SALES AND SERVICE

Excellence

THE MAGAZINE OF TEAM LEADERSHIP

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Great Brands

Show Conviction

Service Eye Candy

Managing Perception

John Patterson
Customer Service Consultant

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SERVICE/RETENTION

Service Eye Candy

Go for attraction and retention.

by Chip R. Bell and John R. Patterson

EYE CANDY. IT IS SUCH A COOL LABEL. IT should be a phrase that has a terrific reputation. After all, who doesn't like candy? And, "a sight for sore eyes" is clearly a positive and encouraging statement. Most of us see way too much *plain vanilla* and *drab stuff* in our lives.

Unfortunately, *eye candy* has a shady reputation. It has come to mean *attractive but superficial*. It's like the apple that Snow White ate—it looks tempting to take a bite, but at the end of the day it will put your customers in a deep sleep and not nourish them long-term.

Customer service can be like eye candy—look good on the outside but have no depth or quality on the inside. We sometimes call it *window dressing* or make reference to *pigs with lipstick*. You get a sense of potential service eye candy when you spot signs or posters reminding you how important you are as a customer. Then, you get confirmation it is only for attraction when no one who tries to serve you has apparently read any of the signs!

One of our favorite examples of service eye candy is the recorded message: "Your call is very important to us," followed by a 30-minute wait for a call center rep. Or, the phrase "satisfaction guaranteed or your money cheerfully refunded," followed by fine print laced with exceptions or a stack of forms to be completed at the returns counter. E-tailors promise *free shipping* but then send your package via pony express.

What is the bigger problem with "All hat; no cows" as a Texan might say? Since today's customers are wired, and therefore potentially dangerous, their reach and influence can overnight wreck a reputation.

Attraction Without Retention

Customers enjoy the attractiveness of a great customer experience. But, if it is only service eye candy, they may take you to the party once, but don't count on a second date. Service excellence comes in making certain service is more than skin deep. It takes managing the core of service—that part we often take for granted until it either fails or is in peril of failing.

Think of *service basics* as *service air*—we don't notice the air we breathe until it is missing or jeopardized. A great service experience on an airline flight might include a smiling, knowledgeable flight attendant, gourmet food, or comfortable seats. But, it all becomes service eye candy if the flight lands in the wrong city or four hours late. The gourmet meal recollection will be totally overwritten by the nightmare of food poisoning because the restaurant failed to pay attention to routine health standards. Service air might be boring stuff, but it is called "air" for a reason!

God Is in the Details

"God is in the details," wrote architect Miles van der Rohe. The essence of his adage has always been a precept of great customer service. Customers use detail management as an indication of a service provider's commitment to delivering a positive service experience. But, there is a profound element

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of detail management that service providers often miss or misunderstand.

Customers judge whether the basics have been done through concrete, irrefutable outcomes. Passengers and pilots mutually know if the flight they share landed two hours late. The truth that the bank statement contained errors can be proven convincingly to both the perpetrator and the recipient.

Customers also judge service air through their perception of the experience—the assessment is in the eye of the beholder. Its weight and influence lies in how it assumes a grander impact on the evaluation of the overall experience. A bus driver with obvious alcohol breath is not just about the driver's personal habits. A nurse with dirty hands says more to a patient than simply untidy hygiene. As customers, our perceptions can take us beyond what we observe to what we conclude. And, when those conclusions leave us anxious about the outcome, *the message* to a service provider is irrefutable: be a constant guardian of the details.

Managing Perception

The customer's propensity to connect rational facts with irrational assumptions is the substance and the challenge of service air. It led author Tom Peters to conclude "customers perceive service in their own idiosyncratic, irrational, end-of-the-day and totally human terms. Perception is all there is." Service wisdom lies in appreciating its complexity, understanding its impact, and sheparding the details that trigger angst in customers.

1. Listen for customer anxiety. We were doing a focus group interview with some front-line employees of a large hospital. The discussion turned to patient anxiety. There were comments about patients not always being candid with caregivers if patients were uneasy about their welfare. "We were swamped one day," said one nurse, "and it took me longer than normal to respond to a maternity ward patient's call button. Since she had been only two centimeters dilated five minutes earlier, I was confident her call was not an emergency. When I got to her room, she was hysterical. She finally calmed enough to tell me she could not locate her lunch menu. I thought it odd that something so small would make her so upset. But, as I was leaving her room, she asked, 'How soon will you come if my new baby is in serious trouble?' I got a new insight into the symbolism behind the call button."

2. Screen for customer fear. We were assisting a construction company with customer forensics on a major customer who had yanked his business in anger. While sifting through correspondence between the departed customer and the construction company, their marketing director commented, "We've given this poor customer several reasons to keep him up at night."

The comment triggered a renewed look at the data—not as evidence of anger, but as examples of anxiety. The fresh interpretation triggered a deeper understanding of factors that signaled to this customer his construction project was in jeopardy. Without the project, his business was at risk of bankruptcy. Without his business, his upwardly mobile wife would likely leave him. With a history of heart problems, the chain reaction could threaten his life. His outbursts of anger were a cover for his fear-laden cries for help—all misinterpreted as simply the grumblings of a high-maintenance customer.

3. Talk to the customer's sounding board. Any kid who owned a pet no doubt used it as sounding board. Timid or shy at school, one could be courageously outspoken and heroic with Rover or Boots. Customers often have someone with a patient ear to hear their grievances. Candid conversations with the customer's confidants can yield *understanding* of how the customer truly feels about their experience. For example, when John Longstreet (now CEO of Quaker Steak and Lube) was GM of a large hotel, he realized the hotel was frequented by the same taxi drivers eager to transport guests to DFW airport. John reasoned that guests would more likely volunteer candor to the taxi driver than to answer the desk clerk's "How was your stay?" question. He set up focus group meetings with the drivers. Their conversations revealed many ways to improve service and subtle aspects of the guests' sights-sounds-smells rarely found on a comment card. Missing toilet items signaled poor accuracy; scorched-smelling towels implied the potential for a hotel fire; and a poorly lighted parking lot brought worries about safety in hotel hallways.

Major in the Majors

Smart organizations *major in the majors* to ensure customers reliably get exactly what they expect from the organization. But, they also *major in the minors*, taking initiative to care for and protect subtle but vital service hygiene. Without service hygiene, all manner of service enhancements, decorations, and innovations will be viewed by customers as *service eye candy—trappings without substance* and *enticements without entitlements*. SSE

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ACTION: Manage customer perceptions.

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Executive Excellence Publishing

Great Brands

They all have four attributes.

by Jean Van Rensselar

BIG COMPANIES SPEND BIG money on branding campaigns that often fall apart. But a small company that spends limited marketing dollars on a focused strategy grounded in sound branding principles can become the brand to beat.

An effective branding campaign with lasting results is *the* most complex marketing activity an organization can undertake. It is a *significant* project. No one should go into a branding effort half-heartedly or without a full commitment to success: A failed branding campaign is much worse than having none at all. When it's abandoned, clients will conclude one of three things: 1) your company lacks strong leadership; 2) your company has fallen on hard times; and 3) your company is out of business.

Conversely, successful branding will lead clients to conclude that you have a *robust organization* with *strong leadership*.

Given that branding is so complex and the strategy is different for every organization, I won't get into the nuts and bolts of strategy; rather I'll present four hallmarks of a truly great brand.

1. The message creates a connection to the company. If you're like most people, you know a million *messages/taglines*, but don't know which companies they belong to. Surprisingly, even some of the most memorable taglines have very low company recognition. This means, that as far as those companies are concerned, they would be better off not having a message at all.

The goal is to present the message in a format that people can easily remember (such as a *tagline*) and attach it to the organization. The best way to do that is to create a *message* that incorporates the company name or its product —*Built Ford Tough, Got Milk*? This is the idea behind jingles, which are enjoying a resurgence—*Nationwide is on Your Side*. The company in this case is clear, but sadly the message is not compelling.

2. The message is clear and succinct. A well-articulated brand—one that clearly and simply lets customers know why they should buy from you—is a memorable brand. Branding guru Rob Frankel said, "Simply stating something clearly in a society weaned on weak generalities is the first step toward standing out from the crowd and creating a solid brand."

Don't outsmart yourself—don't spend so much time trying to be clever that no one understands the point you're trying to get across. This is a big issue with both humor and acronyms. They rarely work. Lest you think you've got a great idea for a branding acronym, rest assured that at this point all the great acronyms that roll off the tongue and are easy to remember, like NASA and UPS are legally taken (most snapped up by government and armed forces organizations years ago).

CDW represents an increasingly common practice of using an acronym to *reverse brand*. CDW started life as Computer Discount Warehouse, but as it grew executives wanted to lose the discount image, so they re-branded with the acronym. BP and the NAACP have done the same. The names of both organizations are now officially just the acronyms. It's a way around changing a name that's no longer relevant without having to completely rebrand with a new company name.

3. The message is credible. Every company thinks their message is credible. In truth, your branding message probably falls somewhere toward the *low end* of the branding scale—between *meaningless* and *an insult*. Organizations with a message that insults their customers are relying on a message alone to correct a serious deficiency. They mistakingly assume that whatever customers think is wrong with their company is all in their heads. Have you ever noticed that organizations with infamous reliability issues brand with messages like, *You Can Count on Us*—as if the mere fact of stating something will erase all evidence to the contrary.

The same applies to using the word *guarantee*. If you're going to use that word in your branding campaign, it will only be meaningful if the terms of the guarantee are clear and you take the onus of backing the guarantee on yourself (the customer has to do as little as possible to take advantage of the guarantee and the result is worth the time expended). What exactly is a *freshness guarantee* or something like *if you find our products cheaper at another store, we'll refund the difference*. For someone to take advantage of this, he would have to buy something at your store, find it cheaper somewhere else, and go back to your store with the proof and the receipt. For most people, the price difference would have to be at least $50 to make it worthwhile.

But marketers tell themselves that no one is going to figure out the logistics of actually taking advantage of a guarantee. I guarantee that they do. If not explicitly then implicitly. If you saw a guarantee like that on a $20 pair of hedge clippers what would you think? Don't insult your customers. The bottom line is that for a branding message to be credible, it needs to resonate—to make sense to consumers even if they can't articulate exactly why.

4. The message is compelling. The message needs to make people want to go out and do something—purchase your products or services, join your organization, or at least take a serious look at what you have to offer. Messages that are clever for the sake of being clever tend not to do that, but seemingly boring messages often do. On its face *You're in Good Hands* is a boring message. There's nothing clever or funny about it. No play or words, no acronym, no strategically bankrupt pizzazz. It's a solid message with proven success. Allstate knows that trust is key when choosing insurance and they know how to convey that message.

This is all a lot to ask from a simple branding message, but it can be done. It won't be done by a committee where people vote based on their likes and dislikes, rather than potential effectiveness. History shows that *many of the all-time greatest brands were built by one strong focused leader*—Sam Walton or Henry Ford. Branding experts believe that *only strong leaders make strong brands possible*—an extension of the theory that all companies are inextricably tied to the personalities of their founders. SSE

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ACTION: Build a great brand.

SERVICE/LOYALTY

Create Loyalty

Increase sales, keep customers.

by John Anderson

MANY ORGANIZATIONS claim to provide *good service* and say that they are *rated highly* in Customer Satisfaction Surveys. In truth, *Customer Satisfaction* is a poor indicator of your chances to retain customers and increase your business. A focus on the *customer experience* is far more productive.

Customer Loyalty is the best metric for determining the value you create. *Satisfaction* is a weak predictor of *loyalty.*

About 70 percent of customers who defect to competitors say they were *satisfied* or *very satisfied!* If a supplier of a comparable product or service enters with a better deal, they are gone in a heartbeat because there is *no loyalty*, only a *transactional relationship*.

Do you understand your customer's *buying* and *utilization* experience? Have you tried to create *customer intimacy* by learning your customer's business? If not, you can't act as a *valued partner*. You're relegated to *vendor* or *supplier* and can't provide anything except your product or service. Does your sales and support process accommodate your customer or pull them through it?

The Loyalty Effect. *Emotionally satisfied customers* deliver a *23 percent premium* in terms of share of wallet, profitability, revenue, and relationship growth!

Developing *loyal customers* requires developing the X-Factor—*emotionally satisfied customers*. Day-to-day actions of your sales and service team—how they create value for your customers—is the key to building *emotional bonds* that drive *customer loyalty*. By understanding your customer's cycle and aligning your organization in a supportive manner, you build *emotional satisfaction* vs. *rational satisfaction*. Asking about their business instead of telling about yours, showing interest in how your product is used and effects your customer's customer builds *emotional satisfaction* and *customer loyalty*.

Rationally satisfied customers believe they received the right product or service at an acceptable cost/value relationship, but they'll quickly change providers if they can receive equal or greater value. If the product/service is comparable, *emotionally satisfied customers will stay with you* while rationally satisfied customers will move on.

What Can You Do?

You can *standardize your service/selling process*: create a common service-selling language; develop customer-centric behaviors; build world-class attitudes and beliefs; and capture best practices and replicate them. Develop surveys and diagnostics to learn about your customers and their processes and then do the same for your organization. Assess how well your processes align with those of your customers and how consistently your customer-facing people apply those processes. How easy do they make it to do business with your company? You say that you are *customer friendly*, but what happens when customers do something that doesn't match internal processes?

As consumers, we're frustrated by companies who only know their way to do things and don't seem to care if that way is inconvenient or ineffective. *I'm sorry, I can't do that*. Or, *We don't do that here*. Or, *I'll have to ask my boss and get back to you*. Or my favorite, *No*!

Use the knowledge obtained from your internal and customer diagnostics to impact the relationship. Ensure your people are *walking the talk*—and that your customers know it. Touch your customers regularly and create strong relationships with multiple points of contact. Visit their place of business and invite them to yours. Make your product or service an integral part of their business and know their market and their customers.

Developing *customer loyalty* increases your top and bottom lines. **SSE**

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ACTION: Create the Loyalty Effect with customers.

SERVICE/SECRET

Great Service

Learn and apply the secret.

by David Reed

WHAT IS THE SECRET TO creating a culture of great customer service? Since *service excellence* can lead to *customer loyalty* and *long-term success*, you might try to answer this question. Here are two keys to creating a *service culture*:

1. Remove obstacles. Many people have great intentions of providing exceptional service when they report to work, but something gets in the way and prevents the execution of their intent. Obstacles can come in many forms, including: systems and policies, a culture of *No*, and no delegation of authority.

2. Hire the right people. Employees must have an *innate desire* to serve others. This is difficult to determine in a short interview, so I suggest giving the candidate several scenarios to consider and have them tell you *how they would handle each situation*. You might tell from their responses if they are persons who will look for ways to go beyond what is expected to delight customers. They must have a passion for what they do, and not merely look at their work as a *job*, but as a chance to positively impact people's lives. Almost every job has the capacity to make a difference in some way by how you interact with a customer or co-worker.

For example, most nurses are technically competent and say the right things to the patients. Fewer have *compassion* and sense a patient's needs and go out of their way to comfort them.

When I worked at Walt Disney World, every cast member was expected to pick up trash and throw it away (I still do). Most cast members did it; some refused to pick up trash. You may think this is no big deal, but having a clean park is *very important* to Disney guests, and cast members with the broom and trashcan need help to keep the parks to this high standard.

Most service employees will provide assistance as needed, but only a handful will consistently *show empathy* for the customer's situation. Those agents will provide *Level 5* service! Providing customer service training can motivate employees to treat customers as they'd like to be treated. This helps you get most of them to deliver *Level 4* service. A customer who receives *Level 4* service is *satisfied,* not likely to complain, but someone who receives *Level 5* service is likely to *return* and *refer* their friends and family members to you. *Level 5* service doesn't come just from training.

Organizations known for *world-class customer service* find, train, and retain employees who daily provide service that customers brag about and keep coming back. And, employees who *enjoy serving others* are happier. **SSE**

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ACTION: Hire the right people and train them.

Brand Community

Let consumers join the club.

by Kate Benson

IN TODAY'S HYPER-PACED, sound-bitten world, digital marketing allows a brand to become multidimensional. Not only can a brand be broadened to represent a company and its lines, it can become almost a *living organism*. By becoming digitally *inclusive*, a brand can give its audience the chance to gain access past the gates—and join the *exclusive* brand *community*.

Attitude vs. Ego. Technology has impacted different aspects of fashion, retail, beauty and luxury industries. These communities have expanded, allowing anyone to give commentary, display designs, distribute retail goods or communicate ideas and ideals of fashion. Social media has led the way for aspirants—dreamers and competitors, young hopefuls looking to participate in the discussion. These are people who *love*, not those who are *professionally obligated*. The amateurs coerce freshness out of old perspectives. Their approach is to forgo their Ego in lieu of their Id, making their ideas novel and raw. They perform on a digital stage, one that gives young designers and retailers a platform and instant audience. Of course, the Internet, for those who use it effectively, has magnified what we already knew about these industries. Now, however, we can not only see things clearer and faster—we can participate and self-declare our own voices, a designer's worst critic. Retail must embrace this change, as there is no longer a wall between the design and its consumer.

Can Do vs. Have Done. It's not easy to keep secrets from the media. Some retailers and designers praise this accessibility, as it gives a collection mass coverage. Tom Ford, however, made this approach blasé, with his latest collection last September. Under a hushed veil of secrecy, Ford hosted a fashion show, equipped with cocktails, at his Madison Avenue menswear store. Rather than pluck girls from agencies, he had friends (Julianne Moore, Rita Wilson, Marisa Berenson, Daphne Guinness, Beyonce and It-Girl models Amber Valletta, Daria Werbowy and Liya Kebede) sashay down his runway. Ford only allowed 100 journalists at the showing. He spoke about each model with a sense of knowledge, friendship, and humor. His show was full of commentary, encouraging laughter. Cameras and camera-phone photography was forbidden to prevent immediate streaming of his designs. Ford created buzz for the show by distancing his collection from the one force that designers use to create buzz—the Internet.

Vision vs. History. What has caused fashion shows to go viral? In a sense, isn't a fashion show like a movie, book or piece of art? Would you expect a director to produce six Oscar-worthy films within a year? Designers and editors haven't been given the time to digest a show, when

it is demanded that they travel the world season after season producing or critiquing them. The virtual fashion show allows designers to stream their art in real-time. Whether this condensed experience is better or worse than the real thing, is too personal a question. It's similar to asking whether emotions can be felt through a text or an email, rather than a handwritten letter. You may be surprised at the range of responses, based on the age of the individual answering.

Buyers no longer just go to the stores, feel the fabrics and see the merchandise on the floor, they are now purchasing based on number crunching, and textures viewed through a computer screen. The collections are endless, and there's constant demand for change. Some designers, such as Christopher Bailey of Burberry, have the vision to take their art and make it mass. They know how to press *Refresh* and have been praised for their technological savviness. Others such as Alber Elbaz of Lanvin are self-declared romantics—cherishing the traditional beauty and history of fashion. It's not a question of whether such experiences will go on the Internet, but a matter of perfecting the formula—figuring out a way to give the world an immediate glance of your art, and somehow make it feel personal.

Dialogue vs. Monologue. In modern companies, offices are opening up. While the corner office still has a window view, perhaps the CEO is joining the rest of the group, and maybe even sitting next to an intern. This dynamic creates a democracy, a dialogue, which will only better the company as a whole, as it allows young newcomers to lend a fresh perspective to the top heads. The monologue of a CEO is no longer the only opinion in the room—there needs to be a constant conversation about the state of the industry to not only remain relevant, but with hopes of staying above the grain.

New vs. Known. How do *well-known brands* become applicable to consumers today? Look at companies such as Estee Lauder, TAG Heuer, Chanel or Dior—they are all established, successful and have history. These universal brands need to remain pertinent to a younger audience, one which prefers everything to be of the newest and latest. Commercial endorsements tie celebrities, musicians, or even certain models, to brands. In this way, a brand can associate itself with any celebrity it feels represents its personality. An individual can become the *face* of a brand, and contractually embody the label's attributes, so that a consumer will see the brand and think of the A-lister, or vice versa. Julie Roberts is now tied to Lancome; Leonardo Dicaprio is associated with TAG; Lady Gaga is MAC's new It-Girl. All of these brands are able to be compelling because they have chosen ambassadors who can be effective on their behalf.

Brand stewardship needs to be positioned at the forefront. People want to hear a compelling story and the best way for your products to tell one is through the brand. Give the consumer a chance to be a brand ambassador because once they become part of your community, they will fight for you, especially if you make it as easy as a click of the mouse. **SSE**

Kate Benson is a founding managing director of Martens & Heads, focuses on senior-level placements within the lifestyle practice and specializes in general management, sales, marketing, human resources and operations.

ACTION: Create a brand community.

MANAGEMENT/BUY-IN

Managing Buy-In

Celebrate authentic engagement.

by Steve Benjamin

LEADERS AND MANAGERS often seek advice about how to achieve employee *buy in* to the vision, goals, strategies, and values. You will never get *everyone* to buy in to *anything*. So, stop trying to achieve the unachievable. You need to set realistic expectations and manage critical soft systems to deliver excellent performance, despite i*ncomplete engagement* with the strategic direction.

Levels of engagement. Employees may demonstrate authentic, ritualistic, or dysfunctional levels of engagement with core drivers—vision, mission, goals, strategies, and values. A small percentage of employees may, at any time, be *authentically engaged* (genuine connection with strategic direction) or *dysfunctionally engaged* (overtly or covertly disruptive to strategy execution). *Ritualistic engagement* (meeting minimum expectations) characterizes most employees—those sandwiched between the ends of the normal curve.

Celebrating Authentic Engagement. Leaders desire *authentic engagement*—total "buy in" to the strategic direction. You'll know when employees arrive at this level of engagement: 1) they participate *actively and joyfully* in group sessions where you discuss developing and delivering on the vision, mission, and values; 2) they show genuine excitement, interest, and commitment for the strategic direction; 3) they explore methods of aligning their departmental and personal work to the strategy; 4) they offer meaningful ideas for improving direction and operations, and 5) they seek greater responsibility in support of your mission.

Celebrate and reward their *authentic buy-in*. Consider them for your leadership development program, since they value where you are going and want to be part of your future success. This group represents a tremendous resource that can be leveraged; they should be viewed as future leaders.

Responding to Ritualistic Engagement. The *authentically engaged* group represents only about 15 to 20 percent of employees. Implement *systems* that respond effectively to help move another 60 percent of employees into the *ritualistically engaged zone*. Help them see how their day-to-day work must contribute to the strategic goals. Provide them with checklists, on-the-job training, expert systems, effective supervision, incentives, and other structures that require specific performance.

Managers working with employees who are not *authentically engaged* must *inspect what they expect*. Hopefully, soon *ritualistically engaged* employees will move to *authentic engagement*. They'll see that *aligned best practices are easier to employ* and *deliver better performance*.

Limiting the damage caused by Dysfunctional Engagement. About 5 to 10 percent of employees may be *dysfunctionally engaged*. They waste time and other resources; do not participate in team meetings—or are negative or off task; act subversively (derail improvement efforts through their talk and actions); act in opposition to your values; view professional development/training as a *waste of time*; and refuse to follow procedures.

Talk frankly with these people and *provide direct feedback* regarding *needed improvements* related to *helping deploy strategy*, *living the values*, and *performing their work* according to best practices. Goals must be set and achieved within a specific time. Counsel *dysfunctionally engaged people* out. Ensure that the *interview and selection process* seeks to determine, among potential employees, *their likely future engagement* with the strategy, values, vision, and mission.

Recognize *the three types of engagement* among employees, and *actively manage engagement* for your benefit. SSE

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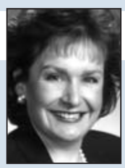
ACTION: Create authentic engagement.

MANAGEMENT/ENGAGEMENT

Driving Engagement

Achieve better bottom-line results.



by Janet Boulter

ARE YOUR EMPLOYEES ENgaged in your vision, mission, strategy, and goals? Or do they just show up, put in time? Today, you need to provide *all employees* with *engagement opportunities*. Turnover has a negative impact on profitability, quality, and morale. High *employee turnover* correlates with high *customer turnover*. The more turn, churn, and burn you have with employees, the more your customers will shop your competitors.

To engage your people, take these ***seven steps***:

1. Individual connection. Help your employees to *make a connection* between their heart (passion) and their work beyond achieving tasks and goals. Help them understand their contribution and make an *emotional connection* between their work, product/service delivery, and bottom line.

2. Personal accountability. People need to know *what is expected of them*—professionally and personally. Beyond having a position description that outlines *required duties* and *needed skills*, list expectations on what it takes to drive performance. Help employees see how their role fits into the company strategy, and what is expected of them to achieve strategy and goals.

3. Social engagement. Learning how to be both an *individual contributor* and a *team player* requires feedback, direction, encouragement, praise, and rewards. When you recognize individual contributions within a team effort, you generate good will. When you recognize the team's collective efforts, you'll meet project and company goals. Pair *recognition* with appropriate *reward* to drive desired performance.

4. Social ability. Coach people how to lead teams effectively, and model the behavior that you desire. Ensure *company policies* support the *culture* that you seek to create. You can't have *engaged employees*, if policies and procedures aren't *employee friendly.*

5. Organized motivation. Rewards help motivate people, keep them focused on goals, and reinforce desired performance. Reward and thank people who excel.

6. Corporate accountability. You need to *be accountable to your employees*. Provide direction, guidance, support, encouragement, and the tools they need to get their work done. Then ensure they deliver the *quality*, *timeliness* and *expectations* you outline.

7. Measuring success. Measure *engagement* initiatives. Solicit feedback and change what needs to be changed. As you add new staff, new products or new locations, adjust your engagement program to align with your strategy.

The more engaged your employees, the lower your turnover, and the higher your productivity and morale. SSE

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ACTION: Take these seven steps to engagement.

Profitable Growth

Are you pressing the right levers?

by Bruce Wedderburn

IMPROVING SALES PERFORMANCE has three main objectives: 1) Profitable revenue growth; 2) See objective #1; 3) See objective #2.

In our work with sales organizations, we speak with CEOs, SVPs of sales and marketing, and front-line sales managers to understand and diagnose their sales performance issues. In each case, "profitable revenue growth" lies at the crosshairs of their priorities when it comes to measuring sales performance. They are right. It should be the priority.

What are the levers that salespeople, sales managers can press to accelerate progress towards this objective of profitable revenue growth? The traditional thinking is to increase the number of opportunities in your pipeline. Sales is a numbers game, right? The more "qualified" opportunities that salespeople are working, the better the odds of reaching revenue goals. Recent surveys confirm this thinking; 66 percent of respondents say that "increasing the number of opportunities" is the best strategy to drive revenue growth.

But this approach overlooks three other levers that play an equally important role in growing revenue: Increase average deal value; 2) Increase win rate; and 3) Reduce sales cycle length. In fact, the never-ending search for new opportunities distracts from working these other important levers. The thinking that having more opportunities in your pipeline is a positive indicator of success is unraveling as more and more companies examine the cost side of the sales equation. Not to mention the *quality* of pipeline opportunities is often suspect, with some of them having been included based on wishful thinking or for window dressing purposes. Having salespeople working a large number of mixed-quality opportunities incurs significant costs when you factor in line items such as travel, proposal writing, management time and hours spent by all the people working on the bid. Then there are the lost opportunity costs as salespeople are distracted from identifying and resourcing those opportunities that they have a realistic chance of winning.

It isn't that looking for new opportunities is not important. It is critical to maintaining a healthy pipeline. However, if revenue growth is the goal, there is tremendous leverage to be gained by increasing the size of, and accelerating the progression of, the opportunities that are already in there.

What if you could increase the size of opportunities in your pipeline by 10 percent? How about increasing your win rate by 10 percent, and reducing your sales cycle by 10 percent? What would be the cumulative effect, not only on the health of your pipeline but in revenue achievement?

Here are a few questions to ask that can impact these three revenue levers:

Increase average deal value: There are two critical questions to increasing the value of each deal in your pipeline: *Does your company's sales process direct your salespeople to explore a wide range of your customer's challenges* (thereby creating value in a broader solution)? *Are your salespeople equipped with the skills to execute this process?* The lengths that companies go to avoid directly tackling these two central questions are staggering. For example, three years ago one of Australia's largest banks had a rate of 2.4 products per customer. Today—and hundreds of millions of ad dollars later—they have 2.6. Their revenue growth efforts failed because they didn't address these questions. Unless you tackle them, your efforts will fail too.

Increase win rate: Does your CRM coach your salespeople to focus their time and resources on *opportunities that they can realistically win*? The increase of SaaS CRMs has provided a *leap forward* in the storage and management of information. But if you ask salespeople, "How does your CRM help you close business?" you get a blank stare. Often they will say it does the opposite. Organizations that are seeing improvements in win rates are integrating their sales process (point #1) into their CRM.

Research from the Aberdeen Group found that industry-leading companies deploy this type of integration 83 percent more often than industry laggards. What's the reason for this improved performance? Salespeople assess any new element of their job from a "what's in it for me?" perspective. By integrating both methodology and process assistance into their CRM, it changes from an imposed management edict to something that they want to use, because it enables them to sell better, increase their win rate and avoid costly mistakes—impacting revenue performance and quota achievement.

Unless your CRM coaches and guides your salespeople and sales managers on the best-practice next steps to winning a piece of business, you will always rely on the coin-toss of the personality, work ethic and skill of your individual contributors.

Reduce Sales Cycle Length: There are *three essential metrics* at play here: How long does it take your people to win a piece of business? How long does it take them to lose one? Where in the sales cycle do *your managers* focus their time?

Recent insights provided by Dealmaker showed in one human resources consulting firm that the #1 revenue-producer won, on average, a deal in 68 days. She lost, on average, a deal in 61 days. This is a best practice. If you are going to lose, lose early. Interestingly, one of her peers who was well behind on quota won a deal, on average, in 65 days, 3 days less that the top performer. But he took 155 days to lose one. Clearly, some targeted manager coaching would not go astray here.

How is your CRM tracking these metrics? There are amazing insights to be gained into what you can do to drive greater success rates from your people if you can access this data.

Research by Huthwaite also shows a direct correlation between where managers invest their time and the average length of sales cycles to see if there is any correlation between *when in the sales cycle a manager gets involved* and *sales cycle length*. When managers are active in the sale during the early sales calls, it has a *direct impact* on the length of those sales.

Ask *what you can do with the deals you have in your pipeline* to impact your deal size, win rate, and sales cycle duration. You *might be surprised* at your findings. SSE

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ACTION: Press levers to gain profitable growth.

SALES/RESILIENCE

Stay Strong

When it gets rough.

by Barry Farber

YOUR ABILITY TO HANDLE rejection and obstacles while selling in hard times depends on your capacity to focus on the *essential activities* that help you stay in control. Here are ***three ways*** to deal with *sales setbacks* and *negative situations*:

1. Keep your eyes on the oak tree. As a friend of mine plowed his farm, he would aim for a row of oak trees and plow a straighter furrow as a result. If you look at all the adversities —a rock, tree stump or small ravine —you wander all over the place. But if you have an oak tree in sight, you'll get past the rocks and achieve your goals. Keep sales goals in front of you daily. *Obstacles* are what you see when you take your eyes off your goal (your *oak tree*).

2. Combine deep learning with qualified activity. As you engage in learning—about your customers, skills or strategies—you increase your value and take your mind off the worries of what you need to do, focusing instead on the knowledge that will help you do it. Combining *learning* with *qualified sales activity* helps you shake off rejection.

Top producers tell me: "I see lots of people, and good things happen." Or, "I make cold calls during good times so the tough times aren't so bad."

3. Falling isn't failing—as long as you don't fail to get back up. Beyond gaining knowledge from picking yourself up and trying a new strategy, you also learn that when you're trying to achieve something challenging *bruises and difficulties are part of the game*. When I first started martial arts training with a six-foot bo staff, my teacher said I would get welts from whipping the staff and catching it under my arm, but eventually my skin would toughen up. It's the same with *setbacks in sales*. In the long run, they won't damage your confidence or deter you from getting back up and trying again. Hard deals came with many obstacles. But those toughen up your skin and open your mind for the next round of challenges.

I know about *falling* first-hand, having founded two companies and been a violinist, martial artist, bricklayer, speaker, talk-show host, husband, father, researcher, and author. Lifelong learning keeps your enthusiasm and confidence strong and builds knowledge and expertise. So, *dive in* and *do the thing you're trying to learn without fear*. Learning is strongest when it comes through failures, setbacks, and adversity. As Ray Bradbury said, "First you jump off the cliff; then you build your wings on the way down."

If cliff-jumping isn't your *method of choice* for lifelong learning, I suggest following the less-risky LEARN steps

L: Levels. There's a world of depth —multiple levels—in every new venture. Immerse yourself in a subject, not just skim across the top of it, to benefit from the learning it offers.

E: Explore. Try new things to gain new skills and hobbies. Each new thing you learn enriches other aspects of your life. For instance, practicing martial arts increases mental alertness and gives you extra physical energy.

A: Action. You *learn from your actions*; you *act from your learning*—one without the other suffers. Some people become perpetual students—but achieve little. Other people never get much formal education, but become great successes. They learn from all they experience, and apply those lessons to their lives. They increase the value of their knowledge exponentially *by taking actions that enable them to keep growing and achieving*.

R: Repetition. By constantly repeating movements, studying facts and figures or practicing a musical instrument, for instance, you increase your ability to retain what you've learned.

N: Neutral. Keep your mind in a *neutral state*. Don't let *stereotypes* or *preconceived notions* stop new information. *Keep an open mind*, and approach a new subject, craft, skill, instrument or profession as a beginner (curious, creative, easily amazed, seeking, searching and eager to learn). After engaging in learning, take 20 minutes to quiet your mind and reflect on all you've taken in. SSE

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ACTION: Learn to deal with sales setbacks.

SALES/FILTERS

Four Sales Filters

These determine your success.

by Bryan Flanagan

IN ORDER FOR YOUR SELLING efforts to be successful and for you to close each sale successfully, each process of the sale must pass through *four filters*. If the process breaks down at any of these four filters, a sale will not take place.

You have to sell to the right ***prospect*** the right ***product*** using the right ***process*** and be the right ***salesperson***.

1. The Prospect Filter. If this person (your prospect) cannot make a decision, a sale will not take place. You must get to the qualified decision-maker. How do you determine if the prospect is qualified? Ask yourself these questions: Is this the person who can make a financial decision? Is he or she aware of the need your solution will meet? Is there a sense of urgency? The answers to these questions determine if the sale can pass through this prospect filter.

2. The Product Filter. If your product or service cannot meet the needs of the prospect, a sale will not take place. Do you have the right product or service to meet the requirements of this prospect? It doesn't have to be a perfect fit, but it must meet the essential needs of the prospect. If your product is deficient, your sales will suffer.

3. The Process Filter. If you do not have a prospect-centered approach to selling, a sale will not take place. The process should be one that enables you to uncover existing and potential needs of the prospect. The process must involve the prospect and must engage him or her so that you generate a greater understanding of how your solutions can enhance the current situation. How can you improve your process filter?

4. The Person Filter. If you are not the right salesperson, a sale will not take place. Often prospects buy the man or the woman before they buy the plan. Did you show up on time, prepared, poised, and focused on the prospect? Or were you running late? Did you forget the prospect's name? Did you do most of the talking? If that was the case, a sale will not take place. How can you become the right person to close the sale? Become the right salesperson.

Selling is nothing more than asking and listening. You must learn to listen so the prospect will talk, then talk so the prospect will listen. SSE

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ACTION: Be the right salesperson for prospects.

It's Who You Know

Identify your top 100 people.

by Bob Beaudine

KEY RELATIONSHIPS ARE placed in your path to help you create the life of your dreams. These special people are not just *happenstance acquaintances* but *strategic relationships*. Creating your dream isn't about *who you don't know*, but *whom you've neglected*. You need to discover (or re-discover) your unique purpose or dream. Get clear on what you want to achieve in life—and dare to dream big! Successful dream seekers apply this powerful principle: "You already know everyone you need to know to get anything you need in life."

Identify people within your group of friends and friends of friends who are the foundation for making connections. Making a list is easy. Making a good list, however, requires something more—looking for clues to guide you.

Use your Who to market you. The *What* in life will take you only so far. Soon you'll come to a chasm you can't cross without someone's help. More paths lead to *failure* than lead to *success*. So, create your own *Personal Board of Directors* made up of your parents, mate, best friend, legal counsel, career or life coach, financial adviser, spiritual adviser. You may need an investor to turn your fantastic idea into a business. Who is more likely to make it happen—someone who doesn't know you, or some friend who knows your talent, energy, drive, and ambition?

Networking, as most people practice it today, implies friendship with people who are *mere acquaintances*. Somehow, *pulling yourself up by your bootstraps* has come to mean *doing it all by yourself* with help from only *strangers*. But you have a powerful network—your *Power of Who!*

I've developed a database of 5,365 people in my *Who* world that can say, "Hi, Bob." I had what I thought was a *great networking strategy*, but I was wrong. I used to try to touch 1,000 people a year with notes and calls and visits. It was exhausting. One day I studied who had *actually given me business* over the last 10 years. I was shocked to learn that there were *only 87*! How could I have missed that? I enjoy meeting people, but I should have been spending more time investing in those 87 people.

Now, I focus most of my time interacting with the people on my *Top 100 List*.

Friendships are as vital to your dreams and goals as food and water is to your body. True friendship is based on love, loyalty, and mutual regard. Friends can help you *move your dreams and goals into the real world*. If you have 100 friends and I have 100, we don't have 200. No, 10,000! It's *exponential*. When you see that *each person* in your circle of friends has influence with their friends, you begin to grasp the true *power of Who!*

The *power of Who* begins to work for you when you remember, reach out and reconnect. Making a list helps you clarify your priorities, values, and preferences—and reminds you of the great relationships you have and the resources they offer. Your friends are conduits to achieving your dreams and goals. Friends have *a strong desire to help you*. They genuinely care about you, and yet you might find yourself asking, "Why haven't I stayed in touch?"

Your *Who World* has three layers: your inner circle of 12 friends, three close friends, and one best friend. There is a *heart connection* here that you don't have with others. Next are your *WHO* friends, people with whom you felt a special connection. Then, there are *allies* you connect with through your inner circle and *WHO* friends.

Your *What* will never come into play until your *Who* brings you across. So, should you spend all your time on the *What* without having a plan for the *Who*? No! *Go deep with your friendships this year!* Your *Who* are people who know and care about you, and are far more authentic than all the names you attain passing out business cards and through online social links.

Old *networking techniques* are almost useless for reaching your goals. Instead, rely on your *Who network*—your community of *true friends* and their friends—to get you where you want to go. Be *transformational*—not *transactional*.

The key to success is to make friends, help your friends in every way you can, and don't be surprised if you do a lot of business with your friends!

Giving is such an essential part of *The Power of Who*. Once you change your paradigm from "Me first," "Me alone," and "I can do it by myself," to "How I can help you?" "What do you need?" and "Yes, I will help," *everything* in your life will change for the better.

Have a plan for your life. You don't want someone else's plan! Don't start calling friends, relatives, or recruiters until you write down your plan!

Ask yourself some tough questions. Explore the desires of your heart. What are you passionate about? Where can your talents best be used? Do you need different training or education? Would you consider relocating? Go on a soul-searching retreat. Reassess your job/life strategies, and define your talents.

List 100 people who you can call and ask for help. *Who is on this list?* Friends, family, and contacts through church, clubs, associations, business. Include executives who know of jobs open in a city. Who are these people? Lawyers, CPAs, bankers, venture capitalists, consultants and recruiters.

Research. Do your due diligence on the *40 companies* in each city you would consider joining, along with the *40 people* you would report to. *Be specific* as possible.

You and Your Who. To fulfill your destiny, you need wise friends and advisers to help you see a vision of your future. Your *who world* consists of an inner circle of 12 close friends, 40 friends and peers who have special expertise, and roughly 100 "who friends" who may be separated by distance and years but want to help you, and rippling outward circles of allies, advocates, and fans. Working within your *Who World* to achieve your career objectives is the *100/40 strategy*.

You'll have a much better shot at winning business if you've prepared, if you've asked your friends if they know anything about this person or company. Do you have a friend who could put in an advance word for you? Explore common interests. When the *I like you factor* is in your favor, the questions become easier (lobbed softballs).

Don't turn away from those closest to you and try to go it alone. Call your friends! Why? It starts with *Who do I know?* Out of *crisis* comes *opportunity*—for those who utilize their *Who*. SSE

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ACTION: Identify and work with your Who World.

MANAGEMENT/CONFLICT

Honest Exchange

Converse to resolve conflict.

by Steven Dinkin

PUTTING OUT FIRES IS A COMMON job requirement for managers. If you struggle with resolving conflicts or confronting challenges, start mastering tough talks.

Dealing with conflicts takes up *42 percent* of a manager's time! A client is offended by something a new salesperson said and threatens to leave. Or, an employee in marketing is furious about being passed over for a promotion. Learn to broach the topics in a way that leads to *better working relationships*.

When disagreements, disputes, and honest differences are treated as opportunities for exploring new ideas about projects, they can become *catalysts for increased energy and productivity*. Getting to that place starts with *The Exchange*—a four-stage conflict resolution model designed to encourage discussion of all the issues in dispute—even the intense, emotional issues—in ways that are more productive than a gripe session.

Actively engaging people in problem solving helps them take responsibility for the problem and the solution. When you address conflicts properly, *challenging situations can lead to creative resolutions*. Turn conflicts into a productive conversations by using these ***five tips***:

1. Start with an icebreaker. Most people will complain, debate, or argue in a conflict-based conversation. If you go straight to the topic of controversy, they'll *defend their positions* and *attack their opponents*. So, begin with an *icebreaker*. Ask for the person's own take on something work-related and positive, such as *what they hope to achieve*.

2. Listen. Often what you *don't* say is more important than what you say. The best resolutions come from *listening carefully* to what others have to say. Being an *active listener* sends the message that you are genuinely concerned about them and the dispute. To get good information, *ask an open-ended question*: "So, tell me, what's going on?" Then listen carefully to their side of the story. Insert yourself into the conversation when the discussion turns negative. You can acknowledge emotions without taking sides. When there's a conflict, you're treading on new ground, building rapport, and showing that person *you're willing to see his or her side of the story* and *work toward a solution*.

3. Use and encourage positive language. It's easy to *slip into negativity* in a conflict. Always *think before you speak*. Use positive, simple language. Don't repeat language from your company's HR manual—*you are having a conversation, not a trial*. If you *keep the language positive*, other parties will likely mirror your collaborative, constructive tone. When you *keep things positive*, you can work toward *great solutions* effectively.

4. Work toward SMART solutions. *Sustainable solutions* are SMART: *Specific*: Be clear *who* will do *what*, *when*, *where*, and *how*. *Measurable*: Tell how you'll assess performance. *Achievable*: Ensure that the solution fits the situation, complies with the law and policy, and can be achieved by those involved. *Realistic*: Allow extra time for glitches and delays; don't assume best-case scenarios. *Timed*: Create reasonable deadlines or target dates; include ideas on what to do if something unexpected occurs, and set new dates if necessary.

5. Put SMART solutions in writing. This honors the work that you achieve and *keeps people focused* on the agreed-upon solutions. Verbal agreements are remembered differently by different people—and then become the subject of conflict. It's safer and easier to *record the solutions* in order to *verify them later*.

Disputes are headaches. They pop up everywhere. When you have the tools to work toward productive resolutions, you can use them to strengthen your relationships and results. SSE

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ACTION: Try these five tips to resolve conflict.

SALES/QUESTIONS

Ask Questions

The What, Why and How.

by Leslie Groene

SO MANY SALES PEOPLE INDICATE that *they already ask questions* in their daily sales experience. I find that this is not entirely correct. I want salespeople to inquire more thoroughly as to the clients' or prospects' *motivation* or *criteria* when making decisions or choosing vendors. This can manifest itself in an appointment where you demonstrate your company's features and benefits or a follow-up conversation with the buyer.

What we want to know is how they arrive at their decisions and how we build trust with them and their company. Here are three examples of open-ended questions: *Where do we go from here? What is our next step?* and *Why do you say that?*

Using seven words at the start of a sentence will create an open-ended question: when, which, where, what, how, when and why. This sort of probing enables your contact to speak more broadly without answering *Yes* or *No*. You can then uncover objections and learn where you stand with the person in the selling process. Have a few of these questions ready to use when on sales calls to build the relationship or make an existing one stronger!

At every stage of your career, you need to stay focused on the fundamentals of your business. Identify focus points for this purpose and pay close attention to these points and commit many to memory so that your behavior will be automatic in the future.

Once you have a solid foundation to build upon, you can apply the principles of *momentum*, *consistency*, *patience* and *perseverance* (while maintaining your balance) and build a satisfying career in the industry of your choice.

The outcome of games often comes down to *execution of the fundamentals*. So, engage annually in *spring training* and focus on *the fundamentals*—the proper way to play.

My 100 focus points include these seven: 1) Learn everything you can about your product or service. 2) Communicate each and every relevant sales benefit to your prospective clients and make a complete case for utilizing you and your firm. 3) Roll up your sleeves and put in the hours that are required to find clients who can use your services and who actually will make transactions happen. 4) Provide these clients with superior service throughout the entire transaction. 5) Stay in touch with clients and find new and creative means of reaching new and better clients. 6) Conduct yourself in an honorable and distinguished manner throughout your career. 7) Stay hungry and stay current in your practice while protecting your niche as an expert in a given area. SSE

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ACTION: Ask more open-ended questions.

On-Boarding Salespeople

This is not your father's Oldsmobile.


by Janet Spirer and Richard Ruff

TODAY A SALES TEAM MUST NOT ONLY BE able to sell a competitive advantage; they must be a competitive advantage. In most companies, it is increasingly difficult to sustain a competitive advantage by traditional means. Traditional factors such as: superior products, scale, and innovative manufacturing technology may provide short term advantages, but unfortunately they can be replicated in relatively short order by an increasing number of agile and aggressive domestic and international competitors.

Although a great sales team is difficult to craft, it has the potential to provide a significant competitive advantage and, perhaps more importantly, one that is difficult for the competition to quickly copy. So optimizing sales performance matters more today than it did yesterday and it will matter more tomorrow than it does today.

On-Boarding

The process of training and acclimating sales people into a new position is a key factor for a salesperson's success. But it's also one of the most understudied and underemphasized aspect of sales performance development. Great on-boarding programs for sales people are still the exception.

This lack of emphasis is part of the larger problem that companies have with *Talent Management*. Companies like to promote the idea that *employees are their biggest source of competitive advantage*. Yet most of them are no better prepared for the challenges of finding, motivating and training capable workers than they were a decade ago.

With the increased importance of developing a world-class sales team, this neglect has not gone unnoticed by everyone. It is suggested the companies who seriously address this issue today will celebrate tomorrow.

What's Different?

If you are a company that put in place an on-boarding system for your sales force more than five years ago, it is likely a reexamination is worthwhile. A number of changes and shifts have significantly impacted what an optimal system looks like.

Some of these factors are:

- ***Success matters more.*** As previously noted, the number of sustainable competitive advantages has decreased and the importance of having a world-class sales force has grown with that decline.
- ***Job demands are greater.*** In sales there is a "book of knowledge." In many companies that book has expanded from a fairly common, well defined set of chapters to a tome that is encyclopedic in scope. Today in order to be a top performer, a sales person has to know a lot more and know it at a higher level of proficiency.
- ***Specialization of the sales function has increased.*** If the various sales positions in most companies were examined under a microscope, they would be greater in number and diversity of challenge than in times past. So, as a sales person moves up the hierarchy of positions, they are faced with different buyers, different buying processes, and differing points of view on what constitutes value.
- ***Generational differences are significant.*** New people coming into entry-level sales positions are from a generation with different expectations, learning preferences, and experience sets. This shift provides a huge opportunity and a new set of challenges.

Getting Off to the Right Start

Major advances have been achieved recently in designing and building sales selection methodologies and in sales training curriculum for on-boarding salespeople. Today a company has a better chance of hiring the right people in first place and a better chance of systematically improving their performance over time.

It always works out better if you can hire people who have the performance potential, attitudes, and motivation to get off to the right start. Today, the selection tools available to Sales Managers to hire the right people bear only a slight resemblance to their earlier cousins.

For example, selection testing can now be done with much greater accuracy than in times past. Assessment instruments designed specifically for selecting sales people engagement in competitive business to business sales are now available—at an affordable price. You can have the applicants take a 60 minute battery of online tests and 24 hours later have the results back.

As the selection process improves, bad things like *turnover* tend to decrease and good things like *leveraging your investment in sales training* tend to increase.

Recognizing on-boarding is a process not an event. Once the time it took for an average rep to come to grips with the contents of the book of sales was manageable. Now, the amount of knowledge and the diversity of the skill sets are exponentially greater, and the level of mastery has been redefined—you really have to know what you are doing to be competitive.

Today, if you want a world-class sales team, you need to define on-boarding as an ongoing training process, not as a one time event. Sales training programs are needed not just for on-boarding new hires but also for on-boarding your existing sales team to deal with an increasingly changing buying environment. As your company enters new markets, launches new products, deals with keener competitors, and copes with ever changing demands within customer organizations, sales training is one of the answers for executing a superior response to these changes. You simply can't maintain superior sales force overtime, if you don't invest in skill development overtime.

Today, leading edge sales training companies have crafted a new generation of sales training that works.

It is difficult to overemphasize the *potential payoff* of developing a world-class sales team. If you accept the challenge, you need to build a *state-of-the-art on-boarding process*. The good news for you is many of your competitors are sitting on the side lines, and today we have a starting set of best practices for getting the job done right. SSE

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ACTION: Improve your sales on-boarding.

MANAGEMENT/RETENTION

Retain the Best People

Firing non-performers is good turnover.

by Jeff Kortes

EVERY ORGANIZATION HAS some *turnover* problems. And the impact of turnover ranges from three months of salary for a low-level employee who leaves to as high as *400 percent of the annual salary* of an upper-level person who leaves.

It's doesn't have to be *all bad*—there is *good turnover*. Firing a non-performer is *good turnover*. But when a top performer leaves a huge void, that's *bad turnover*. In fact, it can affect the performance of the whole organization.

To maximize your performance, you have to adopt a *no nonsense approach to retention*. Here are ***10 must-do actions items*** for retaining your best people:

1. Start at the top! Assess your management team, since 70 percent of the people say that *the worst thing about their job is the boss*. Find out what's wrong and fix it! Identify the prima donnas and micromanaging control freaks, the whiners, complainers, and blamers. Train them and improve their performance continuously. If *you are the boss*, take ownership!

2. Clean up the house! Identify non-performers and poor managers and supervisors. If they do not respond to training and show improvement, *remove them* from an influential role and *replace them* with someone who does what is desired/required for the role/position.

3. Manage visibly! Begin each day by *walking around*. Stroll the floor several times a day. Meet customers, talk with employees, visit with supervisors, greet vendors, help load and unload delivery trucks. Get out of your office. Let people know you are there and that you care. You lead by example. *If they like you, they are less likely to leave you*. Visibility drives retention.

4. Care about your people! If you do not *really care* about your people, your business is doomed. *Caring is the reason why people stay*. Get to know your people. Learn what each person likes and enjoys. Listen to them and learn about their interests, families, and hobbies. Protect your people from harm and from others in your organization. People are loyal to those who care about them and care for them.

5. Keep your door open 80 percent of the time. Let your people know you are accessible to them. Avoid telling people to make an appointment or come back later. Make sure the time you do spend with your people is quality time.

6. Focus on employee assistance actively. Meet with the other managers and *identify the problems faced by people*. Develop innovative ideas and deploy new plans to provide employees with more *flexibility* in their work, *support* for their common needs, and *help* for dealing with personal issues that impact them.

7. Treat everyone with respect always! Every leader and manager must set the standard that *respectful behavior* and *sincere open appreciation* are expected, no exceptions! Take *immediate action* in all non-respectful behavior incidents. Have lunch with your people regularly!

8. Ask your people what they want! Ask your people what they want out of their work to grow, to develop greater control, autonomy and responsibility for the work they do. *Help them achieve these goals* specifically and incrementally. Meaningful engagement in their own future drives commitment and loyalty.

9. Tell your people what you want of them! Be specific, clear, and *explain what you expect of them*. Give them the tools, support and time they need to *get the work done*. If they don't meet expectations, find out what it will take to get them on track.

10. Fire the slugs. Hold people *accountable*. If they don't make progress, *terminate them with respect* (your good performers will love you for it). SSE

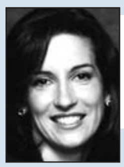
Jeff Kortes, Human Asset Management, is author of No Nonsense Retention. *Email jeff@humanassetmgt.com, visit humanassetmgt.com, or call 414-421-9626.*

ACTION: Retain your best people.

MARKETING/BRANDS

Youthful Brands

Boomers look for optimism.



by Julie Halpin and Rachel Geller

WITH THE FINANCIAL CRISIS STILL LOOMING over burnt-out adults looking for an escape, and mass media/technology making a play for 8 year-olds and 80-year olds alike, a new study shows that adults—*especially Baby Boomers*—are identifying with a more youthful mindset and seeking brands that mirror a *sense of optimism* back to them.

The survey polled 200 men and women, ages 35 to 64, to discover what drives them to gravitate toward certain brands, and what they're considering when making purchasing decisions. The study found that some of *what drives us when we're young stays with us*, hard-wired into our personalities, even when we're about to sign our first Social Security check.

Ask yourself: Are we *missing the boat when it comes to Boomers?* Are we offering them *optimism* and *social conscience*, and are we identifying with inherent qualities of their youths? Think of the impact that thinking could have!

Take note of these major findings:

1. Two of every three adults are still looking for brands to express their personalities. Using brands to bolster *identity* has been the work of adolescence, but Boomers care just as much, if not more, about identifying with youthful qualities inherent in brands to express their personalities. *Gen Xers* and *Boomers* said technology is how they express who they are and what they're about. It's not just for teens and 20-somethings—*tapping into our ego and narcissism never withers away, it just changes brands*. Brands like Sony, Dell and HP were good reflections of their inner selves, as much as Apple and the iPad. And, it's still the jeans. But it's not 7's or Diesel, it's actually Levi's that tell the world what women *of a certain age* are all about.

2. More than half of all adults are challenging brands to surprise and delight them. The notion of *the older we get, the more we look for trust and reliability* is no longer true. That by the time you own a home and car seat, you're not looking for surprises. Boomers led the way in this trend, and brands in all categories, from *Swiffer* for the home, *Keurig* for the palate, and *Under Gear* for the man inside, have turned from *boredom* into *surprise*.

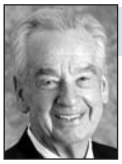
3. Boomers are still looking for optimism and a social conscience from their brands. The Boomers are still looking for *optimism* and *social conscience* from their brands. Today, those *brand drivers* score 12-13 points higher for Boomers than for Gen Xers. The study revealed their favorite *socially conscious brands*: Amy's Kitchen for organic, Dove for its work with women, Trader Joe's for the shopping experience, and SodaStream for bringing back an old school experience to the *socially-conscious*. SSE

Julie Halpin is CEO and Rachel Geller Chief Strategic Officer of The Geppetto Group an integrated marketing agency. Email erin@digennarony.com or 646-380-4768.

ACTION: Make your brand appealing to Boomers.

Show Conviction

You'll close more sales.



by Zig Ziglar

THE LATE MARY CROWLEY often commented that one person with a *conviction* would do more than 100 who only had an *interest*. Commitment is the key to staying the course and completing the project. *Conviction* precedes *commitment*.

When we're convinced as salespeople that we are selling *a marvelous product*, our demeanor, body language, voice inflection, facial expressions—*everything*—communicate to the prospect that we fervently believe we're offering something of value. Many times the prospect will buy not because of their belief in the product, goods or service, but because of the belief of the salesperson.

Our feelings are transferable. Courage is frequently transferred to the other person. Convictions are the same. The teacher who fervently believes in the message he or she delivers will persuade the student by the depth of that conviction. As Mary Kay Ash said, "Many people have gone a lot farther than they thought they could because someone else thought they could." In short, their confidence, born of someone else's conviction, had enabled them to "make it." Conviction comes from knowledge and a "feeling" that what we're teaching, doing, or selling is absolutely right. When we transfer that conviction to those in our sphere of influence, they and society benefit.

Show me a person with deep convictions and I'll show you a person who's made a commitment to deliver those convictions to others. Show me a great leader and I'll show you a person of deep convictions who attracts followers because of their convictions. I'll also show you a person who is happy in what they're doing and more successful than those who do not have those convictions. Buy that idea; develop those convictions; make that commitment.

Each one of us is influenced by the position we occupy as to how we will feel about certain projects brought to the decision table. For example, the R&D department and the sales department like to spend money to develop new products. On the other hand, the accounting department probably feels that, in view of the economy, they should be more cautious in investing funds that might not produce a return for a long time. That's where the decision-making process is key. All factors have to be weighed and analyzed as to the long-range best interests of the company. Once the facts are in, the decision has to be made and that decision will affect the entire company. That's the reason input from everyone involved is important.

Where a person stands largely influences where they sit. People who take a stand for what is right, build on an ethical, moral base and stand on principle, usually end up in the upper eche-

lons of business. When you put these two factors together, it simply means that the person of integrity (and experience and ability) will most likely end up making those all-important decisions about the best place to put the company time and resources. It's still true that the best way is the right way, or the right way is the best way.

Gambling—Or Risk-Taking?

There is a difference between gambling and risk-taking. John Scully says, "People who take risks are the people you'll lose against." A study of the first graduating class from Harvard Business School revealed that these men were risk-takers. They would not pass a car on a hill or a curve, nor blindly go into a business venture. They assembled the facts and evaluated carefully from every perspective the chances of success and the benefits that go with that success. They knew there were no guarantees and that they could lose. Nonetheless, they recognized that the possible gain was so much greater than the possible loss that they deemed it appropriate to take the risk.

Gambling is a different issue. Taking a risk means "pushing forward, to be bold and hearty." Gambling is far more hazardous. Needless to say, some gambles are greater than others. Casino slot machines represent long odds: if you play the dollar slots every day for two months, the odds are two trillion to one that you would lose $1,000 before you won $1,000. That's not gambling—that's a cinch that if you play the other person's game long enough, you'll lose. Washington said, "Gambling is the child of avarice, the brother of iniquity and the father of mischief." Be a risk-taker, not a gambler!

Sometimes Ya' Gotta' Hustle

Several years ago when cassette players were the rage, one day I needed a new one and, since I liked the one I had been using, I decided to buy another. I walked into a store that sold them, held up my device and asked if they had another one. The manager said, "I believe so," and picked one up, commenting, "Yes, this is it." He then turned to the young man who was standing by him and asked him to complete the transaction. The young man started ambling toward the rear of the store, and so I asked him, "Are you going to ring me up?" The young man said, "Yes," and I said, "Well, this is the one I want," pointing to the one the manager had held up. He responded, "I'm going to the back to get you a new one."

He casually sauntered into the store room. When he reappeared he was moving so slowly that I had to line him up between two shelves to make certain he was moving. Since I was obviously in a hurry, I said to the young man, "I am in somewhat of a hurry." He said, "I am hurrying."

He was dragging his heels by anyone's standards. When I was a youngster, I worked in a grocery store. When a customer wanted something and I was not in a dead run to get it, my boss would say to me, "Come on, Boy! A dollar is waiting on a dime!" He meant the customer took precedence and needed to be—and expected to be—given fast service or his next stop would be at another store.

When your customer is in a hurry, you need to hustle and meet the customer's needs and expectations. That benefits the store and customer, and helps secure the job for the employee. *Think about it* and *I'll See You at the Top*! SSE

Zig Ziglar, aka America's motivator, is the author of 29 books, including Success For Dummies, *and many audio and video recordings. Visit www.Ziglar.com.*

ACTION: Show conviction and hustle.

MARKETING/SOCIAL

Social Technologies

Master four mandatory concepts.

by Scott Klososky

SOCIAL MEDIA/NETWORKING and the tools they have spawned have moved into *the strategy toolbox*. To be the Zen master of social tools, first see the need to implement elements that drive revenue and reduce cost. Social tools are valuable for sales, marketing and back office.

Here are ***four social tech concepts*** you need to master:

1. Building rivers of information. There is a massive amount of real-time information on the Web on any subject—megabytes of data that could be critical to your performance—but you will likely only harness 3 percent of what could be valuable to you. Social tools enable you to aggregate and filter this information so that it can be funneled into your brain. Learn which information sources are valuable, and what tools can be used to aggregate and filter them to a manageable state. In a knowledge economy, the smarter teams win. Use social tools to harness relevant and timely industry information, and you'll be smarter. Take time to digest this information to be relevant.

2. Organizational voice. Your organization benefits from building a *powerful Web-delivered voice* through many channels: Blogs, Twitter, Facebook, podcasts, text messages. The *organizational voice* enables you to create a *conversation* with constituents to *earn the right* to grab mindshare by providing a *valuable* flow of content through the voice. When using tools like blogs, Twitter and Facebook to connect with clients/customers/prospects, you might make *three big mistakes*: 1) *No human sounding tone*. Your communication must sound human, and have an interesting, intriguing, or unusual tone. 2) *Mistakes with the frequency of delivery*. If you deliver content too often, you annoy people, and they tune you out. Even if your content is great, it becomes *overwhelming* and people stop paying attention. If you deliver content too infrequently, they lower the perceived value in their minds. The *perfect frequency* depends on the audience, and the type of content—there are no hard and fast rules. 3) *Wrong mix of content*. As you send content through the *organizational voice*, you must deliver valuable nuggets. For example, if you fill 80 percent of your content with sales-related information, it appears to be spam. If you do nothing but deliver your opinions, people might get tired of the editorial. *A valuable stream of content includes* a mix of stories, facts and figures, and links to valuable resources, opinions, and product or company information.

3. Online Reputation Management (ORM). Like it or not, you have *an online reputation*. Internet users (now two billion) are sharing their opinions about service providers and retailers through conversations and comments online. Every time they mention your company or products, their comments become searchable. When prospects search to find information on you, they find these comments. You must have a formal ORM program by *building a listening process*, *creating an engagement policy*, and *using a measuring system*.

4. Crowdsourcing. Who doesn't want to get work done cheaper, faster, and better! That is the promise of *crowdsourcing*. Many sites on the Web can assist you with *crowdsourcing* (CrowdSPRING, 99designs, logo tournament, Innocentive, mturk). Learning to get work done that was sourced in house, or by local vendors, is a strategic advantage. To learn how to use this tool, dive in and start experimenting. The risk is low, rewards are high. Give crowdsourcing a try.

Examine these social tech concepts and *note two that can directly help the front-end revenue generation*, and *two that will help with the back office operation*. Use these four concepts to get a fast ROI. SSE

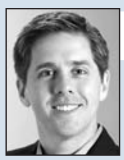
Scott Klososky is author of Enterprise Social Technology *and* The Velocity Manifesto. *Visit www.VelocityManifesto.com or www.EnterpriseSocialTechnology.com.*

ACTION: Master these social media concepts.

SALES/RAPPORT

Rapport

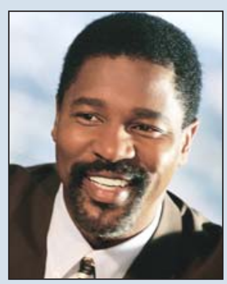
It's the key to sales.



by Matthew B. James

EVERY SALESPERSON KNOWS communication is key in building business relationships. But what does it takes to build *instant rapport and trust* with anyone?

Once I had to get a hotel room with no reservation. I called several brand name hotels only to be told they were booked. But I went to one hotel I had called and used some specific techniques to build rapport with the woman at the front desk.



As we talked, I matched and mirrored her tone of voice and her speed of speech to create rapport. She told me "I'll do whatever it takes to get you a room." I ended up getting a room.

Most communication occurs outside our conscious awareness. Tone of voice accounts for 38 percent of communication and, in face-to-face contacts, physiology accounts for an amazing 55 percent. Only 7 percent of communication is made up of the words we use.

One of the best ways to build good communication beyond our words is *Neuro Linguistic Programming* (NLP). NLP is a behavioral technology—a set of guiding principles, attitudes and techniques—that enables sales professionals to build rapport and trust, the basis for all business relationships.

The NLP sales model, designed to help you build rapport instantly with anyone, is based on a five-step process:

1. Establish rapport. People who are like each other tend to like each other. Match and mirror the physiology, tone of voice, representational systems, breathing, and key words of the person with whom you communicate.

2. Ask questions. The questions you ask should be directly related to the business of the person. Speak their language and ask questions that help you discover their motivation, decision and reassurance strategies.

3. Find a need. When you discover a need, you can establish a value. Propose a solution to the client's problem, and then ask "do you see any value in this?" If there is no need, stop there and find another client.

4. Link need or value to your product/service. Make a clear proposal for how your product or service helps solve the problem you uncovered earlier, without disclosing too many details.

5. Close. There are many ways of closing the deal, but there are only ***four objections***: *I don't have enough time*; *I don't have enough money*; *it won't work for me*; and *I don't believe you*. If you encounter resistance to your message, you need to build more rapport.

By using his five-step NLP process, you build rapport and relationships, close more sales, grow from every experience, achieve desired results. SSE

Matthew B. James, Ph.D., President of Kona Univ., serves as master trainer of Neuro Linguistic Programming, and is author of The Foundation of Huna. *Email info@Huna.com. Visit www.nlp.com and www.huna.com.*

ACTION: Use the 5-step process to build rapport.

Code and Metrics

Help customers justify a buy.

by Peter Sheahan

IN SALES, CONVINCING BUYERS that they want your offering isn't enough. They have to be able to justify it—to themselves, and often, to the internal decision-makers. So, as a sales professional, you must deliver, on a silver platter, the justifications that the buyer needs to support their decision to buy from you.

The key to justifying a buy is two-fold. First, you must *package your offering in the code*—the language people use to justify their decisions within their group, specific to the company or industry. Second, *your offer must be supported by the right metrics*. You not only have to speak the language of the buyer, but you must also offer them measurements to support their decision.

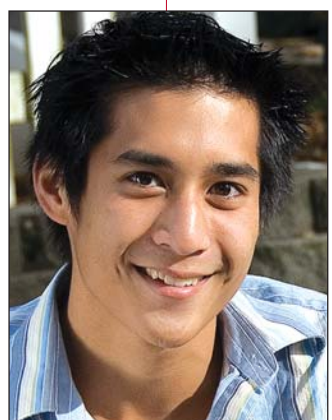
For example, if you are making the decision between buying a used BMW sports car or a new Hyundai, saying, "The BMW was made in Germany, so it must be safe" isn't enough to justify your decision to spend more money on a used car. It's better if you can quote how the BMW 3 Series has been rated in the top-ten best cars in the world on 18 different occasions. Or that the Hyundai has a five-star safety rating for front and side impact, and the BMW has a four-star rating for the front and five for the side. These are both metrics, and both help buyers to make engaging with you easy to justify.

Speaking The Code

Usually, your buyer will need to justify their decision to another buyer—the decision-maker. A buyer may have engaged you as a consultant because he or she liked you, but this has to be expressed to his or her boss as being *based on your track record* and recommendations from similar businesses.

Make it as easy as possible for buyers to justify their purchases to themselves and to their bosses by *understanding their code* and *packaging your proposition in a way that appeals to that code.*

What is *the code*? For example, I had a friend who believed that most senior managers exhibit some signs of depression. He had to leave a job as a senior executive due to nothing short of a mental breakdown. He wanted to start a business for *counseling* executives, but he realized that it's unacceptable to admit your flaws in business, and so rather than call his service *counseling* he called it *executive coaching*. Similarly, instead of teaching new graduates to *manage-up*, we teach them *reputation management*. Instead of telling people they are *dreadful*, we put them through *performance management*. Privately, we say we're *performance managing* them out of the business. We don't talk about *weaknesses*, only *areas for improvement*.



These are all instances of code, and every market has its own. By using the code, you enable buyers to support their decision to engage with you. Do your research to brush up on your code. Knowing what buyers are allowed to spend money on and how they have to phrase that internally is a key concept.

Offering Metrics

Beyond speaking the buyer's language, you must give them measurable ways to support their decision. All markets have metrics by which buyers determine the value of your offering. To determine a market's metrics, you must understand the business model, and the reporting systems of your buyer. The business model is where and how they make money. The reporting system indicates how your buyer is evaluated by his/her buyers.

Once you understand the metrics your buyer values, you must communicate your ability to hit those metrics in a way that is acceptable for the code. To say that your HR consultancy will make people happier at work is one thing. Having survey data to support that notion may be useful too. But, unless you can show how having happy workers increases productivity and therefore profitability, selling happiness is outside of the code. Metrics can be hard to define.

If you are like me, from time to time you miss the metric and support your offer with evidence of things the buyer does not care about. For example, once I spoke on a program that included chess champion Gary Kasparov, Michael Phelps and Barbara Walters. My talk went well, yet I was never invited back. The audience loved it, but the client did not. Surveys said my ability to offer cost-effective strategies to deal with key issues was highly valuable. But to the event promoter, *nothing mattered unless it led to people buying more tickets*. I was negligent not to realize this.

I had met the market need—engaged an audience—but not my buyer's need for more ticket sales. In many ways, I missed the market altogether by thinking it was about the audience. My market was the event operator, and this promoter owned his business. For the event promoter, the key to building the business is to book people who will sell tickets. What I later realized is that what the promoter needed, and the metric by which he judged my effectiveness, was not how many people liked me, but how many people bought tickets *because* of me. My buyer's metric was *tickets sold*. And, I was not on the card next year.

If you can package your offer in the buyer's language, supported by metrics that prove your ability to add value in the way the buyer needs, you'll give them everything they need to justify the sale. Deliver these justifications on a silver platter, and *you will close your sales*.

Master Five Basics

From my experience managing a hotel chain and launching two successful ventures, I've identified five basic issues that separate the haves from the have-nots, the doers from the talkers: ***Packaging:*** Taking your idea and transforming it into something you can sell, something you can offer to the marketplace. ***Positioning:*** Aligning your offer to a market need, even if you have to move the market. ***Influence:*** Convincing the buyer that he or she needs it from *you*, then persuading them to part with precious time, money and energy. ***Acceleration:*** Getting the most out of the opportunity you have created and increasing the demand for what you have to offer. ***Reinvention:*** Taking your brand and expertise and opening up entirely new opportunities. SSE

Peter Sheahan is an entrepreneur and author of Making It Happen: Turning Your Good Ideas Into Great Results *(BenBella) and* Generation Y *and* Flip. *Visit www.petersheahan.com.*

ACTION: Help your customers justify purchases.

SALES/REFERRAL

Targeted Referral Strategy

Make referral selling a priority.

by Joanne Black

ONCE A CLIENT OFFERED ME these words of wisdom: "Joanne, the challenge is always in the execution." I've never forgotten it, because it's still true.

On the one hand, salespeople agree that *referral selling* is *the best sales strategy*. Its implementation is simple, but it's not easy. Where do I start, sales people ask me? What does it take to implement a *Targeted Referral Strategy*?

Start here. Make *referral selling* your *priority*. The word priority is singular. Either you adopt a referral sales strategy, or you don't. Yes or No. No *maybe's* exist in sales. Decide that *referral sales* is your knock-your-socks-off, way-to-go, top of the heap, business-development strategy. Period.

What's marvelous is the new simplicity in your sales life. You:

- Clarify your lead-generation activities. You now recognize what business to accept and what to decline. It's not easy to say no, but if a sales activity fails to support referral sales, ditch it.
- Clearly define your Ideal Client. You get what you ask for, so ask for exactly what you want. Ask your Referral Source for an introduction to your Ideal Client.
- Articulate the business results you deliver from the client's perspective. What is their ROI? Avoid statements that begin with "we." Sales prospects don't care about you. They only care about what you do for them. Avoid clichés and "corporate speak." Connect the dots between your sales prospect's business and the business results you deliver. This is hard work. However, if you leave it to your sales prospect to do the work, you won't get the sale.

Continue here. Set referral goals for your company. Keep it simple. My definition of a goal: It's achievable with a little bit of stretch.

Define your goals. Take 20 minutes and write down your *big goals*. You already know your goals, but if you keep them in your head, you're fooling yourself. If all you do is write your goals, put them in a drawer and never look at them again, you have a 70 percent better chance of achieving them than if you never wrote them down. Review and re-set your sales goals quarterly, if not monthly. Begin with an *annual timeframe* and break those goals into *months*. If you blow past your goals, bravo to you. Set new ones and go for it!

Here are examples of Corporate Referral-Sales Goals: increases in revenue; increases in profits; number of new clients; number of new client projects; new Partner referrals; cross-sell and up-sell to existing clients; targeting a new vertical; expanding market share in your niche.

Here are examples of Individual Referral Sales Goals: number of referrals asked weekly; number of referrals received; number of referral meetings scheduled; number of referral meetings conducted; increases in the number of new deals; amount of new revenue; number of new client projects; percent of new business in a targeted vertical.

Stop . . . Start . . . Continue. After you adopt your new referral-sales strategy, what sales activities become irrelevant? What activities must you *stop* doing that take time and don't support your new strategy? Next, what sales activities must you *start* doing that you weren't doing before? Review the referral options for both corporate and individual referral activities. And, what cool sales activities were you already doing that you want to *continue*, increase, or refine?

It's Time. It's time to stop talking and start doing. Adopt your Targeted Referral Strategy, build your referral skills and execute, execute, execute. SSE

Joanne Black is an expert on referral selling and founder of No More Cold Calling. www.nomorecoldcalling.com

ACTION: Practice referral selling.

SERVICE/KNOWLEDGE

Stellar Service

Knowledge is a key tool.

by Robert W. Lucas

WITH NEW TECHNOLOGY, customers don't need to visit a location to procure a product or service. Your competition is only a mouse click away. If you fail to provide *timely* and *quality* service, your customers can simply switch to another website and find what they need there.

Beyond having job knowledge, skills and professional standards, *today's service providers must be aware of the values, beliefs, social mores, expectations, needs and preferences of customers*. And this calls for a higher level of training and self-development. Even so, many managers don't invest much in customer service training, often viewing such training as *optional*—not something that contributes to the bottom line—and it's a lower priority.

Many factors—technology changes, demographics, work process, social values, customer needs and wants, career opportunities—impact service providers, their employers and customers. To compensate, service providers must improve their skills and knowledge in *dealing with people from diverse backgrounds*.

Many service providers encounter a wide variety of people daily. Those who know how to deal with diversity will provide better customer service. Service providers will need to be multilingual and be aware of cultural and language differences and the value systems of various ethnic and racial groups in order to better serve their customers.

Key suppliers today may lose their strong hold on worldwide exports while other nations emerge to be political, industry and financial leaders.

The way that you deliver products and services to diverse customers representing different colors, religions, races, ethnic, socio-economic, and personal backgrounds will evolve. Your primary role should be to prepare for and professionally serve every customer equally and in a timely and effective manner. This will require your full attention and efforts on creating a culture that says to your customers, "We were expecting you, and we are ready and happy to serve you." You can never let personal feelings, emotions or issues interfere in this effort.

Knowledge will be your prime tool in preparing for *positive customer encounters*. By knowing the products and services, human behavior, cultural, religious and gender differences, and other diversity factors, you can effectively interact with any person. You can gain this knowledge through education and training, travel, research, experience, and interacting with diverse others, and keeping an open mind. If you go out of your way to *meet and learn about others who are different*, you'll provide positive service. Your *service success* relies on your ability to embrace change and meet the needs and expectations of *all your customers*. SSE

Robert W. Lucas is a founding Managing Partner for Global Performance Strategies. For more information, visit www.globalperformancestrategies.com.

ACTION: Know your diverse customers.

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Ken Shelton, editor

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