

SALES AND SERVICE Excellence

THE MAGAZINE OF TEAM LEADERSHIP

NOVEMBER 2008

Law
of Expectations

Seven PR
Secrets

Objections
Keys to Success

Gold Medal
Discipline

Michael Guld
Consultant



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Sales and Service Excellence

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SALES/STRATEGY

Go for the Gold

Learn winning sales lessons.



by Michael Guld

WHEN MICHAEL PHELPS was asked what coach Bob Bowman did most for him, Phelps said Bowman encouraged him to “use my imagination, to shoot for the stars, and to see the future.” Bowman was also the one who pushed him to the point of exhaustion and beyond.

All kids dream of competing in the Olympics, or winning the Super Bowl, World Series, or Stanley Cup of their sport. Few ever get that opportunity. But the ones who do are those who commit themselves to a disciplined life of practice and training, understanding that raw talent is not the only ingredient for success. Thousands of talented athletes do not have the drive, determination or discipline to succeed as a world-class athlete.

The same theory holds true in sales. The world is full of would-be sales superstars. Most salespeople say they want to be a top producer in the company and make a lot of money—just as many people want to lose weight and be in shape. The problem is, there is no commitment. Many salespeople spend their time *hoping* for the big account to

come through, *waiting* for new assigned accounts to come their way, and *praying* that economic conditions improve. But, only the *doing* part actually leads to success. The biggest reason most salespeople fail is not for lack of knowledge. They lack consistency of behavior to do what they know needs to be done daily.

As in the case of Michael Phelps, a coach or a sales manager is crucial. A



coach is part visionary, part trainer, but mostly a developer of talent, bridging the gap between potential and performance. A manager is not there to motivate you, but to hire independently motivated individuals and challenge and inspire each one to reach peak performance. Their job is not to discipline you, but to hire self-disciplined individuals who will create good habits with-

out having to be micromanaged. Their job is not to instill passion, but to hire passionate people who love what they do and commit to being the best in their given field.

Just as there are no guarantees for Olympic victory, there are no guarantees for triumph in the streets of sales. However, there are action steps that, if implemented, will greatly improve your odds for success:

1. Focus on fundamentals and execution. There’s an old saying, “If you spend all your time watching the scoreboard, the ball’s going to hit you in the face.” While the U.S. basketball team was keenly aware of the score, their focus and energy was not on the scoreboard, but on the execution of their game strategy. Too often in sales, account executives and their managers become fixated on the scoreboard—their sales sheets. Instead, if they practiced the sales fundamentals and executed their sales strategy, the scoreboard would take care of itself.

2. View sales as a marathon. If sales were an Olympic sport, it would be a marathon, not a 100-yard dash. The most successful salespeople take a long-term focus on making their career, not just making their month. Look at daily, weekly, and monthly billing as

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games, and look at the year as the season. Play for the year! You cannot manage your sales, you can only manage your time, focus, accounts, and selling strategies. When effective, the sale will take care of itself.

3. Practice the right technique. To be a top athlete, little is more important than training with the right technique. Practicing the wrong technique will do little to help an athlete's career. The same is true in sales. Too often, sales people attend a one-day session, leaving excited and fired up about all the new tools and techniques presented, only to return to their offices to do the same things the same way. They can hear all the theories and learn all the techniques, but as athletes know, there is a big difference between seeing the drills and learning the drills. Hearing what to do and seeing what to do does not translate to knowing what to do until you—as Nike suggests—"just do it."

4. Practice those winning techniques daily. Sales training works only when a dedication to self-improvement is combined with daily application and practice of what is learned. While having a positive attitude is important, when it's combined with positive activities you will finally see positive results. As you increase your competence, you will have an increase in confidence. As your confidence increases, so does your activity. As your activity increases your results will follow!

5. Feel it, see it, visualize it. Most Olympians agree their biggest competition in their quest for the gold is not other athletes or the physical routines. Most likely, it's themselves. There is usually a direct correlation between their confidence level going in to an event and their performance. If they visualize themselves nailing a routine, their chances are much greater than if they begin tentative and fearful of failure. The same is true in sales. A confident seller coming off the heels of a great sale will fair much better than those struggling with self-confidence. Visualize yourself achieving success and then "fake it until you make it." Imagine that everyone is excited to talk with you.

6. Focus on your goals, not your obstacles. Whether you are going for Olympic gold or playing for "salesperson of the month," there will always be obstacles. The bigger the goals, the greater the obstacles. But a billboard for Accenture said it best, as it depicts Tiger Woods trying to hit around a tree, that reads "they are only obstacles if you cannot see around them." Recognize obstacles, but don't let them stop you.

7. Recovery is part of the process. Rodeo riders know there will be times you get thrown off the horse. But they also know if you don't get right back on, your confidence will wane and fear will set in. The same is

true in sales. The quicker you recover from a lost sale or an unsuccessful appointment, the sooner you will be back in the game.

All would agree the Olympics were entertaining, but were they inspiring? Did they influence, arouse, or motivate a change of behavior that will produce a change of results? What the world experienced was the end result of many days, weeks, months, and years of disciplined hard work and training. Do you have what it takes? You never know until you go for the gold.

Your Top 10 Triggers of Growth

In sales, as in sports, there are key metrics and "triggers of growth" to provide short-term benchmarks, leading to long-term success. Determine where you are today by setting "baseline stats" with each of these 10 items and then set mini-goals for the year.

Increase the size of your customer base. Use a combination of sales, marketing and public relations to develop new business.

Decrease your attrition rate. One of the fastest (and cheapest) ways to grow your billing is to stay close to your existing customers, reducing the chance of defection to a competitor.

Increase the number of prospecting calls per week. Even

if you are in inside sales, you still have prospects and previous clients you can call.

Increase your prospecting conversion rate. What if you could increase your appointments from 1 out of every 5 calls to 2 or 3? It's a combination of the right prospect, the right approach, and the right message.

Increase your average number of sales calls each week. Obviously the more calls and face-to-face presentations, the better.

Increase your sales conversion rate. Double your business by increasing your sales conversion rate from 20 to 40 percent. It's a combination of the right prospect, the right product or program, and the right approach.

Increase your average sale and average annual spending per account. This involves a combination of suggestive selling and increasing the frequency of customer visits.

Increase your average weekly sales. Break down your annual billing goals into weekly mini-goals to provide a manageable challenge.

Increase the lifetime of your customer. Your goal is not to make the next sale, but to "super serve" the next customer so they will become a customer for life.

Increase your referral rate. Your best customers can make an advance introduction to help create warm calls. **SSE**

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ACTION: Win sales gold.

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Fourth Quarter Sales Fix

You can turn around a losing game.



by George Ludwig

IN THE FOURTH QUARTER, most sales managers are anxious. Factor the tumbling economy into the mix, and anxiety morphs into sheer terror and panic. If you're behind on your numbers, it's not too late to turn things around—you can hit your revenue goals before the clock runs down. Sales leaders, like coaches whose teams are behind at the start of the fourth quarter, must retool if they want to win the sales revenue game. Managers must adapt to the economic downturn and find the smartest route to score big and score fast.

Focus on Three Strategies

Fourth-quarter comebacks in sports show that sales leaders can turn things around, score big late, and win the revenue game. But you must focus, drill, and deliver in three areas:

Strategy 1. Make sure your sales team has a positive mindset. Make believers out of them in three ways:

- *Give salespeople your best "I have a dream" speech.* Pull everyone together (in person or by phone) and talk from the heart about your belief that the game can still be won. Convince people you can lead them to victory. Highlight all the specific beliefs that are necessary for success. It doesn't need to be more than 10 minutes long, but it must speak to the emotions and values of the team and foster commitment.

- *Reinforce the message with some one-on-one coaching.* Encourage individual salespeople to kick some serious booty and take no prisoners in their pursuit of business. Look for the good in your salespeople, catch and reward them doing things right, and keep the 4th quarter a time when people feel absolutely superb about themselves.

- *Fire them up—but don't fire them.* If you have a salesperson whose performance is dismal, don't get rid of them just yet. Wait until the first quarter of 2009; don't discuss it at all during the 4th quarter. Right now you *must* keep the positive energy at a peak level and have your salespeople emotionally committed so they can sell, sell, sell in Q4.

Strategy 2: Focus on how and where

your team will spend their scarcest resource, time. Be a time management master. Master your time in three ways:

- *Sort out your selling funnels and create a short list.* Involving your salespeople, evaluate each salesperson's sales funnel at the start of Q4 to determine which opportunities to pursue. Look at five factors: the size/profitability of the sale; a realistic evaluation of where the potential sale is in the sales process and the odds of closing it by year-end; the resources and actions necessary to close the sale by year-end; any adverse cus-



tom behaviors or conditions that may preclude them from being a hot-targeted prospect; and any previous buying patterns the target has demonstrated as it relates to price, value, and purchasing urgency. Once you develop a short list for every seller, have your salespeople prepare a brief strategy position, assessing where you are in the process, for each of the opportunities.

- *Aim for the low-hanging fruit.* Plan a Q4 selling promotion targeted toward your current customers. In hard economic times, customers want to make safe choices with their limited funds, so they look to companies and products they know and trust. Team up the sales and marketing departments to offer one or more specific price promotions targeted to hit the sweet spot of your current customers—those in the best position to purchase by year-end. It also costs less and is considerably faster to sell to existing customers than it is to acquire new ones.

- *Grease the skids with quick communications.* Save precious time in Q4 by reaching out to your customer and prospect database, especially your identified targets, using a variety of time-saving communication tactics.

Email, snail mail, faxes, and telephone will all complement your direct sales efforts and keep you top of mind, which is extremely helpful when trying to close business as quickly as possible.

Strategy 3: Coach your team to execute the critical sales best practices necessary to still win the game. Coach them relentlessly in three ways:

- *Stick to your salespeople like glue.* Do not let salespeople fly free. The entire sales management team should be co-traveling and coaching salespeople through year-end. They should encourage salespeople and ensure the company's specific sales best practices are being executed with the customer at every interaction. Coach and teach salespeople to improve skill-sets to ensure every sales call ends with a positive outcome. This may involve a diplomatic intervention to help advance a sale that would otherwise be stalled or stopped.

- *Help cut reluctant prospects loose.* If you think a salesperson is courting someone who won't sign on the dotted line this year, help him or her disqualify the target. Salespeople are optimistic and often need a gentle, caring sales coach to nudge them to move on to targets they are likely to close in Q4.

- *Keep a best practices checklist in front of your salespeople.* The best practices vary from one company to the next. Still, this list outlines the most common best practices for accelerating sales opportunities toward closure: Is this an *ideal target* for Q4 closure? Has the salesperson identified the pain or desire for gain the target is experiencing to a degree that closure can be facilitated within 90 days? Does the salesperson have a list of well thought out questions designed to expand the relationship, establish credibility, diagnose the pain, and advance the sales process leading toward a Q4 closure? Does the salesperson present and prescribe the product or service in a way that creates a sense of urgency? Does the salesperson repel and overcome objections in a way that doesn't delay the sales process?

In the fourth quarter, sales touch-downs and a game victory are both doable, even in a recessionary economy. In fact, having a tight deadline energizes people and helps them focus. Good salespeople love a challenge. Harness their competitive spirit and channel it properly. You'll be amazed by what your team can accomplish by 2009. **SSE**

George Ludwig is an authority on sales strategy and peak performance, a speaker, trainer, and consultant, CEO of GLU Consulting, and author of Power Selling (Kaplan Publishing). Visit www.georgeludwig.com.

ACTION: Finish the year with a strong 4th quarter.

Law of Expectations

Leverage the impact of suggestion.



by Kurt Mortensen

THE LAW OF EXPECTATIONS uses expectations to influence reality and create results. You tend to make decisions based on how others expect you to perform, fulfilling those expectations whether positive or negative. When you know someone expects something from you, you try to satisfy him or her.

People rise or fall to meet your expectations of them. You can express an expectation of doubt, no confidence, and skepticism, and you'll see negative results. If you believe in someone, show confidence in them, and expect them to succeed, you'll see positive results. When you create expectations, you change people's behavior.

You communicate your expectations through your language, voice inflections, or body movement. If someone introduces themselves by their first name, you do the same. If they give their first and last name, so do you. You accept cues from others regarding their expectations, and you act accordingly. Similarly, you send out your own cues and expectations. The power is in using the *Law of Expectations* consciously!

The *Law of Expectations* dramatically influences performance. What people are told influences their perception and performance. So adding the *Law of Expectations* to your persuasive repertoire can change your client's expectations of you, making you infinitely more persuasive. The behavior you expect is the behavior you get. And often your expectations are based on your assumptions about people. Your expectations become reality, a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you assume you are perceived a certain way, you tend to act in that manner.

Are the assumptions and expectations you have about yourself liberating or victimizing? The *Law of Expectations* is at work daily. Someone who thinks they're going to be fired suddenly experiences a drop in the quality and enthusiasm for their work—and then they get fired! Their belief causes them to act a certain way, and those expectations bring about the very thing that was only a figment of their imagination.

Presupposition: Assume the Sale

The power of suggestion is even

more effective when you engage the client's emotions. If you are selling cars and say, "You'll love how this car handles in the mountains," you shift the focus away from the sale and create an exciting image. You also speak as if the customer has already agreed to the sale (he won't be driving the car in the mountains unless he buys it). You act like the sale is a done deal—and the more you do this, the more it is!

Door-to-door salespeople use this law to their advantage. They ring the doorbell, flash a big smile, say they have great news, and wipe their feet on the doormat expecting to be let in. This technique actually works! The salesperson hands the prospect his pen in expectation of signing the contract.

Using expectations, you create immediate reactions to stimuli. Often, prospects don't even have to think—

they just go along with your proposal! They don't even stop and think about their response—they are already finishing the deal in their mind!

Use presupposition by putting it in writing. People think that if something's in writing, then it must be true. We often go along with something we see without questioning it, just because it's what the directions say to do.

When people are aware of your high opinion of them, they want to live up to your opinions. If they receive praise, they want to be worthy of that praise.

Do you inspire others to achieve more? Your actions towards others will tell them how you feel or think. **SSE**

Kurt Mortensen is founder of the Persuasion Institute, a negotiation, leadership, and sales research firm, and author of Maximum Influence and Persuasion IQ. Visit www.persuasioniq.com.

ACTION: Expect confidence; presuppose success.

MANAGEMENT/RESOLUTION

No More Denial

Remove the elephant.



by Julie Fuimano

HAVING AN ELEPHANT IN the room is a metaphor for living with a huge issue you don't see, or do see but do nothing about. It is avoidance or denial.

Avoiding the Elephant

You know the elephant is there; you can see it. But you do all you can to avoid it.

If what you are avoiding lives at home, you might stay late at work, take on projects, or work overtime. You think the pain of avoiding it is easier to deal with than facing it.

If the elephant is at work, avoidance brings poor morale, a negative work environment, lots of "sick days", a lack of trust, low productivity, and the loss of creativity and innovation.

Maybe you're minimizing an issue. You make excuses in an attempt to deflate its impact. You say, "It's okay. He always yells like that. It's no big deal. That's just the way it is. It isn't so bad."

In any case, the elephant needs to be seen for what it is. To eliminate the elephant, accurately assess the situation without prejudice or bias.

Denying the Elephant's Existence

When you live in denial, you don't even see the elephant. You may sense something isn't right, but you're just

not ready to see it. You are imprisoned, trying to navigate around this big obstacle. Until you remove the obstacle and tackle it head-on, you are not free from its impact in your life.

How do you remove it? Become aware of how you feel, when you're uncomfortable, or if you feel you have no space. Look for areas of your life where you are not free to do, think, or be who you want to be. If you are not free to choose, chances are there's an elephant in the room.

Removing the Elephant

Whether you are avoiding or denying, destroy the elephant by facing it. Accurately assess what is going on without concern about how to fix it or address it. Simply see what is really going on. Accept "what is" and be responsible.

Empower yourself. Create a life that frees you to be and do all you are capable of.

Denying or avoiding limits and drains you. Face everything and be open to grow and develop yourself. Contribute more of your talents and abilities. Enjoy yourself more. What do you gain by living the lie or by dancing with an elephant? It's a great place to hide your beauty, brilliance, skills, and talents but you'll lose precious time that can't be retrieved. May you choose to live and work in spacious rooms liberated from elephants. **SSE**

Julie Fuimano is a coach and author of The Journey Called YOU. Visit www.NurturingYourSuccess.com or email Julie@NurturingYourSuccess.com.

ACTION: Get rid of the elephant in the room.

Own Your Career Path

Navigating in today's marketplace.



by Marilyn McLeod

THE CURRENT ECONOMY IS tough. Global competition is changing the workplace, so career advancement is more competitive. You need to take control of your career and be proactive. Take some lessons from those who have made a career of branding their own product or service, and taking it to the marketplace as entrepreneurs.

I help people develop behaviors to become more effective as leaders in dealing with their customers and other stakeholders. Successful leaders accept responsibility for their lives and careers; they put in the effort required and find creative solutions until they get the important things done. Less successful leaders find someone to blame and tend to whine about not getting the right opportunities. It's not impressive to blame others when you're the only one calling the shots.

Take Seven Steps

Here are seven steps you can take to owning your career path and professional development:

1. Accept that you are the one who must champion your new creation. You may think your product or service is your starting point, but your key is closer to home. You are the one who will be putting in the long hours to bring your vision to fruition. You have to be healthy to carry this responsibility, and you have to be happy to carry it long enough to make it work. What makes you happy? What do you especially enjoy doing, and who do you most like to spend time with? What are your values? What roles most appeal to you? Define a role, career, product or company that matches who you authentically are as closely as possible.

2. Adjust your goals, products or service to suit your customers. You may have the greatest product ever, but if the timing isn't right nobody will buy. You must either sign up to create a new market niche, or consider adjusting your goals to fit your customers. This doesn't mean there's anything wrong with your pet project. It's about being realistic with current trends.

Spend some quality time with the people you most enjoy being around and listen to them on their terms. Learn what they need, and from that perspective start thinking about what valuable improvement in their lives you can provide. A *customer* is more inclusive than just the people you're hoping will buy what you're selling. Think about the people who support you—your co-workers and family. They have needs too and will be more receptive to help if you're interested in making their lives better first.

3. Seek and listen to feedback about your business.

Regardless of who you are and what you bring to the marketplace, I suggest you actively seek input from others. You could save yourself significant time and money over the long term. Once you are better acquainted with what makes you happy and what your customers need, consider adapting your business model to match your market. Keep your original ideas on file. I find my first ideas are often inspired and it's helpful to remember what they were when the right time finally does come around. Don't expect yourself to be good at everything. Find strategies or other people to help you with the necessary tasks you don't do as well. If it's not necessary, take it off your list.

4. Focus on tasks that are most important. How well do you keep track of your time and resources? Do you know what you do with each hour? Or do you begin each day running and just keep going until there's no day left and you're exhausted? Are you spending most of your time on your most important tasks? Create a list every night of the next day's most important tasks or priorities. If the list is too long, make it shorter or circle the one or two items that will make the most difference. Then schedule 20 minutes to one hour of quiet, uninterrupted time at the beginning of the day to focus on just those few items. Don't multi-task during this hour. Just make progress on your most important items. Do this every day,

the same time each day. Let people know which part of your day you're available, and which part of the day your door is closed and your phone unanswered. You can create a system in case there's an emergency during that hour, but usually the world can adjust and allow an hour for concentrated, focused work.

5. Sell your personal brand along with your product. For any business to be successful, someone has to sell something. If you're managing your career, you're selling your personal brand. If you're shy, join Toastmasters or get involved with a professional group. Practice talking with people. Think about what you have to offer professionally, and learn to convey this in brief statements people will respond to with interest. How likeable are you? Do people trust you? Read *What Got You Here Won't Get You There* by Marshall Goldsmith and see if you can discover

ways to become more effective in your interactions.

6. Ask how you are doing and follow up. Resist the urge to just keep going along the same track without asking your customers how they're doing. Why not ask? People like being asked for their opinion. It conveys respect and appreciation, which is what you

want your customers to feel when they think of you. There is so much valuable information to be gained by asking. Whether they are right or wrong, remember that you are listening to their perception and they're the ones writing the check. Even if they have a negative perception, you need to know what they're thinking. If you ask the question, they can let you know the problem, and you have the chance to fix it. If you can't fix it, you can at least let them know how much you value the relationship.

7. Celebrate and have fun. Life and business are easier when you're having fun. People are more attracted to you when you're light-hearted and inspired. Remember what makes you happy, and include it as part of your day. Think about what makes your customers happy, and spend part of your day doing something fun for them you know they'll appreciate. That little extra really makes a difference. **SSE**

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ACTION: Own your career path.



Sales Leadership

Practice four principles.



by Patrick McClure

YES, YOU CAN MASTER THE art and science of personal sales to become more successful, win new business, and gain more customers. But to take your team to the next level, you must master the art and science of sales management and leadership. So how can you best manage and lead a high-performance sales team?

1. Lead from a position of joy. If you take away a man's joy and motivation in his job, you create a slave. Lead by example. Show them how to do the task, then coach them into doing it. Great leaders are servants of the people they lead. The ancient term for warlord (Samurai) translates into "those who serve." Reward the achievers and you will be rewarded with more achievement. Isolate the non-performers, working to turn them into achievers.

The opposite of leading others from a position of joy is to lead with oppression, confusion, and interference. Never punish a member of a group publicly, always encourage. Otherwise, you drive out incentive.

2. Simplify, streamline, and accelerate performance. Make their jobs easier, and then get out of the way! General Colin Powell said, "Great leaders are almost always great simplifiers. They can cut through argument, debate and doubt, to offer a solution everybody can understand." The wise sage Lao-Tzu wrote: "Why are people so hard to manage? Because they have become complicated. He who leads others with a complicated mind is a source of calamity. He who leads others with simplicity is the source of blessing."

3. Personalizing your motivation. People are motivated in many ways, and one of your most important tasks is to understand their motivation, articulate your own motivation, and then ensure they are complementary. For instance, someone might be motivated to earn just enough money to pay for their car and dine out. But you may be motivated to dominate your marketplace, to become the #1 company in your industry! Do you see a possible conflict here?

Team members must learn how and why to drive themselves to achieve

the highest levels. Persuade them to adopt your goals or to fully support the corporate goals. You can pay them a salary to help you achieve your goals, and you will have some success. However, if they develop a passion for achieving a goal that you both share, results expand exponentially. When their goals and your goals are the same, miracles occur!

4. Your team needs to set attainable goals, and agree to achieve them. Help your team be accountable for achieving the goals they set for themselves or agree to. Don't let them lose track of their goals. They are accountable for achieving their goals, and you facilitate this process. Management must lead the team to maximum performance. People give their best effort if they trust that you hold their interests at heart and wish them success in

whatever they do. You can't force people to perform at their peak. Train them to expect maximum results, and then insist they do their best. If they've never tasted victory at the level you wish to attain, they won't know it's possible. Prove to them the goal can be achieved. General George S. Patton said, "Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity."

By mastering a few basic principles, you can transform the way you sell and become more efficient, more effective, and more precise. You will find that selling can become easier and more productive when done with precision. **SSE**

Patrick McClure is president of the Connexia Group and a member of the Association of Professional Consultants. Visit www.ConnexiaGroup.com.

ACTION: Master sales management and leadership.

MANAGEMENT/ATTITUDE

Resiliency Strategy

Keep motivated and engaged.



by Douglas Klein

EMployees' attitudes are sure to decline in uncertain economic times. But management needs to work through this uncertainty and these cycles by adopting effective strategies.

Take seven steps to formulate a Resiliency Strategy:

1. Build a partnership culture. Companies with a partnership culture consistently outperform their competitors during both boom times and downturns. They follow hallmark values of basic trust, a long-term perspective, joint decision-making, open communications, and financial sharing on a daily basis.

2. Create, communicate, and exhaust alternatives before downsizing. An employer that treats its employees as partners makes every effort to avoid layoffs. Employees trust management that is open, honest, and is doing everything it can to cushion the blow. When it does become necessary to reduce costs, there are many alternatives to layoffs.

3. Focus on the local behavior of immediate supervisors and managers. Create an environment where everyone is respected, given timely recognition, supported in their continued development, and provided coaching

and guidance. Leaders and managers should understand their own and their subordinates' reactions to stress, and how to develop coping strategies.

4. Pay more attention to high-potentials likely to leave. Consider developing a retention strategy for high-potentials that includes a strong focus on career development. Give them special projects to meet their achievement needs, and make sure they are taking advantage of training and development opportunities.

5. Create ways for employees to contribute to company goals. One excellent

mechanism is gain-sharing efforts. As the name says, it is a method for sharing gains with employees—the gains that employees themselves achieve for the organization. These programs are very motivating and truly exemplify a partnership culture.

6. Include employees to assist with possible solutions. Management may keep plans and information secret during difficult times. Communicating openly and asking for help in developing actions to be taken helps minimize feelings of powerlessness.

7. Perform periodic employee assessments. Assess how anxious their employees and leaders are feeling about internal and external issues. Monitor workers' stress levels, their perceptions of their workloads, and be on the lookout for burnout. **SSE**

Douglas Klein is President of Sirota Survey Intelligence (www.sirota.com) and contributor to The Enthusiastic Employee (Wharton School Publishing). Visit www.enthusiasticemployee.com.

ACTION: Improve employee attitude and morale.



Seven PR Secrets

Get your business noticed.



by Pam Lontos

IS PUBLICITY REALLY THAT important? Yes! The effectiveness of your publicity campaign will ultimately determine the success of your business. It may be as simple as having a letter published in the editorial column of your local paper, or as dynamic as having a front-page article with your name splashed across the headlines.

A successful publicity campaign is hard, but you don't have to be a public relations expert to maximize results. Use the following trade secrets to increase your visibility and sell more of your product or service:

1. Get to know your audience. One survey reported the typical Fortune 1000 CEO is more likely to have watched *The Simpsons* than to have watched all three presidential debates. What does this mean for your publicity? Don't make assumptions about your audience. Understanding your audience and what appeals to them is important if you want to get noticed. Keep in mind that you have a variety of different tastes that go beyond your work, and so does everyone else. Figure out what magazines your audience reads and what shows they watch, then read and watch the same things.

2. Create news. Familiarize yourself with popular publications within your audience to gain an understanding of what issues are important and interesting to them. Understand what they find newsworthy, and develop your publicity around these issues. Tie your topic to current events and target your audience directly when you pitch stories.

If your business focuses on home organization, you can reach a business audience for "Clean Off Your Desk Day." Or, if you help businesses implement time management strategies in the workplace, you can reach an at-home audience with an article on how to tackle the home improvements you start, but never complete. Don't be afraid to stretch the boundaries of your topic. Remember to create news that interests your audience, not that interests you.

3. Send press releases. Press releases are the easiest and quickest way to advertise to a large audience, and they

inform the media you have something to offer. Press releases are also a good method for getting your product or service reviewed in publications. Watch the breaking news and if something ties to your business, send a press release to the newspapers, radio and television shows, and magazines offering your take as an expert to interview about the situation.

Give your press releases a professional look by using a letterhead. Keep them short (two pages maximum), and double space if possible. Direct it to a specific reporter or editor to make sure it doesn't get lost in the stacks, and always use a slant aimed at the publication's or show's audience. And don't forget your contact information.



4. Develop a winning media kit. As you approach the different media outlets, you'll need to send them a media kit. Think of your media kit as your resume; it tells the media professionals about you and your business. A professional media kit should include your short bio, a summary of your product or service, and your contact information. Also include sample questions about your topic that the writer or host can use during the interview. Put all this information together in a professional folder, and present it to media professionals before interviews.

5. Solve your contact's problems. With stories, each reporter and producer has a unique personality and unique needs. Figure out what they want and make their job much easier. If you make a media professional's job easier, they will come back to you for more quotes and more interviews. Ask them what other stories they're working on, and for what other publications they write. Ask how you can help them and what other topics they'd like to see. Let the reporter, editor, or producer know

you care about their stories and their audience because in the end, you'll both look good. Establish working relationships with media professionals and develop strong contacts. Learn everything you can about the show or publication, and about their competition, to really make them shine.

6. Give a great interview. Do you know what it's like to talk to a boring person? They drone on for hours about topics that don't interest you, and all you can think about is getting rid of them. Keep this in mind when you talk to the media. If you are boring, they won't want to talk with you ever again. But if you have energy and keep your responses on the topic, you'll keep the media professionals interested. Before the interview, take time to prepare three to five main points you'd like to cover. Then if the conversation goes astray, you can revert back to these points with ease. Also, don't be pushy about what you want. They may or may not have room in their story to mention your product or service. But if you ask nicely, you'll have a better chance.

7. Follow up. Once you establish contact, maintain the relationships and follow up for more exposure. Avoid nagging with "did you decide yet" calls, but do ask when the article will be published or when the show will air. Maybe you can offer a new bit of information in your follow-up call. Remember to reintroduce yourself, because reporters and producers talk to many different people every day. And be sure to send a thank-you note. These added touches of consideration let the media professionals know that you appreciate them and make them want to work with you again in the future.

Use the PR Secrets to Success

A successful publicity campaign is hard work, but it need not be excruciating. Understand your customers' interests and target your products to their needs. Use a professional approach and media kit. Develop strong working relationships with media professionals. Give a great interview, then follow-up to show your enthusiasm.

Publicity is the key to increasing your bottom line. You don't have to be a PR pro to make the most of your media exposure. With these seven secrets you can maximize your PR success and secure free publicity. **SSE**

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ACTION: Use publicity to increase business.

Service Principles

Create moments of magic.



by Shep Hyken

GREAT CUSTOMER SERVICE IS not a department—it is a simple philosophy that should be practiced by everyone, regardless of position or title, and can be broken down into four basic principles. By understanding these four simple concepts, you will create more moments of magic for your customers.

1. Common sense. This means doing the obvious. It is a little more than treating your customers like you would want to be treated—it is treating your customers the way they would want to be treated. What you would expect might be different than what your customer might expect. For example, a bellman may work at a five-star hotel. When he stays at a hotel like the one in which he works, he would never demand the same level of service and attention the hotel's guests demand. But he still understands what they want and desire, and he delivers it to them.

2. Flexibility. Rules and policies are nothing more than guidelines. Don't let "company policy" stand in the way of making a customer happy. However, there does come a point where you have to take a stand. In spite of what you may have heard, the customer is not always right; but they are always the customer. If they are wrong, let them be wrong with dignity. Do what you can, within reason, to see that your customer is always happy. I am reminded of the CEO of a major company who told all of his people, "Do whatever it takes to make the customer happy." They did, and almost put the company into bankruptcy. Training must go along with empowering people to be flexible. If properly trained, the employee can deliver what the customer perceives as a "whatever-it-takes" attitude, without the employees putting the company out of business.

3. Solving Problems. There are two types of problems to solve—business and non-business. Business problems include taking care of complaints and meeting customer needs. Customers are coming to you to either satisfy a complaint or have you help them with a problem; you need to be there to help them. Then there are non-business problems having nothing to do with what

you and your company do on a day-to-day basis. It might be someone whose car has a flat tire across the street from your place of business. How do you react when they come to you for help? Do you tell them there is a pay phone down the street, or do you pick up the phone and call for a tow truck? Solving non-business problems is a way of generating good public relations. You never know; this person could turn out to be your next customer.

4. Recovery. I don't care how good you are. You can have a long-term, satisfied customer for years and as soon as something bad happens, you have to recover. That recovery will be the customer's final judgment on just how good you really are. Remember, studies have proven it is much less expensive to keep an existing a customer than to get a new one. Do what you

can, not just to recover from a problem, but to give the customer a renewed confidence to continue to do business with you again. Sometimes this means going beyond just fixing a problem. Sometimes you have to get the customer back in the door. A restaurant that had a problem with a guest's meal might not just remake the dinner, but also give a complimentary appetizer the next time the guest comes back. Not only did the restaurant resolve the complaint, but also gave an incentive for the guest to come back.

These four examples of simple yet powerful tools are the key to success in customer service and will create many moments of magic! **SSE**

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ACTION: Make customer service your philosophy.

MANAGEMENT/PERSONNEL

Guard Your Hive

Protect critical resources.



by Roberta Matuson

AFARMER RECENTLY reported an attempted hijacking of his honeybee hives. The attempt was unsuccessful, but the farmer could have lost his ability to cross-pollinate his crop of organic vegetables. Unable to replace the honeybees in time, his entire business would have been lost overnight.

Most of us were unaware of the integral role honeybees play in our ecological system until they started disappearing. We now realize how dependent we are on this tiny sector of nature to fuel our food systems.

Your company has important resources worth protecting, too—experienced workers. What would become of your organization if these people disappear? How many years would it take to replenish this valuable resource? If someone tried to steal one of your most precious resources, would your colony collapse? Could your organization survive?

Prevent Poaching

Prevent others from stealing the experienced talent you have worked so hard to cultivate in four ways:

1. Control the climate. Take your organization's temperature so you can make adjustments before you have a

mass exodus. Use climate surveys or employee focus groups. Check in semi-annually or annually to track your progress as you work toward building a comfortable environment for all.

2. Reassure your talent. Older workers are often concerned they will be reorganized out of the company the next time a wave of reductions hit, making it difficult for them to focus on performance. With your next lay-off list, make sure you are not sending the message that experience is no longer valued.

3. Don't give them a reason to leave. Create an environment where older workers feel welcome. Ask experienced people how to improve the workplace so they feel more engaged. You may not change everything overnight, but you will send the message that you value their contribution and are willing to make changes to retain them.

4. Make your workplace more accessible. Offer preferred parking to employees who find it difficult to walk from the end of the parking lot to the employee entrance. If a job requires standing for long periods of time, supply anti-fatigue mats or chairs. Employers with large campuses could invest in Segway Scooters to allow older workers to move about the campus more freely.

Protect your hive and be in position to thwart off any attempts to steal your honey and your precious bees. **SSE**

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ACTION: Value your experienced workers.



Thrive in Tough Times

Take advantage of opportunities.



by Wolf J. Rinke

IF YOU HAVE ALREADY GONE through downsizings or rightsizings, put yourself in the driver's seat of your career by developing new skills that enable you to take advantage of opportunities and thrive in this tough economy.

Think projects. Work gets done primarily by three distinct specialties: 1) resource providers develop and supply talent or money; 2) project managers ensure talent and resources are organized so the project gets done; 3) talent gets the job done. To thrive in a tough economy, master winning management skills and perform well in the project manager or resource provider role.

Think global. Take advantage of globalization by increasing your cultural awareness. Seek employment in a multicultural organization. Apply to *Fortune's 100 Best Companies to Work For* or similar organizations. Learn a foreign language and travel to a country that speaks that language. You'll become culturally sensitive and bring back great ideas to increase success.

Become an effective team player and leader. A lot of work is being accomplished in today's organizations by teams. Learn how to empower others and master leadership and winning management skills. Be equally comfortable and effective in a supportive role as in a leadership role.

Focus on delivering exceptional quality service. This is not an option; it's a survival strategy. Remember, the person you serve—an external or an internal customer—is who provides your paycheck. It's not your boss or even your organization. Look at last week's calendar and find out how much time you've spent with your external or internal customers. If you are not spending at least one third of your time with your customers, you are making a big mistake!

Become a problem solver. You can no longer expect to be compensated for time—only for results and problems solved. Actively look for a problem, then put a team together and solve it. Then let the powers that be know what a great job your team did and how much your team improved

the profitability. If you do that consistently, you will be promoted or able to negotiate for an increase in pay.

Think of yourself as self-employed. Seeing yourself working for one company for the rest of your career is crazy. You need to see yourself as renting your services out to someone else (your employer). Compute your daily compensation and add about 30 percent for benefits. Ask yourself, "Have I created value today that exceeds my daily compensation?" or "How am I creating \$___ value today?" Repeat these questions every day. Keep asking, "How have I grown in my job today?" Go to work each day with a briefcase of skills and competencies. At the end of the day, check your briefcase to see if you're taking home the same things you brought in. If so, it's time to move on to a more challenging assignment.

Become a highly effective networker in and out of your organization. When it comes time to find a new assignment, your network will determine how fast that happens. Eat lunch with different people three out of five days a week, sit with people you don't know at meetings, and attend conferences sponsored by different groups. Add at least one "mover and shaker" to your network every month.

Check Yourself

Assess how well you're achieving a competitive advantage in this tough economy by asking yourself:

Am I learning? If you're not, your marketplace value diminishes rapidly.

Am I being taken advantage of? Don't sacrifice your long-term development to put out short-term fires. Don't let your ego get the better of you when you're told, "We can't do without you!" No one is indispensable. Never, ever, get caught in persistent short-term traps, at the expense of your long-term development.

If my job were open today, would I get it? Benchmark your skills all of the time. Look at the want ads to find out which skills the marketplace is looking for. If you do not possess those

skills, invest more in yourself by becoming a voracious life-long learner.

Am I adding value? If you can't answer this immediately and briefly, assume no one else knows how you contribute value either. You are a likely target during the next downsizing.

Am I good at selling? You sell all the time. You sell your internal or external customers your products and/or services. You sell your boss on a raise. You sell your team members on an idea. You do the same at home with your spouse, children, and even your pets. So get *great* at it! Look for a quality sales program and attend it this year!

Am I energized by change? Don't fight or resist change. Change will continue to accelerate at hyperspeed, so welcome it with open arms.

Does my resume focus on contributions? Get out your resume and check how well it identifies specific and ideally quantifiable achievements, specific impact on the bottom line, and variety and content of work, projects and leadership experiences. Are you impressed? Would you hire this person? If so, congratulations! If not, update your resume now and get it circulated even if you don't need or want a new job.



Now, Take Action

There is one more skill you need to master. This one is more important than all the others. It's the one skill that, when all else fails, will determine whether you will thrive in this tough economy. The skill is to *take action!* Action lets you know whether what you've tried works. If it does, do more of it. If it does not, try something else. Start the process all over again, and soon you'll find yourself succeeding faster than you have ever thought possible. Whatever you do, avoid at all costs fretting about having *failed*—there is no such thing, unless you make the same mistake over and over again. Action gets you away from bemoaning change and mourning the lack of job security. Action will liberate and empower you. Action will get you to grow, change and adapt. Action will provide you with *virtual* job security, enabling you to achieve a competitive advantage and assuring that you thrive in this tough economy. **SSE**

Wolf J. Rinke is a consultant, speaker, coach, and author of *Make it a Winning Life and Don't Oil the Squeaky Wheel*. Visit www.WolfRinke.com or call 800-828-9653.

ACTION: Analyze and improve yourself.

Master Your Brand

Here are the Top 10 Secrets.



by Brenda Bence

PEOPLE LIKE SIR RICHARD Branson, Barack Obama and Suze Orman have all built powerful personal brands, propelling them to the top. They took the time to define, communicate, and protect their brands. You can be sure they followed these 10 top secrets to reach their great success.

Secret 1: You already have a personal brand, simply by virtue of you being you in the workplace. Determine where your personal brand is strong and where it could use improvement. Make the necessary changes to make it as strong as possible.

Secret 2: Your personal brand exists in the minds of others in the way they perceive, think, and feel about you. If the public fails to perceive a corporate brand as the best, it won't be successful. So keep in mind your personal brand is not what you think it is, but what others perceive it to be.

Secret 3: Personal branding is all about your audience. Personal branding is not self-centered and all about you. Just as corporate branders must offer a benefit to consumers in order for a product to be a success, you must fill a need your audience has in order for your personal brand to be successful.

Secret 4: The only way to determine if your brand is successful is to find out how your audience perceives you. If there is a gap between what your audience thinks and feels about you and what you want them to think and feel about you, your personal brand should be adjusted and strengthened.

Secret 5: Have a strong personal brand; carefully define it. If your personal brand doesn't start with a crystal clear definition, it's just a vague premise. A clear definition tells a marketer which consumers to target and where to focus advertising dollars. Your own brand should do the same.

Secret 6: The best brands respond to both emotional and functional needs. If two accountants are equally qualified, the one with a stronger personal brand will be the one who is reliable and precise. His audience can relax in the knowledge that the work will be done on time and well!

Secret 7: The best personal brands

are credible; prove you can deliver what you promise. It isn't enough to say you can fill a need at work; you must show that you have the experience and training to do it. Prove it with your background, your education, and the unique qualifications you bring.

Secret 8: Your personal brand is always being built through what you say and do. This doesn't mean you can't make mistakes; means you need to think about behaviors that could damage your brand. Even when you're not on the job, if someone sees you drinking too much at the local pub, it could get back to your manager. Think before you act.

Secret 9: Be consistent in how you communicate your brand. What would you think if Nike suddenly started encouraging you to be a couch potato? Just as Nike is consistent in

promoting sports and fitness in all of its advertising, you must be consistent in how you present your personal brand.

Secret 10: Don't pretend to be someone you're not. You won't be happy, and it's hard to remain consistent with a fake personal brand. Find out what your audience needs, and align those needs with your own unique strengths and character traits. Your personal brand will reflect who you are, bringing greater success and fulfillment.

Protect your brand. Take advantage of personal branding secrets that have helped them reach their potential and apply them to your work and life to achieve your goals. **SSE**

Brenda Bence, branding expert and certified executive coach, is the author of *How YOU Are Like Shampoo*. Visit www.HowYOUAreLikeShampoo.com.

ACTION: Apply these personal branding principles.

MARKETING/INDIVIDUALITY

Differentiate Yourself

Show people what you're all about.



by Michael Angier

COMPETITION IS GOOD. It's good for the economy. It's good for customers, and it's good for us as business owners and managers. It keeps us constantly improving our products and services. It hones our skills and stretches our imagination. But just how can we compete effectively?

The best way to compete is to differentiate ourselves—to stand out from our competition with our unique gifts and style we bring to the marketplace.

Sometimes this can be done by being first. Xerox did it in copiers. Kleenex did it in tissues. But if we can't be first on the market, we're forced to do something else. So how do we do this? Here are two ways:

1. Know your unique assets—who you are and what you stand for. This takes some soul-searching. It takes some thinking. What do we do best? What do we love doing? Where have we received the most tribute? Are we faster, less expensive, more responsive, cleaner, lighter, hipper? Are we friendlier or easier to do business with? If you're not any of these things, reinvent yourself. Decide what you want to be known for. But don't try to be something you're not. This reinvention

should be a discovery of latent values and qualities—things that are always there but rarely exploited.

2. Take every opportunity to show people what you're all about. Tell your story, tell it well, and tell it often. Get other people telling your story. Most of this is common sense—it's just not common practice. Southwest Airlines and JetBlue are about the only airlines making any money these days. What's their secret? Southwest is known for low fares, friendly people, and fun flights. Jet Blue is known for new planes, video

screens in every leather seat, low fares, and friendly service. They're known for this because they deliver on this reputation day in and day out. And they're good at telling their stories well. There's good buzz about what they do, how they do it, and how well it's working. People rave about their experiences flying on these airlines. No wonder they're turning profits when others are declaring or trying to emerge from bankruptcy.

Few things are more important, in order to compete effectively, than differentiating yourself. Do it with substance and based upon your core values. Back it up with commitment. You'll be known for what you want to be known for. You'll have more fun doing what you do best. You'll serve your customers better. You'll step up your profits and your fulfillment. **SSE**

Michael Angier, founder of SuccessNet.org, released the *New SuccessNet Resource Book*. Visit www.SuccessNet.org or www.MySuccessNet.com.

ACTION: Improve business. Differentiate yourself.

Referrals

Get more of them.



by Jim Cross

EVERYONE TALKS ABOUT referrals, but few pursue them. Referrals should be the reward for a job well done—the by-product of excellent customer service. The hardest part is asking for them. You need a game plan and well thought-out strategy. You're asking clients to put their reputation on the line by recommending you to another client or co-worker.

Approach referrals after your client has successfully implemented your product or service. Since your client is busy, pursue referrals after the close of their quarter, project, or busy time. View the referral as you would any other sales pitch. You are pitching the client on giving you a referral. Before you ask, show them why you've earned the right to a referral. Present the hard work and excellent customer service you have given the client.

Assess your client's needs and then transition into your needs (referrals). Ask the customer for a lunch meeting or a conference call to review the account and get a status check. Present the client with something tangible—such as customer service reports, product breakdowns, returns, or project deadlines. Get the client thinking, "Yes, I have been pleased."

If you can't present a favorable overview, you haven't earned the right to ask for referrals. Make sure your client is satisfied and happy with your service. Communicate three things to the customer: You and the client agreed upon X. You delivered X. The client is happy with X.

Here is a sample dialogue:

Sales Rep: "Mrs. Customer, I want to thank you for your business and get a feel for how things have been recently. I've prepared a report outlining our most recent project and high points within the project. As we discussed, you wanted XYZ implementation to be up and running by XYZ date. We came in ahead of schedule and under budget. You also said it was imperative there were no glitches, and everything seems to be running smoothly, and the project was delivered without

problems. How would you rate your satisfaction with this project?"

Client: "We are extremely happy with the implementation and look forward to working with you more."

Sales Rep: "I echo your sentiments. I do my best to deliver on expectations and provide excellent customer service. Based on my track record, do you feel I've earned the right to ask you for some referrals?"

If you've held up your end of the bargain, don't be afraid to ask for a bigger piece of the pie. You said you were going to do X, you did X, and the customer is happy. Clients understand that asking for referrals is part of the process.

Two Types of Referrals

Client to Client: This referral gives you the leeway to take care of the personal interest of your customer. It is typically a referral to someone outside your customer's company—perhaps an associate in the field but employed elsewhere. It is okay to offer a reward for a lucrative referral. Some sales reps pay a monetary amount to the client for referring new customers. Or you can simply get the referral because your customer respects you and doesn't expect anything in return.

Introduce yourself to the new client, and let them know you have a successful relationship with the mutual contact, and that based on your past success, the contact suggested you give them a call. Be clear you are calling to earn business based on your previous achievements with the mutual contact. You are calling with the purpose of getting in the loop and earning business. They will thank you for not wasting their time with chitchat.

Don't show up expecting to have business handed to you. Remember, your old client's reputation is on the line. You have to impress the new client *and* to make your old clients proud and confident in their decision to give you the referral. Be humble and honored to earn the new client's business. Be knowledgeable of his or her industry and business model.



And, be professional and respectful.

Don't talk about details regarding your other client, except the professional relationship you have. A referral enables you to get your foot in the door, but the rest is up to you. You can't expect someone to buy from you simply because he or she met with you. Show credibility and earn his or her trust just like with any new account.

Client to co-worker: This referral requires a little more hand-holding. You can't offer a bonus incentive because it could be a conflict of interest. Have your client champion you into other departments of the company based on the added value you bring to the table. If you have kept your end of the bargain, your client will want you to work with the other departments and contacts.

Use the same approach: "Based on this proven track record, do you feel okay with me offering my services to other areas of your company?"

Lunch meetings or joint conference calls are a great way to do introductions. Be on your game and prepared to put your best foot forward. Referrals don't always have to be sales related. Prove yourself without the customer even making a purchase. Meet the three criteria: you agree on X, you deliver X, and the client is happy with X. Even if they don't purchase anything from you, you have executed and met expectations.

Referrals don't have to be to a new contact. Use the referral to expand your offerings within the same contact. If you have met the three criteria, you have earned the right to ask for other business from the same contact. You are referring yourself into new business with existing contacts. If you haven't given them a reason to doubt you, then why wouldn't they give you a shot at more of their business?

Referrals are the low-hanging fruit to increasing your business. Don't cold call; have someone refer you into new business based on past satisfaction.

Always remember to thank your client for any successful referrals. It is common courtesy to thank someone for a referral, regardless of the outcome. You will lose credibility very quickly if you forget to thank your existing clients for their helping hand. **SSE**

Jim Cross is author of Bacon & Eggs and founder of The Cross Corp. Visit www.thecrosscorp.com or call 847-529-3724.

ACTION: Ask satisfied customers for referrals.

New Product Blueprinting

Embrace it now.



by Dan Adams

THE ONLY WAY TO WIN IN tough times is to consistently develop new products customers want to buy and find clarity in the front end of the process. Then, fine tune it to a high-performance level by adopting New Product Blueprinting. NPB enables you to consistently launch products that are eagerly embraced and to develop products customers love, competitors respect, and stockholders applaud.

Five Advantages

NPB is attractive for five reasons:

- 1. Blueprinting lets you more effectively harvest low-hanging fruit.** Discover your customers' needs—and the needs of your customers' customers. Hold customer interviews and help your client strengthen ties with their customers.
- 2. It prevents you from squandering resources on unsuitable markets.** The first step in NPB is to target the best market segments. You can't afford to waste your time and money in pursuit of customers that won't pay off.
- 3. It accounts for critical differences between B2B and B2C customers.** Engage a handful of buyers in the product development process. This creates a customer base that is more savvy, rational, interested, and concentrated.
- 4. It helps you engage customers, treat them with respect and solicit input.** Never approach the customer with cleverly-scripted questionnaires. Ask simple questions so they direct you to the areas they are most concerned with. Promote a respectful, peer-to-peer dialogue, and create an idea-generating atmosphere.
- 5. Avoid the selling stigma and the great solutions giveaway.** You are interested in results your customers want. Understand how you can deliver value that your competitors are missing.

Implementing NPB won't be easy. It means changing the DNA of your company. But why be satisfied with great quality and productivity for making products customers yawn at? NPB requires an investment in people and a commitment to do things differently.

Seven Steps of NPB

Step 1: Market research. Sift your potential opportunities early and cheaply using internet-based market research and effective screening tools.

Step 2: Discovery interviews. Interview customers using techniques that uncover dozens of needs in depth. Enter the customer's world to discover and understand what will excite him.

Step 3: Preference interviews. Prioritize customer needs that are most important and least satisfied. Replace your internal bias with hard data—and kill your project if customers are not eager for change.

Step 4: Side-by-side testing. Compare competitor's products with your own and attack their weak spots, avoid being blind-sided, and optimize pricing.

Step 5: Product objectives. You have a wealth of outside-in customer and competitive data. Use this data to create a blockbuster product design, targeting specific customer needs and predicting market reaction.

Step 6: Technical brainstorming. You've got the "what" (your product design), but must now consider the "how." Brainstorming technical solutions from inside and outside your company.

Step 7: Business case. Would a venture capitalist fund your project? Drive out assumptions, bias, and wishful thinking before you begin heavy spending in the product development stage. **SSE**

Dan Adams is president of Advanced Industrial Marketing and author of *New Product Blueprinting*. Visit www.newproductblueprinting.com or call 330-715-8709.

ACTION: Learn to blueprint your product.

SALES/PRACTICE

Sales Simulations

These drive business impact.



by Steve Gielda

HOW EFFECTIVE IS YOUR sales training? In today's market, sales reps must not only be able to sell a competitive advantage—they must be a competitive advantage. Experienced salespeople reflect a particular type of learner who responds to a specific kind of learning:

Fast-paced: A successful learning experience must mimic the dynamic pace of their real-world selling environment.

Feedback-rich: A successful learning experience must give reps the opportunity to make mistakes and get expert feedback.

Challenging and competitive: The learning experiences must represent challenging and competitive situations that engage the salespeople to strive for a win.

Team-based: The best learning experiences must be team-based so the participants can share best practices, push back on ideas, and strengthen thinking.

Relevant: To deliver strong results, learning activities must be based on real world situations.

Fun: The experience must create the motivation to learn.

Driving Business Impact

Business impact comes from mastery of the fundamental skills—call execution, presentation, negotiation, strategy development and others—plus

in-depth practice and feedback in the application and integration of those skills under real-world conditions.

Here are four good reasons to consider a classroom sales simulation: 1) to create a realistic environment to test "what if" scenarios and provide opportunity to make mistakes in a safe environment; 2) to provide context, content and process which are relevant, realistic, and directly applicable on the job; 3) to shorten learning cycles because of immediate feedback; and 4) to drive business impact through strategic application of critical selling skills.

Done well, simulations bring enormous benefits. Companies using only

traditional training programs are wasting time and money by comparison. Since of our generation X sales reps prefer learning from a competitive, game-like experience, they will find it hard to learn from the experience if it doesn't relate to their own business.

Classroom sales simulations should include the market conditions, trends, and competition your sales team faces daily. They will experience failure and triumph in a safe environment and learn from their experiences, improving their chances for success.

Many companies implement classroom sales simulations to help them apply critical selling skills to their business strategy—helping with market changes, company performance, a new product launch, and more. **SSE**

Steve Gielda is a Principal with Sales Momentum, a simulation-based sales training company. Visit www.salesmomentum.com, call 703-266-7667, or email sgielda@salesmomentum.com.

ACTION: Simulates sales situations.



Four Hard Objections

Take three steps to overcome them.



by Paul S. Goldner

WHEN I LEARNED ABOUT handling objections, I was taught a simple, fairly effective four-step process: 1) listen fully and completely; 2) show empathy for the customer's or prospect's position; 3) provide your viewpoint on the issue or situation; and 4) go for the close, which usually means asking for the appointment or the business.

These four steps provide a time-tested process for handling objections, but there is a better way!

Methods for Handling Objections

There are some important objection handling techniques. These include:

Feel, felt, found. This technique is quite effective when handling the price objection. You could say: "I can understand how you *feel*. Many of my best customers also *felt* that way. But when they started to work with us, they *found* we give them a much lower total cost of ownership."

Ask open-ended questions. The customer might say, "Your price is too high." Respond with, "How did you arrive at that conclusion?" or "What factors entered into your decision making process?" Open-ended questions enable you to gather more information about the customer's concern.

Present a different alternative. Use a different perspective or method. "That is one way to look at the facts; my way is simply another—a different alternative. If you consider the time saving features of our product, you will see that you get the best return on your investment with us."

Ask leading questions. Leading questions, if used correctly, can artfully cause your customer to consider new facts and circumstances. "Have you considered that our product will reduce the time it takes for you to process an order?"

Instead of telling the customer they are making a bad decision by using price (instead of value) as their decision making criterion, artfully ask them a question so they can gracefully change their answer or decision without having to acknowledge they were wrong.

Four Standards Objections

I see only four objections in sales: Price, Competition, Not Now, and Will It Work? Every other objection is a version of one of these four. There are many ways to say the same thing.

A customer or prospect may simply say, "Your price is too high." But they might say, "The competition's product comes with free shipping or installation." By making the latter remark, the customer tells you your product, plus the cost of shipping or installation, is more expensive. Likewise, the prospect could state they are using the competition for the product you are selling and they are quite happy with the results they achieve. They could also say they handle the need for your product or service internally.

Handling Objections

Take these three steps:

1. Listen fully and completely. It is crucial to understand what the customer is telling you.

2. Categorize the objection. Place the objection you just heard into one of our four categories; Price, Competition, Not Now and Will it Work?

3. Provide the category response. Because there are only four objections in sales—regardless of your industry, geography or job role (inside sales vs. outside sales)—you need not memorize thousands of responses. You need only prepare one good response for each of the four category objections.

We have already provided sample responses to the Price objection, so we will focus on giving you representative responses to the other categories.

Competition: The customer says, "we use your largest competitor." Respond by saying, "That's fine. They are a good company, but what we have found is that we can often be an excellent supplement to some of the things they provide." Your response is a function of the company and the industry you work in.

Will it work? The customer says, "Have you ever done this in our industry?" To this you can state, "I can see why that would be a concern

to you. I will provide you with three references of companies in your industry where we have already successfully implemented this solution."

Not now: The customer says, "I don't have a need for that now." You can respond by saying, "I can understand that you don't have a need at the moment but as long as I have you on the phone, do you mind if I ask you a few questions? This way, when you do have a need, I will already have an understanding of your business."

Here you are using open-ended questions to find some unstated customer need you can act on now as a basis to get your face-to-face meeting.

In this situation, I recommend using three open-ended questions. If you cannot get a meeting after three open-ended questions, set up this prospect for your next call to them a month or more into the future.

Two Keys to Success

When implementing our approach to objection handling, use two keys:

First, understand what key phrases you should use when crafting each of your four category responses.

The key phrases include: Price—Lowest total cost of ownership or greatest return on investment.

Competition—Supplement, complement or in addition to.

Will it work?—Reference stories.

Not now—Use three open-ended questions to probe for additional reasons to meet when the initial reason you use is not compelling to the prospect.

The second key to success is preparation. Because there are only four objections in all of sales, there is no excuse not to prepare a response for each and to role play and practice your responses until you well prepared.

It's important to understand these four categories of objections. Become familiar with how they might sound when you hear them from the customer in the sales process and which key phrases to use in your response. Learn where each objection is most likely to occur in the sales process—telephone objections vs. face to face objections. And discover which objections are more likely to come first in their respective phase of the sales process. **SSE**

Paul S. Goldner is a noted entrepreneur, sales strategist, speaker, and author of the REDHOTSALES books. Call 914-232-4682, email Paul@redhotsales.com, or visit www.redhotsales.com.

ACTION: Make 2009 a REDHOT sales year.



Face Rejection

Don't fear hearing 'no'.



by Richard Fenton and Andrea Waltz

THE BIGGEST OBSTACLE TO SUCCESS IN marketing and sales is the fear of hearing *No!* The word *No* stands like a brick wall between you and your goals. The most important quality of great salespeople is their willingness to face rejection.

Consider this story:

I had only been working at Dubin's for about a month when the district manager, Harold, was scheduled to do a store visit. I really wanted to impress him. I wasn't doing very well in sales, and I was worried that if my sales didn't improve, I would be let go. I was newlywed and needed the job.

Harold showed up about 9:30, and at 10 a.m. we opened the doors. I was the first salesman in that morning, and so I had first ups. In walks this finely-dressed gentleman who announces that he wants to buy an entire wardrobe of clothing! Within 30 minutes, I had my biggest sale ever, \$1,100. I was certain Harold would be impressed.

After the customer left, Harold sauntered over and said, "Nice sale kid." My chest puffed out with pride, but Harold didn't seem overly impressed. Then he said, "I'm just curious, what did that customer say *no* to?"

"What do you mean?" I shot back. "That guy just bought a suit, sport coat, three shirts, six ties, shoes, socks, a belt and underwear!"

Harold waited calmly for me to stop being defensive, then said, "We've already established what he said *yes* to. What I want to know now is, what did he say *no* to?"

I mentally reviewed the sale, then sheepishly replied, "Nothing. That customer didn't say *no* to anything."

"So," Harold asked, "how then did you know he was done?"

I suddenly realized the customer hadn't ended the sale, I had! Why? The customer had hit *my* mental spending limit. I had never spent over \$1,000 on a shopping trip, so when the customer exceeded my mental spending limit, I figured "Hey, he's done!"

Learning that lesson changed my

life—along with what Harold said next: "The salesperson never decides when the sale is over—the customer does." Then he looked me in the eye and said, "Your fear of hearing the word *no* is the only thing standing between you and greatness."

It was amazing. I had gone into work that morning hoping to keep my job, and I went home just two letters away from greatness: N-O.

I had been operating with the wrong model of success and failure. I thought I was in the middle, with success on one end and failure on the other. I thought my mission was to do everything within my power to move toward success and away from failure. But that moment with Harold opened my eyes. I realized *failure* was the halfway mark on the road to success—a not a destination to be avoided but a

stepping stone to get what I really wanted in life. Most people get to the sign marked *failure*, figure they're heading in the wrong direction, turn around, and head back home. They think *success* is back the other way, but it's not—it's straight ahead!

The word *fail* is not a "four-letter word!" Failing is not something to be avoided at all costs. The best way to desensitize yourself to a word is to use it, and the best way to desensitize yourself to an action is to do it!

It's the same thing with the word *no*. Don't let your natural sense of tenacity get drummed out of you. Don't take rejection personally. Don't let *no* stand between you and greatness. **SSE**

Richard Fenton and Andrea Waltz are founders of *Courage Crafters*, and authors of *Go for No!* Visit www.goforno.com or call 800-290-5028.

ACTION: Embrace the benefits of "no."

MANAGEMENT/EMPLOYEES

Recruit and Retain

Apply the PRIDE process.



by Gregory P. Smith

EMPLOYERS FACE MAJOR challenges when they consider the increasing difficulty of finding skilled people, a younger workforce with different attitudes about work, and a growing population of older workers. Your single greatest challenge is recruiting and retaining good employees and managers.

Improve your ability to attract, retain, and increase productivity by applying the five-step PRIDE process:

P—Provide a positive working environment. You can't delegate the responsibility to create a positive work environment—it starts at the top. The main reason employees quit is a poor relationship with their first-line supervisor. Properly trained managers play a major role in an effective recruitment, retention, and engagement strategy.

R—Recognize, reward, and reinforce the right behavior. People have a basic human need to feel appreciated and proud of their work. Recognition and incentive programs help meet that need. An effective reward and recognition program does not have to be complicated or expensive. Creative ways to reward employees can have a bigger impact than cash.

I—Involve and engage. People may

show up for work, but are they engaged and productive? People are more committed and engaged when they can contribute ideas and suggestions. Give them a sense of ownership.

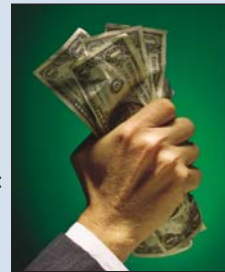
D—Develop skills and potential. More than 40 percent of people say they would consider leaving for another job with the same benefits if that job provided better career development and greater challenges. Skilled people will not remain in a job if they see no future in their position. To eliminate the feeling of being in a dead-end job, create an individual development plan for every position.

E—Evaluate and measure. Measure attitudes, morale, turnover, and engagement level. Conduct an employee satisfaction survey at least once a year. Initiate interviews and surveys concerning the real reasons people come to and leave your organization.

Improve your hiring process to create a better match between the individual's talents and job requirements. Provide flexible work arrangements for working parents and older workers. Hold managers responsible for retention in their departments. Start measuring the cost of turnover. Focus on the key jobs that have the greatest impact on profitability and productivity. Examine those departments that have the highest turnover rates. Design an effective employee orientation program. **SSE**

Greg Smith is a speaker, consultant, and author of *Here Today, Here Tomorrow*. Call 770-860-9464 or visit www.ChartCourse.com.

ACTION: Take PRIDE in your employees.



Know Customers

Ask them better questions.



by Dave Kahle

THE BELIEF THAT YOU, AS A professional salesperson, are primarily a problem-solver severely limits your performance—and yet most sales managers and salespeople proclaim good salespeople are good problem solvers.

Yes, good salespeople are good problem solvers. However, they are more than that. And if a salesperson or manager focuses on just that piece of a salesperson's job, it eclipses all other more pertinent ideas and limits the salesperson's effectiveness.

Salespeople who see themselves as good problem solvers naturally look for problems to solve, thus missing huge opportunities to assist their customers in other ways. In fact, many of the best salespeople don't look for problems to solve—they create discontent in their customers by showing them better ways to do things.

If you think of yourself as a problem solver you tend to focus on the details of the customer's problem. In so doing, you miss what the customer wants. You might waste hours preparing and faxing the quote, and then wonder why you didn't close the sale. You are prepared to respond to the technical specifications of the problem, but fail to understand what the customer really wants, and thus, have little chance of closing the sale.

To overcome the limitations and boundaries of this belief, you need to consider yourself to be an accomplished salesperson who can understand what a customer wants in a deep and detailed way—someone who can put together your products and services into offers that give your customers what they really want.

When you rid yourself of the limiting belief that you are a problem-solver and begin to understand what your customers need, you rid yourself of the bonds wrapped around your performance, and unleash your capabilities for greater return.

Ask Better Questions

Better understand your customers by asking better sales questions.

Of all the things that you can do

and say when you are talking with a customer, you can do nothing better than to ask a good question. It is your single most powerful sales tool.

Of all the ways you can think about your job, nothing comes close to formulating powerful questions to ask yourself, then answering them in writing. The question you ask yourself is your single most powerful thinking tool.

That power springs from a simple principle: *When you ask a question, they think of the answer.*

In the case of asking the customer, the question influences, shapes, and energizes the thinking of your customer. Not only that, but the language in the questions you ask yourself directs and focuses your own thinking.

The decision to buy your product or service ultimately takes place in the mind of customers. And enables you to shape what takes place in their mind? A good question. Your questions can cause your customers to think a certain way about you and your product. That's the power of a question. When you ask them a question, they think of the answer. Imagine the power of asking a series of significant questions to direct and influence your customers' thinking.

Suppose you've just made a proposal or a presentation. What question could you now ask the customer to cause him to think more positively about your product? You might ask, "In what ways do you see yourself or your company benefiting from this product?" This will influence the direction of the customer's thinking. That's the ultimate power of a good sales question.

The power of a question to direct thinking applies just as powerfully to you. When you ask yourself questions, you direct, influence, and energize your own thinking. Asking good questions is your most powerful thinking device, shaping and prompting excellent analysis, great prioritizing, powerful creativity, and excellent plans. Your ability to think well depends on the language in the questions you ask yourself.

I once sold for a distributor of hospi-

tal supplies. I was told by my manager to present something to every customer on whom I called. So, I prepared to make a sales presentation on every sales call. At some point, I thought that if I could increase the quantity of sales presentations I made, I could increase the volume of my sales. So, I asked myself: "How can I double the quantity of sales presentations I make in my territory?"

The answer to the question was obvious: Take two things with me on every sales call. While the answer was obvious, it took me asking the right question to uncover the answer and the resulting strategy. I did just that, and saw my sales increase dramatically.

Some time later, I asked myself a similar question: "How can I increase the quantity of sales presentations I make in my territory?" Again, the answer was obvious: Take more than two! But it wasn't until I asked the right question that I discovered the resulting strategy. I again implemented that strategy and saw my sales increase.

I eventually asked myself this question: "How can I increase the quantity of sales presentations?"

Since I asked the question in a different way, it led me to a different answer, and a different strategy. The answer was to influence the manufacturer's reps who sold the lines I carried to work on my behalf in my territory. If one of them made a product presentation in my territory, it would have the same impact as if I had made it myself. So I identified and then worked with a core group of reps, with whom my company had exclusive relationships, and who I determined to be competent, honest and reliable. As a result of this strategy, I did five times the volume of the average rep in that field.

One reason I did that kind of volume was because I created more opportunities. And I generated more opportunities because I worked closely with a core group of reps and was prepared to show several items to every prospect or customer on every sales call. I implemented those strategies because I arrived at the obvious answer to some questions I asked myself. So, focus on gaining mastery in asking better questions. **SSE**

Dave Kahle, The Growth Coach, is a consultant and trainer and author of six books, including Question Your Way to Sales Success (Career Press). Visit www.davekahle.com or email cheryl@davekahle.com.

ACTION: Ask yourself useful questions.



Fighting Fraud

Start answering the call.



by Ralston McCracken

FRAUD OFTEN ARISES FROM within the ranks, eroding profits and investor confidence. U.S. companies lose more than \$600 billion a year to fraud, and fighting fraud is now among the FBI's list of top 10 priorities. While some companies are still in denial about the severity of this issue, others are taking steps to combat it through the use of whistleblower hotlines.

Hotlines are extremely successful at detecting fraudulent activity and curtailing subsequent losses. This is because workplace fraud is most likely to be detected through a tip, rather than by internal audits or other controls—especially in cases where fraud losses top the million-dollar mark.

Hotline and Web reporting systems can provide a viable option for employees who are uncomfortable speaking up in person or revealing their identity. Hotlines also have a dramatic impact on the bottom line. Organizations operating without anonymous hotlines suffer an average of \$200,000 a year in fraud-related losses; fraud hotlines cut those losses in half.

Anonymous hotlines can also help you obtain valuable insights into vulnerabilities such as discrimination or harassment. You can document concerns from employees, vendors and other stakeholders. It also provides information needed to identify trends, target areas for improvement, and evaluate the effectiveness of ongoing ethics and compliance efforts.

Operating a Fraud Hotline

If everyone isn't comfortable with the hotline—they fear being recognized or incurring management interference—few viable tips and concerns will be addressed. If this is the case, opt for an externally operated, third-party program, reducing conflicts of interest and producing a comfort level.

Regardless, you must have a consistent and reliable method for taking reports. Train interview specialists to know how to handle sensitive situations, make employees feel safe and comfortable, and gather specific details. A trained interviewer can help a caller relax while asking the appro-

priate questions and gathering the necessary details. It is vital to encourage the caller to call again with more information as it becomes available. Have the interview specialists create a system of checks and balances, maybe by sending the report to both the HR Director and the CFO—offering an additional layer of investigation to ensure proper follow-up.

Track the internal response to claims. Use a database that combines the data from documented complaints with the investigation data in one central location. Such a system should include the case's final outcome and a record of the corrective actions. This streamlines compliance activities and creates a clear documentation trail for further review.

Make sure all stakeholders are aware of the hotline. Tell employees

about the reporting mechanisms and educate them about expected behaviors. Review and study feedback from the hotline. Reinforce hotline communications awareness programs based on the use or misuse of the system. Make clear the specific purpose and goals of the hotline program. Reinforce the message on every level of management to confirm the program's validity in the minds of employees.

Anonymous hotlines have proven their worth in detecting harmful activity. When combined with well-planned communication programs, documentation, and tracking, hotlines provide a vital component of any compliance program. **SSE**

Ralston McCracken is VP of sales and business development for The Network. Visit www.tnvinc.com.

ACTION: Utilize a fraud hotline.

MANAGEMENT/ECONOMY

Economic Slowdown?

Protect your business and brand.



by Ron Strauss

PRUDENT BUSINESS LEADERS will address the short-term financial implications of a slowdown, but there are other, non-financial, long-term implications. For example, what are the implications of a slowdown to your brand reputation among stakeholders?

Employees: Your employees' view of your company and its reputation will be kept if you act quickly to share with them the emerging situation and the possible actions everyone will have to take—cut costs, freeze salaries, cut back on travel, etc. Acting early you can engage the employees in the best way to cope with the situation. Challenge them to come up with alternative action plans that will enable the company to come out of any slowdown stronger.

Vendors: Create a win-win situation by proactively approaching your vendors, finding ways to put greater value into your relationships. Look at the activities and steps your two organizations engage in. If the added value is not evident, see if that activity can be avoided, modified, or stopped. When times get better, your vendors will remember working with you through tough times, and your brand and reputation will be burnished as a result.



Customers: Be proactive. Tell your customers what you're doing and what you'd like to do to control or reduce costs and create more value. Have your sales force deliver this message to your key accounts. Set up teams to diagnose each situation, develop proposals, and execute. Measure the results and share with all participants. Step up your marketing activities to add selected high-margin new customers.

Investors: Keep the folks informed who have an equity stake in your business—your employees, vendors, and members of the community who

own your stock through a mutual fund or 401K plan. Communicate early and often—what's being done to proactively meet the challenges of a slowdown, manage expectations and protect your and the company's brand integrity.

Community: Community activities and contributions are the first victims of budget cuts. Shine by not eliminating them. The media will be looking for good news, and by keeping these programs in place (albeit at a reduced level) you can get positive coverage. Members of the community will think well of your brand long after any slowdown has run its course.

Treat each stakeholder so their experience matches your brand's promises. Maintain brand integrity and create value. Do what's needed to protect your brand, and you'll get the best long-term financial outcome. **SSE**

Ron Strauss is president of Brandzone and co-author of Value Creation. Visit www.valuecreationbook.com.

ACTION: Protect your brand in a poor economic.

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