Sales and Service
Excellence

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MANAGEMENT/RELATIONSHIPS

Relationship Resolution

Strengthen your relationships this year.

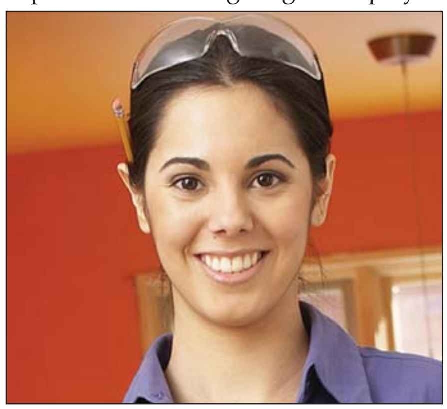
by Ty Freyvogel

SUCCESS IS NOT A ONE-PERson show. Even the smartest, hardest working people depend on others for their success. Sure, it's good to have a healthy sense of self-respect, but don't take it too far. The going-it-alone mentality may cause you to forget the employees, vendors, customers, and others who help keep your business running smoothly. Make strengthening these relationships New Year's Resolution #1.

There is no such thing as a lone-wolf success. Your success is intertwined with a network of other people and organizations. Those relationships must be constantly tended and nurtured. Even though your interaction with your customers is different from how you interact with employees or vendors or bankers, your reason for forging strong relationships with them is the same—building a successful business.

Here are 10 ways you can strengthen business relationships this year:

1. Learn all you can about everyone you work with and then act on that knowledge. You need to know about your customers, vendors, and employees so that when their needs change, you can provide them with what they need to stay happy with your business. Constantly ask them, "What can I do for you?" and then, do it. They'll appreciate your efforts. Always treat them with the utmost respect and do everything in your power to make them happy. That may mean anything from giving a customer who is going through a hard time a special discount to giving an employee whose daughter is starting college an unexpected bonus. Such acts create strong relationships. Make everyone feel like they are your favorite.



2. Treat your vendors like honorary employees. Nurture relationships with people who aren't working for you but who service you or your company regularly—anyone from the package delivery guy to the materials supplier to the designer who keeps your website updated. Show them that you appreciate what they do for you and that you care about them and their companies. Get their e-mail addresses and cell phone numbers and stay in touch with them. You never know when an emergency might arise in which you could use their help. Acknowledge when they go above and beyond the call of duty to make you happy. And send a quick note to their boss—recognition means everything. Also ensure your vendors get as much value out of their relationship with you as you do with them. Then they are more likely to cut you a break when you need it.

3. Know everyone's birthday. You might wonder, *How much of a difference will saying "Happy birthday" make?* Well, people love to be acknowledged. In a world where everyone is self-absorbed, getting a happy birthday wish is a rarity. Set up a calendar that includes the birthdays of everyone you come into contact with and set up reminders that will let you know when those days are close. When someone's name pops up, send a card, call with a birthday wish, or send an email acknowledging her special day and thanking her for the help she gives

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your business. You'll be surprised how powerful those words are and how much they benefit your business.

4. Encourage a sense of ownership among your people. Whether it comes from having a voice in major decisions, working directly with clients, or owning stock, a sense of ownership will create strong ties between your employees and your business. Inspiring your employees to love your business will strengthen your foundation—and your business will be more likely to survive setbacks and grow to great heights. To create a sense of ownership, I use what I call *A Stock* (voting stock) and *B Stock* (nonvoting stock). I distribute the *B Stock* among my employees and myself, but I retain the voting stock. While the employees have no final vote in the company, they still receive all of the benefits of owning stock. Because they feel like partial owners, they work harder and take more pride in what they do.

5. Have one-on-one conversations with your customers to find out what you can do better. Most unsatisfied customers don't approach you with a detailed list of the things they'd like for you to improve on. They just leave you for one of your better-equipped competitors. So, ask them what they need from you. Never stop interacting with your customers. Ask them how you can better serve them and let them know about any new products or services. Provide anonymous surveys in case customers aren't comfortable telling you what they think face-to-face. And always call and follow up with customers after they purchase a product or service from you. Make an effort to remember every customer's name, and always greet them with a smile and a handshake.

6. Make your start-up loan payments on time. Always have enough money in your account to make your monthly loan payments when they're due. Set up a separate emergency account and put something in it every month—someday you'll be glad you did. Gain a reputation with your bank as someone who makes loan payments on time. Staying close to your bankers can help you secure your finances. Set up a safety system with them to ensure that all of your deposits go through in a timely manner. Once I once had a manager who embezzled money from my business. Fortunately, I had a close relationship with my bank, and the bank manager noticed something wasn't adding up with my account. He called me to let me know, and we set up precautions to ensure that no one embezzled from me again.

7. Contact your mentors frequently. Think about those people who gave you valuable advice when you were starting out, or the mentor you call when you need advice to build your business. Don't call your mentor only when you have a problem. Get in touch regularly, even if it is just to give her an update. She might tell you about a contact that could help you, or tell you where she sees a hang-up. Always send a thank-you note when she does something to help you—that small gesture has a big impact. And be sure to ask her once in a while, "Is there anything I can do for you?"

8. Constantly recognize a job well done. Everyone likes to be told they've done a good job. Most people are driven more by recognition than by dollars. So give your people the recognition they deserve. And when a client compliments an employee's work, *never* steal the credit—pass the glowing review along to the rightful owner! Let everyone know. Acknowledge when one of your vendors is doing a good job. If one of your delivery guys is always on time, friendly, and helpful, call his boss and let him know. Tell him how much you appreciate the excellent service.

9. Be flexible with the people you count on. Rarely will a day turn out exactly how you plan. You need to be flexible when those around you run into problems and need to change their schedules. Maybe one of your vendors needs to make a delivery earlier or later or maybe an employee has to leave to take care of a family problem. Be understanding, and ask if there is anything you can do to help. Their past service should count for something, so never make vendors feel like they will lose your business or make your employees feel like they will be in trouble with the boss. You never know when you will need the same respect from them.

10. Make sure employees have everything they need to do their jobs. Nothing frustrates a high-performing people more than having to struggle to do their job because they lack the right software program or must make do with faulty equipment. Ask them what you can do that will make their jobs easier. Perhaps you can't take care of it right away, but simply showing you care will go a long way.

You can't succeed by yourself. Look for ways to thank and reward your key players. Ensure they get as much out of the relationship as you are. Show them you care. Nurture positive relationships. The more people care about you and your business, the easier it will be for you to maintain success. **SSE**

Ty Freyvogel is CEO of Freyvogel Communications, , and author of It's Not Your Smarts, It's Your Schmooze *and* Seize the Century! *Visit www.MakingSenseOfYourBusiness.com.*

ACTION: Nurture positive relationships .

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Reality Check

Customers should feel served.

by Joan Fox

WE TALK PASSIONATELY about customer satisfaction and invest to achieve it. We see it as a critical success factor in our strategic plan. It is the reason we say we come to work—an elusive target we long to hit. It affects bonus structures, performance reviews, and raises. It haunts us when we fail to achieve it and causes us to celebrate when we improve it.

But, who cares? Is the satisfaction of your customers the worthwhile goal you espouse it to be? At first, you would likely say *yes*. But take a second look.

Many mediocre companies satisfy their customers every day. They deliver a product or service without painful snags, and yet their customers exit by door, phone or internet, having been served. Customers get what they want with reasonable ease and courtesy, and go on with their life—not dissatisfied and not "wowed."

Your *satisfied* customer today is likely to be *dissatisfied* tomorrow. Why? Because you can't ensure a "no-fail" experience for the customer consistently. Something will eventually go wrong. Leaders and service providers are human beings who are riddled with imperfections and implement imperfect ideas. Human beings make mistakes, and in a service scenario, the customer will experience the mistake and become dissatisfied. This dissatisfaction leads the customer out the door to look for another company to do business with. And the cycle continues.

And since customer satisfaction is a precarious mixture of ever-changing customer expectations and perceptions, the formula is destined for disaster.

Customer satisfaction is the wrong goal for companies striving to grow their customer share. Although there is value in measuring customer satisfaction, to grow your business you need to make changes that improve the customer experience. Customer satisfaction is not an indicator of customer loyalty. A customer can be satisfied with their experience, but it doesn't mean they will come back. And isn't the customer's return visit your goal? If you rely on *satisfaction* to grow a loyal customer base, you're relying on a house of straw that will get blown away.

Three Ways to Feel Served

So if customer satisfaction is not the goal, what is? First, you need to understand the difference between "getting served" and "feeling served." Customers can "get served" anywhere. "Getting served" is the outcome of a transaction. Robots transact. Smart organizations that understand how to make a customer "feel served" will build loyal customers, grow their business, and become market leaders.

Here are three ways to make customers feel served. Omit any of them, and you will lose precious customers.

1. Listen. The first requisite is to "listen big" and "listen small" to the customer. *Listening big* means putting proactive processes in place to capture customer feedback and then using it to make recognizable changes. This requires an understanding of who the customer is and customizing the listening mechanism accordingly. Too often *listening big* is a survey designed to produce falsely positive results, a stack of cards on a counter, or a phone number for complaints. *Listening big* needs to be a strategic, ongoing process, not a single isolated event.

Listening small means face-to-face interaction. When one person actually hears another, magic occurs. Some people have no idea what an effective interpersonal interaction looks like, but their job requires one. The many touch-points that include an interpersonal interface with the customer must be staffed by good listeners—people who can hear the message and respond with understanding and empathy. Your customers can be insightful consultants. You can ignore them or listen to them and act on what they tell you.

2. Begin inside-out. You can't give excellent external customer service when the internal culture is characterized by poor attitudes, angst, distrust and disrespect. The DNA of the culture shows on the outside. I'm amused by the mission, vision, and values documents created by companies that are staffed by employees and leaders who are miserable. It is standard to find a statement about *excellent service*.

Creating a true service culture inside spills over to the outside. This culture change is a tough one. Years of old habits and unchecked poor behaviors must fall to the wayside. When successful, it is characterized by a responsive, caring, accurate and reliable internal environment. Changing into this culture must be inspired and modeled by the leadership. When a company is deemed by the employees to be a great place to spend their day, there is positive flow.

3. Build relationships. Build relationships where respect, trust, communication and having the other person's best interest in mind are evident. In a positive relationship, caring is demonstrated. It shows in the interpersonal interaction, in thoughtfulness, and in communication. It means you go out of your way once in a while to do something for another individual. It goes beyond words—into behaviors that leave no doubt that you value them.

Relationship building or blocking is evidenced in the processes and policies at customer touch points as well as the people at the touch points. Policies that inconvenience the customer and processes that make the customer wait too long are relationship blockers.

Study your policies, processes and procedures as they relate to the customer's experience. Are they relationship builders or relationship blockers?

When you listen, begin inside out and build relationships with your customers, they will feel served. And when customers feel served, even if temporarily dissatisfied, they will give you a second chance. This is an earned outcome. It reflects an investment in time, training, and other resources. This investment will serve you well in the long run. Again, I ask. Customer satisfaction: Who cares? SSE

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ACTION: Make your customers feel served.

MANAGEMENT/SALES

Increase Sales

Start from current sales.

by Jay Abraham

I SEE THREE SIMPLE WAYS TO increase your business: 1) calculate (and increase) your number of clients; 2) figure the average amount they spend on each transaction/sale (and increase it); and 3) determine how often they make a purchase (and then increase it).

If you have 1,000 clients who average $100 per transaction/sale and make two purchases a year, your total income is: 1,000 x $100 x 2 = $200,000

If you increase these three numbers by just 10 percent, look what happens to income: 1,100 x $110 x 2.2 = $266,200.

A mere 10 percent increase across the board expands your income by 33 percent! A 25 percent increase in these categories nearly doubles your income to $390,625! Focusing on this formula is one way you can increase your income or grow business by 100 or 200 percent.

1. Increase the number of clients. How can you do this? I had a client whose income curve was stagnant. Their compensation program paid the salespeople 10 percent of the profit. So, if the company made $1,000 profit on a sale, the salesperson would get $100 and the company $900. I had them calculate the worth (in dollars) of each new client each time they buy, the number of times that client buys from them each year, and the number of years the average client will be with them.

On average, the first sale resulted in about $200 profit for the company. Of that, $20 went to the salesperson, $180 to the company. On average, the client bought five times a year for three years. So, each time that company got a new client, they received $3,000 in cumulative profits. My solution: Instead of giving salespeople 10 percent of the profit on a sale to a new, first-time client, give them 100 percent of the profit of the first sale. Management's response: "You're insane!" I explained that their salespeople would be 10 times more motivated to sell new clients. Every time they bring in a new client, the salespeople make an additional $200, but the company makes an additional $2,800. The company implemented the plan, and sales tripled in nine months.

2. Increase the average size of the sale per client. Car companies will sell you a new car for $24,995. Have you ever paid just the advertised price? Or do you buy a few extra items, like a radio, air conditioning, security system, sunroof, warranty package, or financing? Despite our good intentions, when we go out to dinner many of us up the value of our transaction when the waiter shows us the wine list, and later the dessert tray.

3. Increase the number of times that clients return and buy again. Stockbrokers offer occasional IPOs to select clients. Clothing stores, auction houses, and jewelry stores hold private or invitation-only sales events for preferred clients. Airlines offer frequent flyer miles. Miles Labs published a cookbook filled with hot-and-spicy recipes and gave it away. Why? They make Alka-Seltzer. Each example represents an income-increasing strategy.

You might think: "I'm not in sales. I don't have clients. My responsibilities don't include selling or servicing clients." Think again. *Everyone is in sales.* Whatever your work, you have clients, and need to sell. Your internal client might be the head of your department, and you need to sell him or her on your project, proposal, promotion, perspective, value, or raise.

You must sell both your company's product and service and your personal product or service—you. You need to sell you and your ideas to advance your career, gain respect, and increase your success, influence, and income. These strategies are designed to raise you above your competition. SSE

Jay Abraham is CEO of Abraham Group, increasing the bottom lines of clients. Visit www.abraham.com.

ACTION: Increase your sales this year.

SALES/GOALS

Set No-Goals

See amazing results.

by Richard Fenton and Andrea Waltz

IT'S NOON ON MONDAY, AND CHRIS HAS already made four sales calls, visited two appointments, and closed two sales! As he strides toward his car, having hit his goal for the week, he reserves a tee time for golf. And in the blink of an eye, a great day begins to take a slide toward an average week—all because Chris set the wrong goals.

Everyone knows the importance of setting goals. The problem is in the *type* of goals people set. Many salespeople operate with *Yes-Goals*—number-specific goals for the number of times prospects say, "yes." This approach is flawed: once we achieve the objective, we tend to divert our attention to other tasks or reward ourselves for our success by slowing down, taking a day off, playing golf, or catching up on paperwork.

There is a better approach: ***Stop setting Yes-Goals, start setting No-Goals***. Stop setting goals for the number of sales you intend to close or dollars you want to generate, and start setting goals for the number of prospects who say "no" to you. Operate with a failure quota rather than a success quota. The word *quota* means "a proportional share." However, we usually mean *the highest number or proportion*. That's the problem. Most people treat their quota as the ceiling of their performance rather than the floor. So, quotas often limit sales rather than propel sales upward. Chris, for example, ended his hot streak on Monday!

What should Chris have done? With two sales Monday morning, he should have built his momentum! Instead of starting with a two-sale goal for the week, he could have set the No-Goal of gathering 12 rejections. After closing two sales, Chris would have said, "Monday is half over and I haven't got a single *No* yet! I've got to make more calls to get 12 for the week!" His success will now lead to more calls, and he'll likely obliterate his quota for the week, month, and year! That's the power of setting No-Goals! Ironically, placing a greater emphasis on increasing your failure can often lead to massive success! Success can often become your greatest enemy, for with success comes complacency.

Many top performers focus solely on the behaviors that generate results. They know that the act of setting Yes-Goals or quotas could place artificial limits on their income and performance.

When you get your next quota, set it aside in favor of aggressive No-Goals for the number of times you fail. The results (yeses) will come! 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: Focus on behaviors that generate results.

Make Big Sales

Get past the gatekeepers.

by Patrick McClure

SUPPOSE YOU HAVE COMPLETED your research, evaluated your target market, and determined that Mr. Big is the ideal prospect for your product or service. You have learned everything you can about the company, and some personal details about the key executive. You understand your own products, and you can articulate with clarity your benefits and the value you can bring. Everything is prepared, all systems are "go," and you are ready to engage!

You will now encounter your first barrier to the sale, the gatekeeper. If your executive is the key decision-maker, he or she will be guarded by a defense system. Just like the moat that protects a castle from being stormed and captured, the gatekeeper represents your first hurdle to cross.

There are two classes of gatekeepers, and they require different approaches: 1) live gatekeepers—receptionist, administrative assistant, or personal secretary; and 2) electronic gatekeepers—voicemail, spam filters, specialized email addresses, and customized telephone answering systems.

The live gatekeeper is a person who works for the decision-maker you wish to speak with. Part of the gatekeeper job is to guard the executive and prevent interruptions and intrusions. They have a list of known associates and friends who are granted access to the executive (family members, spouse, close friends, and the boss). For anyone else, the gatekeeper normally states, "Mr. Executive is in a meeting/unavailable/not in" and to take a message.

The fact that your executive has a live assistant indicates that he or she has a senior position. Lesser executives normally answer their own calls or transfer everything to their voicemail system.

If this is your first call on Company X, your objective will likely be to arrange for an introductory meeting with the key executive. To accomplish this, you usually need to speak directly with the executive. The task of gaining an appointment is different from conducting a sales call. In this instance, your job is to convince the executive of the benefit of meeting with you and to schedule an appointment, not to sell anything.

The only person who can evaluate whether it makes sense to meet with you is the executive, not the assistant. In rare cases, I have met executive assistants who are empowered to make appointments, but this is rare. So, you need to gain approval from the gatekeeper to pass you on to the key executive.

Since this initial request through the gatekeeper will routinely be over the phone, you must smile. Genuine friendliness is conveyed over the phone when you smile. If you're not physically present, at least your friendly voice (backed by a smile) will be present. Be confident and direct, never antagonistic or arrogant.

To gain access, keep these facts in mind: The gatekeeper is a valuable member of the Executive's staff. You need to be friendly to the gatekeeper. A positive attitude is essential. The gatekeeper needs to become convinced that you have something beneficial to offer their organization, and that their boss would naturally want to hear your message. In short, you have something of value that their boss will want to hear! Your first call to the executive in most cases will be directed to the gatekeeper.

Your dialogue in this initial call needs to be simple, direct, and friendly. Remember to smile, and your call has a better chance of being connected. If not, you may need to supply additional information. Keep in mind that the administrative assistant normally is not empowered to confirm an appointment on the executive's calendar without his concurrence. Only the executive can make that decision. You are only asking for five minutes to explain to the executive why it is important for him or her to meet with you. You're not trying to sell anything; you just want to schedule an introductory meeting.

In most cases, you will be connected directly to the executive if he's in the office and available. If you still aren't getting connected, try these tips:

1. Ask for an exact time when the executive will be available, note the time down, and tell the assistant you will call back at that time. When you call back, greet the secretary by name, and ask to speak with the executive.

2. Sometimes, the assistant will want you to send information about your company so they can evaluate whether to meet with you or not. Ask for the email of the executive and send the information directly to him, with a cover note requesting you meet for 10 minutes, and you guarantee it will be a valuable meeting (for him). This has an additional benefit in that you will receive the executive's email.

3. Befriend the administrator, make her an ally. Explain why you are committed to meeting with the executive (stress the value to their company) and ask for her help. "What's the best way to get on his calendar?" is a very useful question to ask.

4. Find out the direct phone number to the executive. If you are not getting through, try calling early in the morning or late at night (when gatekeepers aren't screening calls).

5. If you are asked if you'd like to leave a message, it becomes a judgment call. I will generally not leave a message if I've not yet met with the executive. They are extremely busy and will seldom have time to return a phone call from someone they've never met. Would you?

6. If you simply can't get through, you have no choice but to leave a message. However, always request an email address so you can send some information. Many executives will read an email rather than take a phone call.

7. Remember to thank the gatekeeper for their help. Acknowledge with an email thank you, a handwritten note, a card, flowers, perhaps a small gift.

The best salespeople all exhibit similar behaviors. No matter what company they work for, they are always successful. It doesn't seem to matter what territory, customer, quota, or management team they deal with, they just know how to get the job done! SSE

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ACTION: Get past the gatekeepers.

SALES/PRICING

Sales Negotiations

Apply these proven principles.

by Paul S. Goldner

I URGE YOU TO APPLY THE seven principles of effective sales negotiations:

Principle 1: Every sales negotiation contains a need on the part of the seller (to close the sale) and a need on the part of the buyer (to purchase a product or service to solve a problem). So, the playing field in sales is level!

Imagine a technology sales pro who is nearing the end of the quarter for her company. She is short of her sales goals for the quarter—a difficult position to be in. She calls on an account that the company has not done business with for months and learns that the customer expects to receive an old and expired discount. She is leaning toward giving the discount, unaware that the customer has a need as well and that her position is not as desperate as she perceives it to be.

Principle 2: Never respond to an immediate request for pricing, especially over the phone, without first completing your sales discovery.

If you respond to an immediate request for pricing, you commoditize your product or service and make price the major factor in the sale. You can do little to salvage the situation.

Instead, set up a face-to-face meeting with your customer to learn what they're trying to achieve as a result of the purchase. If your customers don't know you, your product or your service, they are making a purchase to achieve a business objective. So, go to the customer, ask open-ended questions to learn about their needs and objectives, and then develop an appropriate solution. Only by doing this can you establish the value of your solution.

Principle 3: The most powerful sales negotiations strategy is to have a full sales pipeline. If you are at the end of the quarter and have not reached your sales goals, and your client wants a discount that they are not entitled to, what can you do? Just remember: pricing decisions often outlast a career. When you accept a discount of 30 percent off of the list price, which you might do based on a relationship that includes a large and consistent sales volume, you tell the customer that you can still make a profit with that discount. The customer remembers this message. You set a ceiling on the price of your products that may last for decades. And if you honor the discount to close this transaction, the customer will likely ask for an even larger discount on the next transaction.

So, what should you do?

First, be aware of what is going on inside the customer's company. If their need to get your product is greater than your need to close the sale, you have no need to offer a discount.

Second, have faith in your sales and negotiating skills. You may have crafted the perfect solution for them, and they can't wait to get started with you. The customer likely recognizes the comparative value of your solution, even if they don't acknowledge it.

Third, have a full sales pipeline. If you reveal that you need the sale to meet your goal, you tell the other party that your sales pipeline is empty!

Principle 4: In negotiation, your goal is not to defeat the other person. but to create a win for them and for you, irrespective of your leverage.

Principle 5: Once you set pricing with a customer, you set a strong precedent for future pricing discussions.

Principle 6: Every customer interaction trains the customer how to behave with you on the next interaction.

Principle 7: Don't make pricing decisions, or negotiating decisions, based on accounting conventions.

Apply these principles in your next sales negotiations. SSE

Paul S. Goldner is the author of Red Hot Sales Negotiations *(AMACOM),* Red Hot Cold Call Selling, *and* Red Hot Customers. *Visit www.redhotsales.com.*

ACTION: Negotiate big sales effectively.

MARKETING/BASICS

Three Marketing Tips

Successful businesses apply these.

by Joy Gendusa

SOMETIMES THE SIMPLEST data is the best. Marketing is not complex if you know the basics. By using three simple tools, you won't have to join the ranks of failing businesses.

Tip 1: The more that your potential customers see your name in front of them, the more likely they are to call your number when they need the services you offer. Many marketing efforts go unrewarded, not because they are off target but simply because they aren't given a chance to work. Showing your TV commercial one time, running an ad in the newspaper once, or doing one mailing of postcards won't grab and keep the audience's attention. Taking the time to see which pieces/messages are generating the response you want will pay off. Don't give up when a response is low—persistence is vital. Get your name out there regularly, and people will remember you when they need your product.

Tip 2: Measure your return on investment in terms of money, not response rate. Advertising is working when the money it brings in has more value than the money and time spent on the marketing. Don't be discouraged by a small number of callers responding to a large number of pieces. If you spend $10,000 to be in the view of 1,000 possible leads, it may only take a few customers responding for you to make enough of a profit for this marketing to be valuable. You can only determine the usefulness of any means after you calculate the amount of income generated by the promotion. If you spend one-fifth of what you generate or generate five times what you spend, your campaign is successful.

Tip 3: It is easier to sell a prospect once you get them to call or come in to your store. Step 1 is to get them interested; step 2 is having them speak to a representative to get all the details—and get "closed" by that rep. Your design must be eye-catching and informative, but don't try to close the sale by explaining all details in one ad. The details of a transaction often take more words to explain than the main concept of what is being sold. For example, if your company offers great prices, depending on the quantity purchased, you don't need to list the prices for every quantity you sell. Simply give examples of two or three different quantities and state in the ad that other discounts are available for other quantities. They will call to get the details once you get their interest.

By learning and implementing these three fundamentals, you are already on your way to marketing success! SSE

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ACTION: Apply these three tips.

Riches in Niches

Embrace expertise for profitability.

by Susan Friedman

EXPERTS ARE EVERYWHERE! You can't turn on TV, listen to the radio, log onto the internet, or pick up the newspaper without finding experts discussing their view of the world. Experts are telling us how to live our lives better, how to work smarter, how to complete our work faster and enjoy our lives more.

What motivates all of these people—financial planners and attorneys, floral designers and wedding planners, massage therapists and ear, nose and throat specialists—to take on the *expert* mantle? Being an *expert* is the most efficient and effective way you can transform your career and the most powerful way to differentiate yourself, command respect, and realize maximum profitability from your practice.

In his book *The Long Tail*, Chris Anderson notes that consumers increasingly demand that services and products be targeted to them. There's a cycle of specialization at work, resulting in a public that wants experts for everything. No longer are buyers content with any old accountant or attorney, nor the run-of-the-mill interior designer or financial planner. They want the best—the *expert* who's ready and prepared to handle their every need and anticipate and solve problems before they occur.

Savvy entrepreneurs soon discover that the best way to take advantage of this shift is to consider their skill-set and determine where they can position themselves as the *expert* in a narrow, well-defined market segment—a *Niche*. I call these visionaries Nichepreneurs.

Four Good Reasons

You should consider this Nichepreneur strategy for four reasons:

1. Fewer competitors. The smaller a market segment you seek out, the less competition you encounter. Most business owners try to be all things to all people, concentrating on the marketplace as a whole. However, by focusing on a small, select segment of the market, you bypass all that competition. It is possible that some of your colleagues and peers will offer similar services, but the odds that someone will specialize in your area of *Expertise* drop dramatically as your *Niche* becomes more and more defined. It's far easier to be the best—and occupy the advantageous *Expert* position— when fewer people are vying for the honor.

2. More efficiency. Nichepreneurs focus their efforts and practice on one narrow area. This creates an advantage of efficiency: no longer does a professional have to keep abreast of each and every development in their field on the off chance that they may someday need to be aware of the topic—they can, instead, delve more completely into their chosen field of study. At the same time, becoming a Nichepreneur virtually eliminates the learning curve. Because all your efforts and energy are devoted to one particular area of practice, there's no need to come up to

speed when someone comes to you with a difficult problem. You'll already be well versed in the field—and if you don't know the answer yourself, chances are you'll be connected to someone who does.

3. More profitability. Expert advice carries premium prices. The public, well-trained by the media to value the expert, fully expects to pay top dollar for their services. This is a very lucrative position: while the services and counsel you offer your clients may be very similar to those your peers and colleagues offer, you'll realize greater profit.

Additionally, being the *Expert* allows Nichepreneurs to explore secondary and tertiary revenue streams that aren't generally available to the generalist service provider. From book deals to speaking engagements, coaching and consulting to creating informational products, there's an entire spectrum of opportunities to create additional income.

4. Increased visibility. A serious problem exists out there in the marketplace: professionals from every discipline face the unending challenge of sameness—a sea of providers offering identical services. This creates confusion in customers. They have no way to differentiate between this attorney and that one, nor select between counselors.

Positioning yourself as the Expert sets you apart from the crowd. You're cutting yourself out of the herd and putting yourself in a position of prominence. It's a very tangible way to say "if you want the best, you want me."

Differentiate Yourself

The question then becomes clear. How do you differentiate yourself from the crowd? How do you stand out? What do you have to do to become a Nichepreneur—to be the *Expert*? What determines which Nichepreneurs get quoted in magazines while others labor in obscurity? Why do some enjoy the heightened visibility, greater profitability, and enhanced reputation, when others do not? It's not mere chance, good fortune, luck, or being born into a family of media moguls—although these might help! *Experts* aren't born—they are made.

You have the potential to find a niche, position yourself as the expert within it, and create a lucrative career for yourself. This requires a major shift in your thinking. For too long, you've been told to be all things to all people, and that you have an obligation to serve a customer's every need. Breaking out of that restrictive mindset to concentrate on the work you want to do—work that couples your personal passion with your professional prowess, work that matches your vision for yourself and helps you achieve your purpose in life—takes courage, but it is well worth the risk.

The success Nichepreneurs enjoy is duplicable. In fact, as the public's buying behavior shifts from the mass market to the individually tailored, embracing the Nichepreneur strategy becomes essential. There are riches in niches, but the fate of those left out in the big, cold, highly competitive generalist market may not be as promising.

The choice is yours. You can take charge of your destiny and forge your own entrepreneurial path to success. Step out and couple your personal passion to your professional prowess, and success as a Nichepreneur awaits. SSE

Susan A. Friedmann, TheNichePreneur Coach, works with clients to increase their niche marketing potential. She is the author of Riches in Niches: How to Make it BIG in a small Market. *Visit www.richesinniches.com.*

ACTION: Become a Nichepreneur.

Winning Proposals

Focus on the customer's needs.

by Tom Sant

YOU NEED TO BASE YOUR sales proposals on customers' needs. Knowing their needs and restating them is the key to writing a persuasive message.

Your customers' needs are the reasons they consider investing in your products or services. The need may be a problem, a gap in capabilities, or an opportunity they want to capitalize on. Regardless of its nature, the client's need is your starting point. It's the first thing to address in the executive summary.

Avoid Three Mistakes

You may try to focus on your customer's needs, only to slip into one of three major pitfalls:

1. Defining the customer's need as being identical with your solution. I once worked with an account team at a major bank, helping them develop a proposal. The first question I asked was, "What is the customer's business need?"

The account manager said: "They need to verify credit cards on line."

"So what are you proposing?" I asked. "What's your solution?"

"We'll enable them to verify credit cards on line."

"But why do they need that ability?"

He looked at me like I was daft. "So they can sell stuff over the Web."

"Okay. But why do they want to sell their products over the Web? They already have a big chain of stores."

"Because their two biggest competitors are doing it," he said.

"But why should they copy them?"

"They lost 40 percent of their market share to them last year!" he said.

Ding! He just discovered the need. Verifying credit cards is part of a solution, but it's not the business need. Their need is to stop the bleeding and regain some of the market share they lost.

This story illustrates a common mistake: defining the client's need in terms of your solution. The folks at one training company said that the reason their customer needed leadership training was "to develop leadership skills." That client had a huge attrition rate among middle managers. Reducing that rate was the real need. Similarly, the sales team at a property management firm said that their client needed to appoint a property agent. What the client actually needed was to liquidate some real estate assets to generate cash to fund expansion. Ask, *Why do they need to do this?*

2. Assuming that the RFP defines the complete problem or need. The RFP rarely states the real need. Why explain in a public document that your company is having a big problem in some area of its operations, or an unacceptable level of attrition, or short on cash? If that information fell into the hands of a competitor, the damage would be enormous. So the RFP typically defines the requirements of an acceptable solution, not the reason a company needs a solution. Answering exactly what the RFP asks for without showing insight into the underlying problem means your proposal will be technically compliant yet irrelevant. Responding to an RFP without interacting with the client is a losing strategy. You don't know enough to structure your response so that it addresses the real need.

3. Not talking to enough of the management team at the client organization. If you're only talking to CFO or IT manager, you may never hear the real drivers. To ensure you understand the client's need, negotiate access to other senior managers. Get their perspective on what's important, what needs to be changed, what's not working, and why the problem is urgent. Once you do that, you'll have the insight you need to write a winning proposal. SSE

Tom Sant is CEO of Hyde Park Partners and author of Persuasive Business Proposals *and* The Giants of Sales. *Call 805-782-9290.*

ACTION: Create more winning proposals.

Three Steps to Profits

Attract and keep new customers.

by Jimmy Vee and Travis Miller

IF YOU ARE LIKE MANY MARKETING MANagers, you're not attracting new customers the way you should. Once you could just buy a small ad, handout business cards at an event, or mail a postcard and get clients. That's no longer the case. Traditional marketing methods are racing toward obsolescence.

You expect more: more prospects, more sales, and more money. But you may be wasting your time, money, and efforts with traditional marketing.

So, how can you attract a steady stream of qualified prospects who pay, stay and refer? Here's a sure-fire, powerful, low-cost approach for revitalizing your business and making a dramatic impact on the bottom-line.

1. Stop thinking media. Many owners ask us, "Where should I place my ad?" When the chosen media doesn't perform well, they conclude, "This doesn't work," cross that media off the list of options, and then conclude that marketing doesn't work. That's certainty not the case. It just doesn't work the way you're doing it. Stop thinking about where the ad should go and start thinking about who the ad is for.

2. Stop selling products. Everyone sells products and features. But, most people could care less about what you offer and have a thousand options. So why should they pick you? If you fail to create a compelling reason for people to buy what you're selling, you will wind up right in the commodity market with no option but to compete on price and selection. That's when your lead flow dries up and profits suffer.

3. Start selling outcomes. Instead of talking about the features of your products and services, declare: "I am the obvious choice! Doing business with anyone else would be foolish." Start talking about why prospects should choose you. Discuss what they will gain from their investment. Make concrete offers and tie those offers to powerful benefits by answering these questions: What are the big obstacles your customers are facing? What do they have gain by working with you? What do they have to lose by not working with you? What are your competitors missing? What do you do better than anyone else?

Your potential customers seek a buying preference that makes their decision making easy. So, make your claim, back it up with a promise and guarantee, and tell prospects how and why you'll make their life much better. Communicate your ideas through a story that causes people to take action. SSE

Jimmy Vee and Travis Miller are marketing experts and authors of Gravitational Marketing Customers. *Visit www.gravitationalmarketing.com.*

ACTION: Attract and keep more new customers.

Juggling Projects

Overhaul your management.

by Rudolf Melik

IF YOU CAN'T PRIORITIZE YOUR projects and make good decisions on selecting new ones, you'll soon be in serious trouble. Transform your project management "circus" into a sane, smart, successful system.

If you manage people and projects, you may feel like a juggling clown at the circus: trying to keep your ball, baton, and flaming torch in the air while maneuvering your unicycle around the ring. Focus too much on one object, and you risk dropping one of the others—or taking a tumble.

Project management can be like this. Neglect to give one project the attention or funding it needs and you waste big money on an unimportant or failed project. It's time to send *out* the clowns. You don't have to manage your projects in a circus-like manner.

A dearth of facts and analysis lead you to make poor decisions when selecting new projects or assigning resources to existing ones, resulting in unmet goals and lost opportunities. Poor decisions waste valuable funds and create a culture where strategic projects take a backseat to pet projects.

In a poorly managed project system, managers don't know what percentage of their projects are high-risk, resulting in money spent simply to keep things going rather than completing value-creating projects. You have to make the right decisions at the project and business level, where there can be hundreds of projects to evaluate. And all of these projects rely on the same resource pool and budget.

The solution is project prioritization—organizing and managing projects as a group or portfolio at a business level. Project prioritization and selection requires involvement of executives, project managers, and other stakeholders. The information is collected, shared, and presented for analysis in an easy-to-use manner.

Project prioritization and selection involves five steps: 1) select project ranking criteria, considering which projects are more important now; 2) rank the projects, knowing that the top 20 percent will likely deliver 80 percent of the value; 3) balance your portfolio, providing the right mix of projects and giving priority to those projects that offer high reward for low risk; 4) balance capacity and resources to ensure adequate resource availability and capacity to deliver a given project; and 5) prioritize your portfolio by marking lower-ranked projects or those that can't be funded soon as inactive.

Seven Advantages

Your efforts to select and prioritize projects pay off in seven advantages:

1. You focus on top-priority projects. The project portfolio that you create when you prioritize your projects helps you put the most valuable projects in one place. The project portfolio organizes projects that share common objectives, cost centers, resources, or risks, and enables you to make funding decisions, and to report on and analyze a collection of projects in one entity. You can simply look at your portfolio and decide which projects are strategic, which require additional funding, and which ones are not reaching the expected end results. All employees or managers know what projects are the most important and can devote their time and resources accordingly.

2. You take the guesswork out of project management. Implementing project prioritization and selection processes elevates decision-making to a more strategic viewpoint by aligning and assigning projects with business priorities. It also helps optimize resource allocation. You can decide which projects are the most important based on hard information. You no longer have to guess at what project deserves the most money and attention. You are working on goals that will create the most valuable results.

3. You provide guidance for new projects. Project prioritization and selection helps you add new projects to your queue without misallocating more important resources to them. And, it helps you allocate enough time and manpower to ensure quality results. Project prioritization and selection provides a framework to evaluate new project requests systematically. Each opportunity is considered against current priorities and resource availability. If you determine that the new project isn't a priority, you can reject it or archive it for future consideration.

4. You assess risks from a global perspective on their impact. With project prioritization and selection, new risks can be assessed with respect to how they will affect the company. The steps you use to organize and balance your project portfolio will help you weed out those projects that contain too much risk. When projects are prioritized and selected properly, risk is greatly reduced and the business operates at an optimal capacity with a higher number of successful projects.

5. You know when you have the resources and when you don't. Resource availability is key. Your project portfolio will help you see if you are overallocated or close to capacity and when resources will be available for projects and when they need to be reallocated. Everyone knows the reasons behind the decision because they can see the weighting and ranking.

6. You spend less time than when you juggle projects. When you have the selection and prioritization system in place, you'll spend less time trying to learn what happened to failed projects or spent resources and more time managing the projects that matter most. Review your portfolio at least once every quarter.

7. You make people more accountable. The project selection and prioritization system fosters accountability. Resources are allocated based on specific criteria. If a project doesn't receive the funding or manpower it needs to succeed or fails for another reason, you know what went wrong and can address those issues with the right people. You can also analyze past decisions and improve decision-making and forecasting. Create a framework for process improvement and use lessons learned and metrics obtained to improve future project selection, estimation, and ranking.

Project prioritization and selection provides you with timely, accurate information to help you make fact-based decisions regarding project priorities and project selections. SSE

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ACTION: Manage your projects more effectively.

MANAGEMENT/PEOPLE

Grow Business

Use three system keys.

by Grant D. Robinson

ARE YOU ON PACE TO MEET your sales and financial goals? Most managers failed to reach their sales goals and grow their businesses last year, and many have all but given up.

Is this you? Are you now looking to make this year the one you shatter previous productivity, sales, and revenue records? Regardless of whether you are on pace to meet your goals, it's a great idea to prepare for your best year ever. And you *will* need to prepare. The act of setting a goal, sharing it with your managers, and giving the extra effort to accomplish the goal is really secondary to the preparation required.

Before you start working toward an objective, eliminate all past barriers to goal accomplishment; otherwise, you'll fail to meet the objective once again—for the same reasons as before.

Use three keys to grow business:

1. Operational systems. The operational systems include the vision and mission; financial and budgeting; production, manufacturing, and distribution; and sales and marketing. These systems are in place to efficiently grow your business. They are the standards for how your organization and people operate from day to day. To improve productivity this quarter and prepare for your best year ever, analyze your operational systems and identify what productivity barriers must be eliminated, what operating expenses must be reduced, what unique cultural standards must be maintained, and what marketing promises must be upheld.

2. Managerial systems. Changes to operational systems are usually made to improve people productivity. But, these changes alone rarely help. Failing to meet goals, managers tend to make irrational decisions. They feel if they rewrite a vision, increase spending on technology, reorganize production procedures or alter their marketing messages, performance and profits will magically improve. Not so. The changes usually end up harming efficiency, production, and morale. The employees who naturally performed the job they were hired to do before the changes, still do; those who failed to produce before the expensive modifications, still underachieve.

The five most important processes of your managerial systems are: recruiting, hiring, training, developing and retaining productive people. When you create a successful managerial system, your hiring success rate, employee motivation, and the effectiveness of your leaders improve.

3. Focus on people. People are key to growing a business and meeting goals. The more productive your people, the more productive your teams. Recruiting, selecting, motivating, and retaining top performers in every position are among the most important-management functions. And yet most managers spend their time, energy, and financial priorities in operations. This strategy just doesn't work.To prepare for your best year, ask: How can we best hire, develop, and retain top performers in every position?

Hiring top performers for every position, the first time, is the only way to ensure your productivity and profits will improve. Top performers are five times more productive than their counterparts! No modification to an operational system will ever increase your performance five times. You can double or triple productivity and profits by giving your managers the tools to hire, develop, and retain your people.

Great service, work ethic, motivation, productivity and sales success come from employees who fit your culture, their team, and the job they are hired to do. Focus on your people to prepare for your best year ever. SSE

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ACTION: Meet your sales goals this year.

MANAGEMENT/VISION

Language of Vision

Follow four rules in its creation.

by Larry Oakner

ANYONE CAN HAVE A VISION. Simply embark on a vision quest, and you'll soon have a vision. But what makes a true visionary is being able to communicate it to followers clearly, with relevance, passion, and commitment.

Your vision statement should express your aspirations in a way that sets the direction for the future. It is not a strategy, but it guides and informs strategy.

Great leaders articulate their vision with language that creates an enduring and inspiring rallying cry. Look at vision statements from Apple, 3M, or Amazon.com, and you'll see examples of compelling, powerful language. Apple's vision says, "Man is the creator of change in this world. As such he should be above systems and structures, and not subordinate to them." That vision is reflected in the intuitive screens and systems of a Mac computer. Amazon.com gave itself room to expand beyond books with a vision "to be earth's most customer-centric company; to build a place where people can discover anything they might want to buy online." And 3M's vision states their goal to "grow by helping our customers win through the ingenuity and responsiveness of people who care."

Four Steps

How do you write the best vision statement? Here are four simple rules:

1. Look beyond immediate issues to describe what you see in the future. Imagine you could look far into the future and report on what you see. That's a vision statement. Your vision should be lasting and almost unattainable. Think of it as a 100-year plan, no matter what happens next quarter.

2. Combine tangible business realities with powerful emotive language. If you want your people to be inspired and motivated by your statement, communicate with language that stirs the soul. Compare words used to describe a product with how people feel when describing their children. Avoid business-speak and capture the passion that energizes your employees.

3. Consider many perspectives to be relevant to your audiences. Having a 360-degree viewpoint will make your vision multidimensional. Your vision will reflect how your company relates to your employees, customers, and communities. See your company from their viewpoint and reflect it in the statement.

4. Appeal to human values, not only economic value. You need to think of your vision statement as more an architect's sketch than blueprints to build the house. Your vision should express an idea, thought, or goal that lies ahead and is yet unseen. SSE

Larry Oakner is Brand Director for CoreBrand. Visit www.corebrand.com.

ACTION: Create a compelling vision.

Reduce Turnover

Quantify the indirect costs.


by Joel Rich and Aaron Sorensen

As talent pools continue to shrink, managing turnover has become a strategic issue to control bottom-line costs and drive top-line results.

Before you address turnover, first seek to understand where turnover has the greatest impact on your ability to deliver core services and products and to drive long-term strategic success. Also consider factors relevant to the individuals in various roles, including whether the organization wants to retain these people and why they might want to leave. Is it compensation? Prospects for advancement? Problems with their boss? Only by knowing underlying causes can you curb undesirable turnover.

One hidden cost of turnover is the talent gap in roles that are critical to executing the strategy and the erosion of revenue that results from the open positions. For example, turnover in roles that are critical to developing innovations and bringing them to market has a great impact on the top-line results in innovation-based companies, because they forego revenue as a result of the lack of new products.

To determine whether you are experiencing undesirable turnover, you must first identify the critical roles and then determine whether you are losing key talent in those roles.

In some cases—such as where a role is no longer important—it may not matter if good people are leaving. However, a red flag should go up if turnover is occurring in roles that are strategic to executing the strategy.

You need to know what roles are most critical and where undesirable turnover has the greatest impact. Undesirable turnover in roles that you deem *strategic* and *core* will have more impact on your ability to execute strategy. So, greater focus and investment—in terms of time, money and resources—should be made to determine what is causing turnover in these roles and what retention strategies and investments you should use to reduce undesirable turnover.

Quantify the Costs

Once you know whether you are experiencing undesirable turnover, you need to quantify the direct and the indirect costs. The direct costs are well known and easy to measure. They include recruiting fees and hiring costs, as well as the expenses generated by hiring temporary workers, training replacements and paying overtime to the remaining staff. The indirect costs can be harder to quantify. They include loss of productivity and capacity, misallocation of resources, reduced bench strength, lost customers, increased training time and lost work hours.

To quantify the indirect costs of turnover, you must first consider what indirect costs you are experiencing and their impact on revenue and productivity. For example, if you can't attract and retain the right talent, you may not be able to deliver the product on time, which will threaten income. Or, if you can't attract capable young graduates, managers will have to do the work, and they will have less time to perform higher-level tasks, such as attracting new clients and developing new services. Or, if your production line is staffed with inexperienced workers, managers must spend more time overseeing operations, and they won't have the time to do their own jobs.

Another approach is to identify which employees are key to delivering products and services, have a high replacement cost, or exert a strong impact on revenue or profitability. You can then determine the cost of turnover for these employees and approximate the cost for less critical employees.

Turnover and the EVP

You can often tie undesirable turnover to your employee value proposition (EVP), which explains why people should want to work for the organization (and why it wants them to work there). It consists of five components:

- ***Compensation.*** Paying salespeople the median rate will not retain high achievers who expect top rewards for their accomplishments.
- ***Work content.*** Organizations that expect their talent to do the same job every day will not retain capable people who want variety.
- ***Affiliation.*** Team-oriented firms won't retain entrepreneurial types who prefer to work on their own.
- ***Career.*** A high-tech company that does not offer training won't retain people who seek ongoing development to keep up with changing technology.
- ***Benefits.*** A hospital that requires employees to use its own facilities for treatment won't retain talented people who want to maintain their privacy.

If you are looking for the real reason you are losing top talent in critical roles, you can find it by exploring what is occurring inside these five EVP components. Conduct an employee attitude survey and identify the relationship between elements of the EVP, turnover drivers, and actual turnover. Solutions for turnover have a better ROI if they are targeted to specific high-cost-of-turnover areas and the real causes of turnover in those areas.

Reducing Bad Turnover

Once you identify the root causes of undesirable turnover in critical roles, decide what actions to take and investments to make to address the problem. Carefully review of the information gathered in the cost and causes analyses to decide which problems to address first and how best to solve them.

Next determine how much time, energy, and money is needed to fix the problems and the potential ROI for each solution. You need to compare the cost of the undesirable turnover to the cost of the solution to determine what to do. Showing potential ROI on investment in retention initiatives will help convince the CFO that a proposed solution is worth the expense.

You may know your turnover rate or cost of turnover, but you likely don't know whether you are experiencing undesirable turnover. You need to identify your critical roles and the performance of people in those positions to know whether and why you are losing top talent. Then quantify the effects and make necessary corrections. **SSE**

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ACTION: Reduce the bad turnover on your team.

MANAGEMENT/STYLE

Adjust Your Style

With difficult personalities.

by Byron G. Sabol

AS A SALES OR SERVICE manger, you must often communicate with difficult and challenging personalities. You have choices in how you communicate and deal with these people. You can, of course, do nothing and hope things will get better. Don't count on it! Why would they change their attitude or behavior if their way of communicating and acting have worked for them for years?

When you communicate with challenging personalities, first seek to understand their personality and style. This enables you to more effectively communicate and to persuade them to your viewpoint. Personality influences how people communicate. You likely excel in one of four behavioral functions: *Controller, Analyzer, Supporter*, or *Promoter*. And you tend to get along better with those whose style is similar to yours and have difficulty communicating and relating with opposites. If you know your style and the style of the other person, you are better equipped to communicate in a manner that seems more open and trustworthy to the other person.

Four Styles

To present your message so that it will be acceptable to the other person, recognize each of the four styles and adapt your style accordingly.

1. Controllers. They are doers who supply the driving force. They lead others. They might say, "Follow me, and I will take you to the Promised Land." They emphasize action and results and thrive on getting things done here and now. They are likely to be seen as constructively impatient. When communicating or working with *controllers*, be prepared to move fast and to be tested. Expect *controllers* to argue, interrupt, disagree, raise their voice, and challenge your thoughts.

2. Analyzers. They are characterized by analysis, detail, logic, systematic inquiry, and stiffness. They function in a steady manner, finding satisfaction in identifying a problem, weighing options carefully, and testing them to determine the best possible solution. They are logical thinkers who provide objectivity. When communicating or working with *analyzers*, be well organized, have details lined up, and plan each meeting carefully. Speak slowly, pause as you speak, and ask questions to ensure you are both on the same page. Avoid generalizations; think specifics.

3. Supporters. Concern for people dominates the thinking and behavior of *supporters*. They are often sought for their empathy and patience with others. Understanding listeners, they can identify change in ways that reduce conflicting forces and increase the likelihood of cooperation and teamwork. Supporters tend to become emotional, and to flinch or back away in a time of conflict. When communicating with *supporters*, use an informal, open, and personalized approach. Your face-to-face communications should be somewhat guarded. Maintain ample space.

4. Promoters. The promoter style is characterized by an emphasis on ideas, innovation, concepts, and long-range thinking. Promoters will challenge you. Fast and deep thinkers, they are not inclined to take things for granted. They are seen as leaders and visionaries of new possibilities. They have strong egos, quick minds and wits. When communicating with them, probe for their ideas, ask questions, and listen.

By relating well with challenging personalities, you create harmony. SSE

Byron G. Sabol is a marketing consultant and author of Taming The Beast: Success With Difficult People *(ByeCap Press). Visit www.Byronsabol.com or call 407-909-1572.*

ACTION: Relate well with your difficult people.

SALES/RISKS

Take Some Risks

Let go of what's ineffective.

by Dave Kahle

TAKE RISKS THAT FORCE YOU to move out of your comfort zone—risks that stimulate you to stretch, become more competent, gain new skills, and become more effective and efficient.

You take a risk when you call on a different customer, implement a new strategy, try a new way to contact your clients, relocate your office, or change a habit. Some risks turn out well; others become failures. But simply trying something new will help you gain confidence in your abilities, and learn from successes and failures.

Fine in the Past

Are you hindered by ***fine in the past*** (FIP) or *formerly effective* sales and marketing policies, principles, practices, and strategies that are now ineffective?

Reliance on quality service and word-of-mouth marketing is one FIP principle. Passive sales and marketing approaches rely on customers coming to you and recognizing the superiority of your product or service. Your job now is to create an attractive operation that will *pull* customers to you and then keep them coming back. The economic landscape is littered with the remains of businesses that were excellent in providing product or service, but mediocre in selling it.

Here are four other FIP principles, followed by a better approach:

1. Creating sales by relying on outside salespeople. *Hire salespeople, give them some training, and then charge them to go and sell.* A better way is to profile customers to collect relevant information. Then, analyze and segment them by their potential and by the dynamics of the most effective sales approaches.

2. Sales management by pay plan. *Pay them straight commission, and everything will take care of itself.* The sales commission plan is only one part; the processes and methods you use to hire, train, focus, motivate and hold salespeople accountable also matter.

3. Reliance on on-the-job training. *Everyone can learn how to be an effective salesperson. Just put them out in a sales territory, and soon they will figure out how to do the job well.* Sales requires certain knowledge and behavior, and commitment to continuous improvement. Set minimum standards and expect salespeople meet or exceed them.

4. Hiring by feelings. *When it comes time to hire a new salesperson, find someone who has experience and about whom you feel good.* Create a hiring process with a profile of the most effective salesperson as a model. Use several interviews, formal assessments, reference checks, and a pre-hire aptitude assessment to make a well-informed decision about who to hire. Deciding who to hire is the most important decision you make.

Move your sales and marketing efforts into the 21st Century. SSE

Dave Kahle, The Growth Coach, is author of Ten Secrets of Time Management for Salespeople *(Career Press). www.davekahle.com or 800.331.1287.*

ACTION: Take a risk to improve your sales.

Hiring Mistakes

Here are the five big ones.

by Stephen Blakesley

I FIND THAT MANAGERS MAKE five common mistakes when hiring people:

1. Faulty job descriptions. Most job descriptions are laden with prerequisites like "three years experience" or "good work ethic." They are lengthy and seldom read. They often have to be trimmed because they exceed the word limit. Applicants merely scan ads for possible matches and ignore the rest.

The best job descriptions are ones that get read. They seldom exceed 250 words and focus on outcomes and results. Many job descriptions are vague and wide-ranging: *operations manager will have excellent management skills.* A job description focused on outcomes and results would say *the operations manager will achieve a gross profit of 40 percent annually.* It is specific and measurable. The person in the job knows the expectations, and the manager has an accountability and coaching tool to help measure performance.

2. Failure to understand the competencies driving performance. Job fit is all about clearly defining the job and then understanding what attributes must be present for a person to be a top performer in a job. Once you clearly define the job and the outcomes expected, you can consider the attributes necessary to achieve the desired outcomes. A formal process of defining the candidate profile is the *Ideal Candidate Profile*—a document that clearly describes what a candidate ***needs to have*** and how a candidate ***needs to be*** to be a superior performer in the job.

An effective means of communicating the picture is to provide a *Desired* and *Essential* grouping of competencies. The competencies can be divided into the *to have* type (Education, Experience, and Special Skills) and *to be* type (Emotional Intelligence, Values/Motivators and Behavior). Now the picture of the Ideal Candidate becomes someone who fits between the *Desired* and *Essential* attributes of education, experience, special skills, emotional intelligence, values and behavior. With clarity provided from the *Performance-Based Job Description* and the *Ideal Candidate Profile*, you have the foundation to better hiring.

3. Failure to communicate expectations. Most hiring managers don't concern themselves with expectations until they have filled the position. It is almost like they are saying "fill the position and worry about performance later" as if they could inject the new hire with talent after they have the job. How can you hire someone to do a job and count on them to do it unless the expectations of the job are clear? You can't. If you don't know where you are going, you are not likely to get there. If you coordinate the job description with the job ad and reinforce the expectations at the opening interview, you have done everyone—candidate and organization—a big favor. You need to communicate the performance you expect over and over and ask for acknowledgement from a potential hire in the opening interview.

Suppose you have just met the candidate for a job you posted on Monster. The candidate has been vetted by a resume screen, assessment and a telephone interview, and she is to meet you for the first time in an interview. This is how you open the interview: "Mary, before we get into question-and-answer time, I want to refresh you memory about the expectations of the job. Here is the job description we sent to you earlier. Would you please read it?" You then say, "Do you see anything there you don't think you could do, provided you have the right tools?"

She says, "No I didn't."

"Great," you say, "that's what I thought. Please initial and date it. It will be part of your permanent file." Then you proceed with the interview.

You have sent the message that your organization knows what it expects and respects the applicant to share that up front; told the applicant how their performance will be judged and what is acceptable performance as well as superior performance; and provided a coaching and accountability tool you can use to help the person be the best they can be in the future.

4. Failure to assess the candidate psychometrically. How do you see what you can't see? With an assessment that measures the soft skills essential to superior performance but not readily apparent by observation in an interview. Understanding the "Three Great Rivers of Performance" and identifying their presence or absence in a candidate is a powerful selection tool. Those rivers that feed into the lake of performance are *what a person values*, *how a person behaves*, and *what talents they have naturally*.

You can determine the competency of a person by observing performance or by discovery through psychometric assessment. Often you can't observe a candidate's performance until after the hire, and then it is too late if there are serious deficiencies. However, you can use one of many effective instruments that might be better than observation.

5. Faulty interview procedures. Most hiring managers dislike interviewing, even though people are their most important assets and interviewing is a major part of the selection process. I think the reason is this: "I am not trained and prepared to do interviews. I need to make the right selection. It is part of my job, but if I make the wrong decision, I get all the blame and may lose my job." All of that creates stress. The biggest mistake hiring managers make is hiring people like themselves, and the greatest challenge hiring manager's face is remaining objective in the interview. Preparing for the interview requires the interviewer to know what questions to ask, ask them, listen to the answers, and score the answers. Having a structure for the interview (for example, an introductory script and list of open-ended questions) enable the interviewer to focus on the answers.

Become skillful in asking behavioral - style questions that require more than one-word answers. For example, "Tell me about a time when you admitted that you made a mistake. What did you do? What was the outcome? What did you learn?" Listen 80 percent of the time and talk only 20 percent in an interview to discover if the candidate has and uses the talent required by the job. SSE

Stephen Blakesley is Managing Partner for GMS Talent and author of Strategic Hiring-Tomorrow's Benefits Today. *Call 281-444-5050 or visit www.gmstalent.com.*

ACTION: Reduce the number of hiring mistakes.

MARKETING/CAUSES

The Triple Win

Engage in cause marketing.

by Michael Guld

"WE CAN DO WELL BY DOING good," said Louis Gerstner, Jr. when Chairman of American Express Travel Services, the company widely credited with coining the term "cause related marketing" when they raised funds for the Statue of Liberty Restoration Project, while increasing new applications and usage of their card. After a three-month $4 million cause-related marketing campaign, the Restoration project had received an additional $1.7 million, new card applications rose 45 percent, and use of the AmEx Card increased by 45 percent over the previous year—a win for all parties.

More managers have realized that they don't have to choose between being "missionary" or "mercenary," and cause marketing has become a billion-dollar industry. Any business can apply marketing principles intersecting business goals and objectives with the needs of society and achieve extraordinary benefits for all parties.

Cause marketing is maximally successful when the benefits of each party's involvement exceeds their investment of time, money, and energy.

A triple win offers several benefits:

1. The non-profit garners support in time, resources and expertise; gets access to a company's customers, employees, and suppliers; obtains leverage for marketing and PR opportunities to promote their cause; and increases involvement or donations.

2. The for-profit is viewed as a socially responsible company; customers-clients/public feels good about it; creates brand differentiation in a crowded and changing marketplace; enhanced marketing and PR opportunities; employees and potential recruits feel good about the company; and increased business (the bottom line).

3. The individual is exposed to a new opportunity to make a difference; feels good about making a difference; is viewed by others as one who makes a difference; and may receive value back for contributing to the cause.

Some highly committed companies promote that they donate a percentage of their profits to local causes, while others create specific promotions around a cause related to their industry. Real examples include: a shoe retailer that encourages the donation of used shoes for the needy, a dry cleaner that encourages customers to drop off used coats that they clean and then donate to the Salvation Army, and a car dealership promoted a donation to the local children's hospital for every test drive.

Consider what contribution you can offer to make a difference. While you may not believe your company is large enough or has the funds to invest in cause marketing, your contribution need not be in the form of dollars—it may be your time, expertise, or the resources of your staff, customers, or suppliers. Select a non-profit or cause that you (and your organization) are most passionate about. Is it feeding hungry children, finding homes for abandoned animals, caring for the elderly, or building homes for the homeless that could benefit from your company's involvement?

Set goals for your cause marketing. What is the targeted outcome? The biggest impact will be made with a long-term commitment. After a cause is chosen and a campaign theme developed, use that theme over and over—the frequency provides greater results. Choose strategic promotional partners who can leverage your investment.

The more authentic you are, the more successful you'll be. Cause marketing is about promoting good deeds of good companies to help good causes. SSE

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ACTION: Engage in cause marketing.

SALES/TRUST

The Trust Factor

You can win and lose it fast.

by Kelley Robertson

WE RARELY BUY ANYTHING from someone we don't trust. Trust is the foundation of every sale. And yet, many salespeople will stretch the truth; mislead the customer; misrepresent their company, product, or service; or even deliberately lie to capture a sale. While this may work once, most people won't fall for this approach again. In the long run, you might win the battle but lose the war.

How to Win Trust

How can you earn a person's trust? Here are three concepts:

1. Do what you say you will do, when you say you will do it. If you make a promise to a client, keep it. If you say you will do something, follow through. This shows that you are trustworthy and someone they can count on.

2. Be on time for appointments. Show up on time for meetings. If, you are running late, call. Your clients are busy—so respect their time.

3. Be yourself. How you behave and interact with your clients and customers should not be "an act."

You gain a competitive edge just by following these concepts. Ultimately, everything you do influences the level of trust you develop with customers.

How to Lose Trust

Here are five ways you lose trust:

1. Mistreat clients' employees. Many salespeople are rude and treat non-management employees with disdain. Such behavior is noticed. So treat people with respect and dignity.

2. Delay your response to clients and prospects. If you delay answering a prospect's request or question, you lose trust. If I contact a company and they are slow to respond, I think, if you don't respond quickly now, what will happen once you get my business?

3. Make outlandish claims about your product or service. Many salespeople exaggerate the capabilities of their products. If your product or service fails to meet customers' expectations, they may question what you tell them and perceive you as someone who'll say anything to make a sale.

4. Push unwanted products or services. When you try to sell people things they don't need or want, you show your customer that you are concerned only with getting as many sales as possible and harm your reputation.

5. Fail to listen carefully to your customer. You lose your customers' trust when you fail to make eye contact, listen, and capture what they say.

Trust isn't just about what you say. People often judge your trustworthiness by what you do and how you do it. What are you doing to build trust? SSE

Kelley Robertson is author of The Secrets of Power Selling. *Visit www.kelleyrobertson.com, call 905-633-7750 or email Kelley@RobertsonTrainingGroup.com.*

ACTION: Cultivate trust to win more sales.

Build an Ethical Culture

Consider a hotline program.

by Gabriel Romero

MANY ORGANIZATIONS ARE under meltdown and scrutiny for accounting fraud, kickbacks, or other scandals. At the same time, other organizations are taking a proactive approach to protect their reputation and adopt new corporate responsibility policies. An emerging trend is to build an ethical culture wherein all employees value their role in contributing to the bottom line and know what to do if they witness or learn about unethical behavior.

One way you can build an ethical culture is by incorporating an anonymous way for employees and other stakeholders to report issues—such as a hotline. Most managers see the wisdom in adopting this practice voluntarily, because they see how effective they can be. Organizations lose an average of $150,000 per fraud scheme. Hotlines can also be preventative and deter unethical behavior, because there's a heightened risk of being detected. But a hotline alone can't build a culture of ethics.

Communication Is Crucial

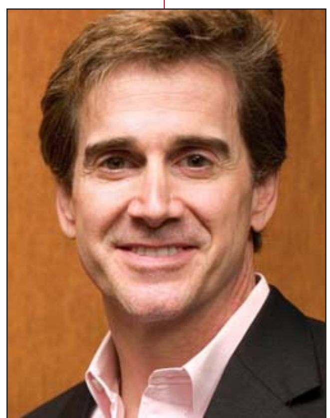
Ongoing and targeted messages that promote the hotline program are essential. Organizations that establish a hotline but do little to advertise it soon discover their success in uncovering misconduct is poor. If people don't know a hotline exists or are confused or uneasy about using it, the hotline won't deliver the desired results.

The communication should clearly outline expected behaviors, such as conducting business in a legal and ethical manner, and behaviors that won't be condoned, such as theft or falsifying records. It should offer concise steps about what to do when unacceptable activities are discovered. Be clear about how to access the hotline and what happens when someone makes a report. Teach employees how to recognize signs of theft and fraud. Some employees might not know what a kickback is, or how to identify someone engaging in this activity.

When you educate people about ethical and unethical activities, they can make informed decisions. If they feel coerced into committing a fraudulent act, they can better resolve the dilemma if they know that it's wrong and have someplace to report the issue.

Top-Down Support

Enthusiastic support from management is necessary in building an ethical culture. Managers are responsible for driving the communications down to employees, and their full and consistent support is required to provide credibility and longevity to the program. If the program is perceived as unimportant to management, employees may ignore the communication. But with repeated messages delivered in positive language, managers can clearly establish their dedication to fostering an ethical culture while discouraging inappropriate activities. Those who are considering reporting misconduct are more likely to do so if they know management is supportive.



Leaders should be inspired by sincerity, rather than by compliance with new governance and regulations. When leaders examine their role in an ethical workplace, they should plan only what they honestly and realistically wish to support. Since managers represent their employees, they hold responsibility for perpetuating desired cultural ideals. If misconduct occurs and a manager ignores the issue or fails to address it promptly, employees view the behavior as acceptable, allowing them to believe unethical activity is the norm.

Changing Behaviors

A comprehensive ethics communications plan is like an ad campaign. The goal is to modify or reinforce certain behaviors among the target audience. So, this plan should be similar to those used by top marketers and built on three cornerstones—message, frequency, and reach. The communication needs to have a consistent and clear message repeated frequently to all audiences who may use the hotline.

When launching a hotline, send a letter announcing the program to all employees. This shows active support when it comes from a recognized company leader. With the letter, include an easy-access info card with the hotline number on it. The message should then be communicated in ways that overlap and reinforce each other. For example, attention-getting posters in break rooms, memos on intranet sites, and articles in employee newsletters can be distributed simultaneously, or in rapid succession, to help ensure the message is seen and absorbed by all stakeholders. Repeating the message keeps it top of mind and reminds everyone of management's desire to create and maintain an ethical workplace. Site managers also play a role in delivering messages. Different topics can be discussed in meetings.

The communications can also include vendors or various publics who depend on the organization's services. Fraud, theft, or other misconduct may come to the attention of these external audiences, and managers need to give them the same opportunity to report misconduct or improprieties. Organizations can send information about a theft and fraud hotline to suppliers through messages in payment checks or mailings that could help uncover schemes like over-billing.

Monitoring Progress

To cultivate communication efforts, you must first measure employee understanding. By using the same survey questions generated to discover thoughts before the program, you can see how much of the message was understood and know what areas of focus are needed for future messages.

Measuring effectiveness reinforces knowledge; conducting surveys before during and after communication campaigns provides interactivity. Reinforcement gets people to the point where the message is learned and believed and integrated into the culture. Measurement lends credibility to the program, showing top-down support for ethics, because time is spent to follow up.

Building an ethical culture is a process, but the payout is worth it. Just as managers have learned the benefits of having anonymous hotlines to battle fraud and unethical behavior, they will realize the benefit of an ethical culture. SSE

Gabriel Romero is a director at the Network, a leading provider of anonymous fraud hotline and ethical culture communications. Visit www.tnwinc.com.

ACTION: Build a more ethical culture.

MANAGEMENT/INSPIRATION

Inspire Your Team

You do it best through example.

by Michelle LaBrosse

SIMPLY SAYING THE WORD *inspire* causes us to pause and think. We may remember our personal heroes or a teacher or mentor who brought out the best in us and showed us the power of one person.

It's easy to get cynical when we encounter false inspiration—the posters with motivational sayings that are easy to spoof when the actions of managers don't reflect the images and quotes.

Inspiration comes from example. As Albert Einstein said: "Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing." We all have the power to inspire others by our actions. As a sales, service, or project manager, you're in a position to inspire your team. Here are 10 ways to get you started.

1. Have a clear goal with a reasonable approach to achieve it. Shooting for stars may work for you when you're developing your personal goals, but when you're inspiring a team, people need to be able to clearly see how they are going to get from point A to point B and believe that it's possible.

2. Be enthusiastic about each person's contributions. Remember how good it felt when a teacher recognized your contribution? You glowed all day. It costs nothing to recognize people for what they do well, and give ideas on how they can work even better.

3. Wear your blue hat and leave the black hat at home. Play the game where you wear different hats to assume different roles. The *black hat* starts with the negatives and tells you everything that's going wrong. This is the person who can kill idea generation. When you're inspiring a team, wear the *blue hat*. See the possibility and opportunity in every challenge. Begin with what is working and build on it.

4. Focus on the strengths of each person. Focusing on weaknesses instead of building strengths is a backward way to approach problem solving. It's faster and more effective to focus on the strengths of your team members and develop them. You will see results faster and have a happier team because people are doing what they're good at and contributing at their highest level.

5. Clear hurdles like a Super Hero. How do you get your team to feel like rock stars? Think like Superman and clear any hurdles that are in their way. When you remove obstacles, you show your team that you've got their back.

6. Get slackers off the team. Nothing brings down a team like slackers. When people aren't pulling their weight, it lowers the standards of everyone and makes it seem like quality doesn't matter. When you remove people who aren't performing, it improves morale. It shows you're serious about results.

7. Roll up your sleeves. When you work with the team in areas where you can contribute, you send a strong message because you are showing that you are part of the team with your actions.

8. Acknowledge people's contributions every week. Many managers only recognize their people once a year. Recognition should be a regular part of your team dynamic. Take time every week to tell people how they've contributed.

9. Be the model of accountability you want to drive through your team. If you tell people to be accountable while missing your own deadlines, soon eyes begin to roll. Keep your team inspired by keeping your commitments to them and meeting every milestone.

10. Show and communicate your progress. Do updates at milestones and in meetings. Communicate the progress every week to ensure you're on track.

And with each step, add some fun! Give people every reason to laugh and let the sound of laughter inspire your team to be the best they can be. SSE

Michelle LaBrosse is Chief Cheetah of Cheetah Learning. Visit www.cheetahlearning.com or call 630.637.1302.

ACTION: Inspire your team to high performance.

MARKETING/PLAN

It's All in the Plan

Can you tell me your goals?

by Desiree Young

YOUR ODDS OF SURVIVING THE next five years will be greater if you have a clear idea of the goals you want to achieve, barriers that stand in your way, and actions you'll take to market your products and attract and retain customers.

I often ask owners and managers, "Can you tell me what your top three goals are this year? Have you recorded your goals for the year—or the month?" Usually they don't have an answer—and therein lies the problem.

You need to identify and break down barriers to achieving your business goals and market your business to attract loyal customers. Here are five ideas to get a plan in action:

1. Keep the audience in mind. In writing a business plan, know the intended audience and why the plan is being written. Whether it be a banker, investor, or potential business partner, your plan needs to be tailored for each.

2. Business plans are for everyone. Even if your business is thriving, ask what changes need to occur to take it to the next level. If it requires going after a different market, developing a new product, or rebranding what you do, you need to develop a new plan.

3. Strategy is the core of your plan. The first half of the plan is geared to helping develop and support a solid strategy. Look at the market, industry, customers, and competitors. Look at customer needs and the benefits of current products and services. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each competing firm, and look for opportunities in the market. These steps help you create a strategy. The second half of the plan shows how you will execute your selected strategy. Your products and services, marketing, and operations should tie in with your strategy.

4. Think competitively. You'll have serious competition, no matter how creative your business concept. Identify where you do things similarly, where you do things differently, where you have real strengths, and where you have real weaknesses. Then capitalize and brand your strengths while you work to leverage your weaknesses.

5. Don't overreach. Many plans sound good on paper but don't work in the marketplace. It's difficult to attract people to a new product or service. To get them to do business with you, you either have to steal them away from another business or create them by developing a need for what you have. It's easy to overestimate sales projections, and to underestimate costs. There are cost overruns, expensive problems, and overlooked items. So forecast conservatively and have a cushion of cash in reserve.

Ask: "Is what we're doing now moving us toward our goals?" If the answer is *no*, fix it and refocus. SSE

Desiree Young is a marketing strategist. Call 504-392-0707 or email info@venturewalk.com.

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