via traditional advertising and direct marketing or through e-mail, social networks, mobile or other web-oriented means) and ultimately responded to and acted upon by the consumer or prospect—and reinforced by the customer service brand experience.

Today, there is no excuse for not monitoring and rigorously evaluating ROI, or for treating (and serving) the customer as anything but an individual who may become a brand loyalist. Enhanced ROI depends on having a *clear strategy* built on a brand's essence, positioning, and understanding the customer as a person and not a number—resulting in *an all-encompassing brand experience* that drives customer loyalty and repeat sales. Knowing the relevance of a brand's positioning and the brand perceptions—creates repeatable events and repeat purchases.

Rule 4: Create value before you commoditize. Often, as products or services extend their reach, the core essence of the brand gets diffused and muddied or lost. However, the core essence is what makes the brand unique, so as it gets further away from its core, the brand is at risk of losing its differentiation and its distinctiveness. That loss makes a brand a commodity—something consumers or customers buy on price point, not desire. The brand goes from a *must have* to a *don't need*, especially now when customers and consumers' shopping habits are focused on *sales*, not simply *buying*.

Rule 5: Endure before you perish. *Profitable sales* are the ultimate determinant of *marketing effectiveness*. However, marketers should also be interested in creating, maintaining, and enhancing a brand's performance over time.

Brands with a loyal fan base drive dollars to the bottom line for years. Product sales may not matter, as they may be commoditized and seen as the same as a competitor's version, causing consumers and customers to shop on price and look for value. *Marketers want customers to value the brand so they'll buy it at a premium, not only when it's on sale*.

Brand loyalty is alive in enduring brands that can keep a company afloat during tough economic times or transition periods and business cycles.

Rule 6: Lead before you fail. Avoiding *failure* takes fortitude and boldness. Today, marketers must focus on the *opportunities* an economy in transition brings—its potential for change. The Great Recession has left consumers and customers feeling battered and adrift. Their choices of brands, therefore, are driven by necessity and by value. Become their choice by ensuring your key brand differentiators are nourished, refreshed, relevant, and reinvented. SSE

Timothy R. Pearson is president of Pearson Advisors and author of The Old Rules of Marketing are Dead *(McGraw-Hill) Visit www.pearsonadvisorsandpartners.com.*

ACTION: Renew your key brand differentiators.

Ask, Don't Tell

Use power questions to connect.

by Andrew Sobel

PERSONAL CONNECTION, *likeability*, and *trustworthiness* are the litmus test for doing business. We create these qualities not by knowing the right answers, but by knowing the right questions.

In an era of *unpredictability*, customers, vendors, and employees seek deeper, more intimate and engaged relationships that reduce risk. They want to partner with people they like and trust.

The ability to *connect with others* and *build trust* begins by *asking the right questions*—and letting people come up with their own answers. Telling creates resistance. Asking creates relationships.

Here are nine ways questions can transform your relationships:

- They turn one-dimensional, arms-length *business relationships* into *personal relationships*. When a relationship lacks personal connection, it lacks heart and soul; therefore, you are a commodity—a fungible expert-for-hire. A client—or your boss—can trade you out for a new model with no remorse. But when you connect personally, you transform the situation because *clients stick with people they like. Your expertise and competence get you in the door, but personal connection builds deep loyalty*.
- They make the conversation about the other person—not about you. Most of us don't care *what other people think*—we want to know first *if they care about us*. The need to be heard is a powerful motivating force. So, ask, *What do you think?* or *Can you tell me more?* When you make the conversation about you, others may think you are clever, but *you won't build trust or learn about them*.
- They cut through the *blah, blah, blah* and create *more authentic conversations*. Get people to focus on the issue by asking: *What is your question?* This is a tough-love question. People resist it, but *asking it forces them to clarify what advice they need from you*. You move faster toward authentic conversation.
- They help people clarify their thinking and enable you to help others see the true reality. Instead of saying, *We need to improve our customer service!* try asking: *How would you assess our customer service levels today?* Or, *How is our service impacting our customer retention?*
- They help you zero in on *what matters most* to the other person. When you ask *What should we be discussing today?* you connect with what matters to the person—and the conversation will help her see you as relevant and valuable.
- They help others tap into their passion for their work. Asking *Why do you do what you do?* motivates people. When they answer, they will light up and generate ideas that create real impact.
- They inspire people to work at a higher level. The late Steve Jobs often asked employees, *Is this the best you can do?* This question infused Apple's culture. Use it to stretch people.
- They can save you from making a fool of yourself. Before responding to a request or answering a question, seek more information about what the other person really wants. You might ask, *What would you like to know about me (my firm or product)?* Asking a *clarifying question* can save you huge embarrassment.
- They can salvage a disastrous conversation. When you make a serious error, apologize and then ask, *Do you mind if we start over?* People are forgiving. They want to have a great conversation with you. Asking this will disarm people.

Becoming a master questioner takes the pressure off you—you don't have to be *clever* and *witty* or *have all the answers*. The right questions unleash *innermost feelings*, *vibrant conversations*. They make people *like you*, *trust you*, and *want to work with you* (with that, *the battle is won*). SSE

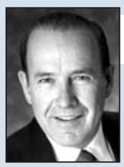
Andrew Sobel is coauthor with Jerry Panas of Power Questions *(Wiley). Visit www.andrewsobel.com*

ACTION: Become a master questioner.

SERVICE/CUSTOMERS

Coworkers as Customers

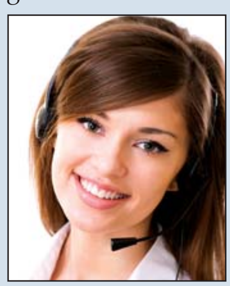
First provide the best service.



by John Tschohl

WHEN WE TALK ABOUT *customer service*, we usually think about how we deal with the people who walk through our doors—both physical and virtual—to purchase our products and services. However, we also have *customers* within our organizations—our *coworkers*.

Customer service means being responsive to a customer's needs and being resourceful in meeting those needs.



How you interact with coworkers and supervisors impacts the effectiveness of the team. When you treat them with respect, when you help them solve their problems and do their job, *your value as an employee increases dramatically*. Just as you do whatever it takes to satisfy a customer, you should do whatever it takes to help a coworker.

To ensure that the service you provide is exceptional, ***take seven steps***:

1. Develop a positive attitude. Your attitude is reflected in all you do. It not only determines how you approach your job and coworkers, it determines how they respond to you. *Don't complain*—and *don't hang around negative people.* Do what it takes to *get the job done right.*

2. Listen. You can't help a coworker unless you hear and understand what he needs. Listening shows that you care and provides you the information you need to do what needs to be done. Ask questions. Rephrase what your coworker says to ensure that you understand. Then decide how to move forward.

3. Solve problems. Great service pros quickly analyze a situation and decide what needs to be done to solve the problem. *Don't procrastinate.* Develop a plan, and handle the situation quickly.

4. Be accessible. Return phone calls and respond to emails soon. This sends the message that what your coworker needs is important to you and that *you are available and eager to assist*.

5. Be honest. If a task is outside your expertise or you can't meet the deadline, *admit it*. Then identify someone who has the expertise and the time to assist. Honesty earns respect. When you make a mistake, *admit it*, *apologize*, and *learn from it*.

6. Make coworkers feel valued. Recognize them with a smile. Call them by name. Make eye contact. Be attentive to what they say. Compliment them when they do a good job. Ask for their advice. Make them feel important.

7. Perform. *Deliver what you promise.* Send the message that your coworkers can depend on you. Do what you say you will do—and do it with quality, speed, and accuracy. If you say you are going to complete a report by Tuesday, do your best to complete it by Monday.

When you master the skills necessary to provide *exceptional customer service*, you'll earn the respect of your coworkers, be recognized and rewarded, *and satisfy your customers*. SSE

John Tschohl is a service strategist, president of the Service Quality Institute, and author of several books on customer service. Call 952-884-3311, email quality@servicequality.com, or www.customer-service.com.

ACTION: Provide service to your coworkers.

Increase Sales

Do it in 21 ways this year.

by Jim Cathcart

HERE ARE 21 WAYS FOR YOU to boost sales this year:

1. Prepare yourself to excel. Use a checklist to prepare your attitude, appearance, customer information, company and product information and the selling environment, so you can be at your best on every call.

2. Notice what is working. Study yourself, your product or service and your company to know what is working now. Reinforce the actions and tools, which are generating results. Learn from your successes as well as your failures.

3. Know your competitive advantage. Study your company and your products and services in relation to what your competitors offer. Know where and how you stand out, and where you don't. Be prepared to discuss these comparisons at any moment.

4. Improve your sales skill, not just your product knowledge. Don't rely on product knowledge to make you more persuasive. Sharpen your skills in reading people, describing your offer in compelling ways and in asking for the order at the right time.

5. Target the people who are your best prospects. Best customers have patterns. Most will fit the same pattern, so prospect among those who fit the pattern. Calling on people with similar needs, circumstances, and interests makes you more likely to create another best customer.

6. Know what to be curious about. Know in advance what questions to ask by knowing what answers you need. Cultivate a strategic curiosity. Learn to be curious about the things that will advance your chance of making a sale.

7. Realize who is in your market. Create a profile of the ideal market for what you offer. Define who they are, where they can be reached, what they care about, what they fear, what they read, whom they admire and more. Know them well.

8. Understand the person and their situation. Create an awareness of the psychological needs of your prospect as well as knowing what their technical needs are. Sometimes the way someone wants to feel has more influence on their decision to buy than what they actually need.

9. Find the diamonds in your own backyard. More business exists around you than you know. Look among your friends, neighbors, existing customers, past customers, colleagues, competitors and coworkers for the opportunities that others overlook.

10. Ask for specific referrals. Tell people what your ideal customer or prospect looks like. Ask them who they know who fits this description. Then ask them to take a *specific action* to help you meet the prospect; a telephone introduction, a testimonial letter, a luncheon or coffee shop meeting.

11. Manage your sales reputation. Determine today how you want to be thought of tomorrow. Specify the reputation you want within each group of which you are a part, and then work a plan to earn it piece by piece.

12. Grow your brand identity. Get yourself and your company known within your market area. Write articles, letters to editors, offer expert input for reporters and publishers, conduct surveys, provide free services to key people, donate your time to *worthy causes*, put your photo on your business card, share valuable ideas via email. Create a broad awareness of yourself as an authority on what you do.

13. Build a fortress of great relationships. It is not only who you know that determines the value of your relationships; it is whether they know you as a valuable business resource. Define who you need to know today and five years from today. Start now to cultivate the relationships and the reputation, which will expand your possibilities.

14. Learn to manage points of view. Half your job is keeping yourself and others in the right frame of mind. Cultivate your ability to keep the focus on the things that matter most. Become a person who can put everything in perspective for others.

15. Manage tension throughout the sales process. As tension rises, trust falls. Be aware of the ebb and flow of tension as the sale unfolds. Learn to reduce it when it gets in the way and to momentarily increase it to add urgency to the decision process.

16. Look like good news to your customer. The way you are perceived by your customer determines how much resistance you will encounter as you sell. Learn to project a positive feeling among those you communicate with. Become a partner in problem solving, not a sales persuader.

17. Cultivate a selling style that uses your sales strengths. Use the combination of online communication, in person calls, telephone contacts, trade show attendance, and public speaking, which allows you to shine. Build a mix of activities to diminish your sales *weaknesses* and amplify your *strengths*.

18. Give samples of the experience you represent. A movie ticket doesn't just buy you a seat in the theater; it buys you the experience of enjoying the movie. What experience does your product or service bring to people? Give them a way to sample that experience through your presentation.

19. Stay conscious of the meaning in what you do. When a person doesn't find much meaning in what they do, they don't bring much value to what they do. Write down specifically how your product or service makes life better for those who buy it. Read this description every day briefly, to keep in mind the reason behind the purchase. It's not about buying; it's about benefiting from buying.

20. Know when and how to ask for the order. Learn to recognize buying signals, how to ask differently with different people, when to let the customer sell himself, how to negotiate details and when to walk away. If you don't ask you don't get. But how you ask often determines success or failure.

21. Deserve to have loyal customers. Know how to cultivate dedicated clients. Become competition-proof by delivering more than people expect. Overfill your client's needs and be their business friend, even when they are not buying from you.

Be *the kind of person people rave about*. SSE

Jim Cathcart is a professional speaker, founder and president of Cathcart Institute, and author of 13 books, including The Eight Competencies of Relationship Selling. *Call 1-800-222-4883, email info@cathcart.com, or visit www.cathcart.com.*

ACTION: Boost your sales this year.

SALES/SLUMP

Making Sales

During tough times.

by Tom Hopkins

TO SUCCEED IN TOUGH TIMES, heed the saying, *When the going gets tough, the tough get going*. When business slows down, many people say, *I can't change the market, so I'll just ride out the recession*.

If that's how you think, I ask you, *where would we be if we all thought that way about our planet?* Simple awareness and desire in millions of people to improve the way we care for our planet is showing positive signs. The *gloom and doom* projections for the destruction of the earth, are being altered by you and your neighbors recycling aluminum cans, glass bottles and paper products. If you can make a difference in saving the planet, you can definitely do something about the effects of a recession.

The key to finding success within crisis lies in how well you handle what is happening. Succeeding or failing primarily depends on your *attitude*. In the good times you don't pay much attention to your attitude, but challenges are constant—the economic climate is always changing. Many changes that take place are caused by outside factors that you are powerless to control.

However, you can control how you react to a situation. Many salespeople tend to become inefficient in good times. They see all the great business they're doing today and fail to continue to take care of yesterday's business or prepare for tomorrow's business. They make keeping on top of the latest industry news a low priority. Then, when things get tough, they struggle. They've lost their competitive edge.

By *competitive edge*, I don't mean with the competition. I mean the competitive edge within the company—to make each department the most efficient and productive it can be tomorrow versus where it is today.

When you recognize you are in a slump, analyze what you're doing different today from when you were at your peak of performance. Good salespeople keep records and know what worked best and when. They don't just randomly try new things to turn business around. They rely on their knowledge and expertise to give them a solid footing from which to test new ideas.

One key to surviving a slump is having your overhead under control. However, don't be so thrifty that others think you're not doing well. Don't cut costs in *highly visible areas* if possible.

If you're having a tough time, no one should be able to tell by looking at you. Groom yourself. Take care of your sales tools. Keep your car clean and neat. Keep things looking good. In good times or bad, selling is still a numbers game. The salespeople who have the highest visibility make the most sales.

In tough times, remember: *many of your regular customers feel the pinch as well*. They might change what they do with you or seek lower quality materials or less service. *Don't let that happen*. Contact your best accounts weekly. Let them know you care. Give them positive news with each call. Let them feel *you're in it with them* and *they're important to you*. Sticking by them *builds loyalty*. Then, when the economy swings back around, they'll remember you!

If you believe that it's time to cope with a major challenge, set everything else aside and put all your energy into dealing with that challenge creatively.

By spreading positive thoughts and performing positive acts with the people around you, you can have a powerful impact on a problem or a person.

Your natural ability is not enough to make you successful in sales. *Natural skill*, combined with *how to training* is the secret to *high productivity*. I learned this lesson the hard way early in my career. After receiving training, I applied and refined techniques that enabled me to become an industry *sales leader*. SSE

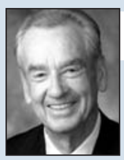
Tom Hopkins is a sales legend and trainers of sales pros. Visit www.tomhopkins.com.

ACTION: Make more sales this year.

SALES/MEETINGS

Meeting Mania

Stop wasting your time.



by Zig Ziglar

WE RECENTLY SURVEYED people: *What's the worst thing about meetings?* Over 1,600 people responded. The most common responses were:

- No clear purpose or objective.
- Not organized. No agenda.
- Too long. Doesn't start on time, stay on track, or finish on time.
- Boring. Nothing new or interesting.
- Not *inspiring* or *motivating*.
- Lack of interaction.
- Allowing attendees to ramble and repeat the same comments and thoughts.
- Allowing people to *ramble* and repeat comments and thoughts.
- Weak presenter (unprepared, not succinct, monotone, overly redundant).
- Repeating info for late arrivals.
- No action items or *walk-away points*.

Meetings are an important part of how we connect and communicate, how we learn, how we encourage, and how we inspire. Here are some tips:

If you're running a meeting: Don't do the things that annoy people. Be a grown-up. Respect your attendees by preparing well, communicating well, and valuing time (our most valuable commodity). Make it about making them better as a result of the meeting (and you'll be better for it too).

If you have *D-grunts* on your team (people who are *disgruntled* and mess things up), don't invite them if at all possible (then ask yourself why you're allowing them to be on your team). Life's too short to tolerate D-grunts.

If you're attending a meeting:

- ***Participate.*** Answer questions and be a part of the discussion where appropriate. Encourage the leader by being on their team and offering your thoughts and support. Forward this article if you think these ideas might help them. Avoid *D-grunts*. They don't make good things happen.
- ***Remember:*** Few meetings are perfect. Give people the break you'd like to be given (it's part of *Loving Your People*). That's it. No filling or killing time. Meet. Connect. Learn. Inform. Bam!

Short Messages

I've written short messages that can help you improve your team meetings.

- Go after a particular goal? *Cross The Line* to get there (this message is about *commitment* and perseverance).
- Encourage a little *extra effort and attention*? 212, the extra degree, might be just what your team needs to hear.
- Need to inspire a *positive attitude* toward customer service? *Smile and Move* can teach you what it means to serve.
- To inspire *accountability* to each other internally, *Love Your People* will help.
- You might find our *reminder pocket cards* to be inspirational. Our *tiny posters* make great motivational inserts. SSE

Zig Ziglar is the author of Born to Win. *Visit www.Ziglar.com.*

ACTION: Improve your sales meetings.

Developing People

Get higher engagement and results.

by Saundra Stroope

WE ALL KNOW THAT COMPANIES with engaged employees have higher performance and profits—and that *people don't leave companies, they leave bad managers*. We'll work longer hours and put in more effort for a manager that believes in us, supports us, and provides career development.

Why then do some leaders excel at developing employees? All leaders are responsible for producing business results and managing the work that needs to be done. What gets measured gets done, and most often leaders are expected to report to senior leadership on cost savings, quality improvements, and widgets produced. This becomes our measure of *leadership effectiveness*. In fast-paced environments, *the nice to have* goals for developing people that aren't being measured fall by the wayside and too often just don't get done.

It's not that leaders don't have good intentions, most do. After all, leaders are promoted in most cases for producing results and because someone provided coaching and development opportunities for them. Too often organizations forget to measure *true leadership effectiveness* and balance *business goals* with *goals for people development*.

When was the last time you were asked to report on:

- The number and frequency of *career development conversations* you've had with employees who report to you?
- The number of employees successfully promoted from your team?
- The number of developmental stretch assignments you've provided for people on your team?

Leaders that take personal responsibility for engaging and developing people without being asked to are the ones we all want to work for. We are willing to go above and beyond for them to produce business results.

How do you do it? It starts with getting to know the people who work for you. Have a *development conversation* and truly listen to find out what you can do to keep them. Try a few simple questions, for example:

- What do you like about what you do?
- Which part of your job is the most enjoyable to you?
- What would you like to learn?
- What are your *career goals/ambitions*?

Simply having the conversation is not enough. You then need to *take action* to show that you are truly interested in the employee's development. Simple actions could include:

1. Introducing the employee to key people in your network. You might invite a high-potential employee to a senior leadership team meeting or briefing. People want to know what's happening. If the leader isn't sharing information, employees build *their own network*, going around the leader and gathering information in other ways.

- ***True story***—One disengaging leader *hoarded information*. Employees discovered that this leader routinely printed e-mails on a shared printer and resorted to cruising by the printer during the day to read about decisions being made that affected the team. The team gathered at lunch without the leader to compare notes and discuss their future.

Sharing information openly, providing the avenues to it, and discussing information, creates an open culture.

2. Finding ways to help the employee find more challenging assignments if they are bored. Too often poor leaders resort to keeping employees stuck with work tasks they are good at but have always done and hold people back from achieving potential. Worse, in challenging times some leaders remove work that the employee enjoys and have them focus only on the mundane work that *must* be done.

- ***True story***—I've met many successful people who apply for a promotion or new work and are asked to stay in their current position because the current leader needs them, they are the best at what they do, and it's in the best interest of the organization.

The best leaders have developed a successor to fill that position. When it's time for the employee to move to a new enriching assignment there is a plan in place to fill the role. The best leaders find a way to meet the needs of the organization and the person.

3. Giving an employee the opportunity to make decisions. You give up some control over the situation by giving the employee the latitude to determine when and how the work gets done, but you can then focus on *measuring results* (not *dictate approaches)*.

- ***True story***—One disengaging leader had trouble delegating. He would often ask employees to do an assignment and then begin to work on the assignment or ask others to begin working on the assignment. The results—unclear and back door communication channels, confusion over who's doing what and near misses with poor decision making. Don't delegate an assignment to more than one person.

View *challenging situations* as *opportunities for employees to learn and grow*. If you aren't certain people can handle the assignment on their own, *help them form a team* that can provide input, be clear about responsibility and roles, and point the employees to resources for coaching.

4. Be honest and transparent with employees and provide both positive and corrective feedback about their work. The best leaders provide honest feedback regularly and don't surprise employees about how they performed on an annual performance appraisal.

- ***True story***—Working for a leader who isn't transparent and honest with communications is challenging. One overly demanding leader set unrealistic deadlines and demanded work be completed and turned in for approval on dates the leader was on vacation. This leader provided mostly negative feedback. More time was spent *criticizing* rather than *helping* employees improve.

People want to know how they are performing—and receive both positive and corrective feedback. Being truthful and providing corrective feedback in a constructive manner helps employees who want to improve perform better on the next assignment.

Stop the Horror Stories

Many *true stories* are *horror stories*, not *fairy tales*. Becoming an *engaging leader* means being a leader that people *want* to follow. Set a goal for growing and developing people, and they will go *above and beyond* to produce results. SSE

Saundra Stroope is Talent Management and OD Manager at ATK. Email saundrastroope@yahoo.com.

ACTION: Boost engagement and results.

SERVICE/CUSTOMERS

Lost Customers

Learn more about them.

by Chip R. Bell

FORENSICS IS THE EXAMINAtion of evidence using a variety of disciplines to arrive at a conclusion or insight. It's often used as a *postmortem examination* of hidden customer information to determine the real cause for the loss of the customer. It entails a timely investigation before facts and perceptions are *contaminated* by customer memory loss —thus curbing *future customer turnover*.

A shotgun approach to customer intelligence risks missing the mark and often triggers lukewarm initiatives that only address symptoms. However, armed with *customer intelligence*, you can launch *preventive measures* to read early signals of impending customer departure, and implement more efforts targeted at fixing deeper problems that contribute to customer turnover.

Motive, Opportunity, Alibi

Police Science 101 informs us that the building blocks for solving a crime are *motive*, *opportunity* and *alibi*. I use a similar framework for *customer forensics*.

• ***Alibi.*** The excuse used for not being the perpetuator was either *false or not credible*. You need to rule out all *natural influencers* to customer churn, since they are like *alibis*—they camouflage the real reason a customer leaves. Isolate reasons that are *organizationally caused*. If your retail store has a spike in sales in December, you need to seasonally adjust sales figures *over several years* to know if it was due to *holiday buying* or to *something you did to ramp up sales*.

Look for peaks, valleys and patterns to customers' departures to spot aberrations in churn and discern *what factors contributed to customer departures*. Then ferret out any clues that follow demographic patterns (predominately customers in a particular location, city size, climate). Ethnographic or psychographic filters can ascertain if departed customers fit a *homogenous social niche*.

• ***Opportunity.*** This implies that *the facts put the perpetrator in a position to do the deed*. Look for ways to *exit interview* departing customers, since these interviews enable you to *save a customer* and *create a learning opportunity* at the juncture when reasons for exit are clear, raw and sharp. *Opportunity analysis* can also be enhanced with *truth syrup*. Truth *serum* is used to get a person to disclose truth *without control* over what's revealed. Obviously, this wouldn't be advised for customers! So, use *Truth Syrup* to incent bashful customers into telling the *real reason* they departed. You might hold a non-judgmental *Be Frank* discussion or reception for *customers who have left*.

• ***Motive.*** *Motive* suggests that *the perpetuator of the dirty deed had a reason to do it*. Motive assessment involves direct communication with the departed customer to learn motives for leaving. It is a *learning orientation*, not a *sales* or *marketing orientation*. While *customer forensics* insights can help shape a customer win-back strategy, their practices must never be mixed. *Forensics* takes an attitude of *curiosity*, *discovery* and *openness* to divergent learning—a willingness to be drawn into the world of the former customer. *Marketing* is more about *attracting* or *drawing customers to organizations*.

Ask assessment questions to learn the reasons that cause customers to have *reservations*, to learn the *defining incident* that represents the tipping point—*what caused you to decide to no longer be our customer*, *what features or actions left you disappointed or angry*, *what incident was the final straw in your decision to leave*, or *what steps can we take to keep customers like you?*

Since customer expectations are continually changing—and rising—gain intelligence from customers who leave. As the Polish adage goes: *A guest sees more in an hour than a host sees in a year*. To reverse *insider blindness*, *view the organization through the lens of former customers*. SSE

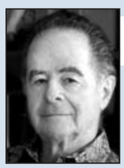
Chip R. Bell is author (with John Patterson) of Wired and Dangerous *and director of the Center for Customer Forensics. Visit www.chipbell.com.*

ACTION: Learn more about your lost customers.

MANAGEMENT/PEOPLE

Managing People

Achieve the desired results.



by John Featherstone

MANY PEOPLE ARE WELL organized and disciplined to do *what is important*—and other people are busy all day, yet when you look closely, you will see that little or nothing is accomplished that contributes to their success or to the success of the business. No business can afford to allow such people to carry on day after day with little or no results. Here is a way to help people make greater contributions:

First, recognize that every job is divided into two basic time elements. There is *committed time* where the person has duties and responsibilities that must be performed at a specified frequency. This rarely requires all the hours available; in fact, these tasks probably only demand half of the employee's time. The difference is ***discretionary time*** where people can decide how this time is to be spent, constructively or otherwise. During this time, progress is either made or wasted. No one works at 100 percent productivity, yet an increase of 50 percent means an employee is now working at 75 percent effectiveness—and *that's very good*.

So, first establish a Project/Priority List with headings that look like this across the top: *Proj. | Priority | Est.Date | Name of Project | ____% Complete*.

• Keep a Project/Priority List for each employee.

• Meet with the person weekly, same time and day for a review of results.

• Have the person provide you with an updated Report for the meeting.

• Add projects as needed at the weekly meeting, after discussion of details.

• As you think of a new project to assign, pencil it on last week's Report.

• Agree with subordinate on priority and estimated completion dates.

• Glancing at the Report gives you a *picture of progress*. Comment accordingly.

• When projects are behind schedule, determine why, what needs to improve.

• You can see from the pattern where the person spends discretionary time.

• There should be no surprises about missing a project completion date.

• You'll know when the person needs support or help, or doesn't have the skills.

• These Reports will help you when *evaluating performance* for *pay adjustment*.

• The person will know how effective he/she has been at any time.

• Use this Reporting System as a basis for helping people grow.

• This system is an effective means for tracking their growth potential.

• Serious performance problems will be evident early, so take remedial action.

• The person has a ready-made list of accomplishments to refer to.

The company and employee benefit from *better results* using this system. SSE

John Featherstone is a Consultant and author of Start Hiring Winners. *Visit starthiringwinners.com.*

ACTION: Establish a project/priority list.

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