

SALES AND SERVICE

Excellence

THE MAGAZINE OF TEAM LEADERSHIP

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Consultant

**Your
Selling
Career**

**Arm Yourself for
Follow Up**

**Crucial
Questions**

**Grow and Prosper
Connect with Customers**

Sales and Service Excellence

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CUSTOMER SERVICE/DECISIONS

Grow and Prosper

Five decisions that drive explosive business growth.



by Jeanne Bliss

BELOVED COMPANIES CREATE an indelible bond with customers. Their devoted customers grow their business for them, telling everyone they know on Twitter, Facebook, chat rooms, and websites that these companies are worthy of their business.

What is behind achieving beloved status? These companies earn the right to grow and prosper because of the anguish, thought, and purpose that they put into decision making. The actions that come from their decisions set them apart. Beloved companies weave their humanity into every decision they make, connecting who they are as a people with the decisions they make in how they run their business. As a result, they earn not just loyal buyers, but passionate, vocal fans.

Five decisions comprise the backbone of how these companies conduct business. What informs and motivates their conduct is that they:

1. *Decide to believe*
2. *Decide with clarity of purpose*
3. *Decide to be real*
4. *Decide to be there*
5. *Decide to say sorry*

These decisions create a seismic shift from *mere business to beloved company*.

Beloved companies decide to believe. *"We trust our customers. We trust those who serve them."* Beloved companies make the decision to believe, both in their customers *and* their employees. They suspend cynicism in their relationships, and thus are freed from the extra rules, policies, and bureaucracy



that create a barrier between them and their customers. The belief demonstrates a company's trust in their customers. Take *Zane's Cycles*, a bicycle shop with over \$13 million in sales each year and a relationship rooted in customer trust. Zane's Cycles allows current and prospective customers to test drive their bikes—including any of

their \$6,000 bikes—without asking for any form of collateral or identification. Why? Because Zane's Cycles decides to **believe in the integrity of their customers**. Zane's has valued every customer with a lifetime value of \$12,500, and they don't want to risk that long-term relationship by starting out with questioning a customers' integrity.

Zane's trusts that the customers will do the right thing, and true to their belief, of the 4,000 bikes they sell each year, they lose less than five each year from a stolen bike during a test drive.

Equally important is a company's belief in its employees. This belief lets employees know they are trusted to make the right decisions, without being scrutinized or strictly monitored. **Wegmans Food Markets**, a grocery store chain with \$4.5 billion in revenue in 2007, decided to ditch the employee rule book and replace it with one rule: *no customer is allowed to leave unhappy*. They enable their 37,000 employees to do whatever is needed, regardless of the situation, to ensure their customers are satisfied. This belief in employees led to less turnover (only 7 percent, while the average for grocery stores is 19 percent), an estimated operating margin of 7.5 percent, double that of its competitors, and 50 percent higher sales

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per square foot than the industry average.

Beloved companies understand that most people strive to do the right thing, and they decide to believe that this is so for their customers and employees.

Decide with clarity of purpose. "We are clear about the purpose we serve in our customers' lives." Beloved companies are clear about their unique promise for their customer's lives. Clarity of purpose guides choices and unites people, elevates their work from merely executing tasks to delivering experiences that customers will want to repeat and share with others.

Business for *Zappos.com*, an Internet clothing and shoe retailer known for its superior customer service and quirky culture, exploded in 2008, reaching over \$1 billion in gross sales. In the face of rapid growth, Zappos decided that their customer service culture was essential and must be preserved. To ensure their culture would not be lost, they decided that only passionate employees should stick around, offering \$2,000 for new-hires to leave the company if they didn't feel that they could uphold and live by the core values. Fewer than 1 percent of new-hires take Zappos up on their offer; those who stay are committed and passionate employees, ready to embrace the culture. Businesses prosper when they decide with clarity of purpose.



Decide to be real. "We are genuine, passionate and take the best version of ourselves to work." Beloved companies break down barriers between customer and company, creating a relationship between people and revel in one another's foibles, quirks, and spirit. It draws them to one another. Their humanity and authenticity is what sets beloved companies apart from all the others. **They allow room for people to blend their personal instincts with their business decisions.**

The Container Store encourages employees to be like "Gumby," an animated clay figure. The connection is that folks at The Container Store should not create boundary lines between what each person does; that bending over backwards for customers and each other is necessary for growth and prosperity. Founders Garrett Boone and Kip Tindell wanted to ensure they didn't deliver forced customer service or teamwork. They want everyone to be flexible and find the right solution for each situation, without imposing a forced reaction. This decision to ask employees to be like Gumby contributes to only 15 percent employee turnover (average is 50 percent in retail). Creating an environment where people find joy in work has earned them nine years on *Fortune's 100 Best Companies to Work For* list. Customers

and employees gravitate to companies that decide to be real, drop the corporate veneer, and nurture the personality and spirit of customers and employees.

Decide to be there. "We are in the scrimmage every day to build our operation from our customers' perspective." Beloved companies devote more resources and more work to be there for their customers. They're in it every day to earn the right to a continued relationship with their customers. The first decision they make is to be there when the customer needs them, on the customer's terms.

Aware of the frustration customers felt from waiting in long lines only to find out that the banker was unable to help them and that they had to move to the end of another line to get help, **Umpqua Bank** decided to be there for customers by creating the position of Universal Associate; training all employees in every banking task. UB Associates can take a mortgage application and a loan officer is more than happy to help with a safety deposit box. And, the bank made its mission to provide customizable banking, allowing the managers in each community bank to customize their offering based on their customers' interests—from yoga to knitting. This advanced employee training and customized banking has allowed UB to be there for customers and led to exponential growth.

Decide to say sorry. "We are humble. We accept accountability. We will make it right." Grace and wisdom guide beloved companies to accept accountability when the chips are down, when things don't go the way they planned. **Toro Company**, a lawn mower manufacturer, says "I'm sorry" to customers who have been injured while using their products. After ensuring that the customer is okay and taken care of, Toro shifts the conversation, transitioning from "wronged customer" to "what happened." In a highly litigious industry, 95 percent of Toro's cases are settled on the day of mediation. How a company reacts to mistakes reflects its humanity and shows its true colors.

How you steer your decisions and actions impact your ability to earn the right to grow and prosper. You can earn your customers' business by deciding how you run yours. With every order you ship, every person you hire, every product you develop, you have the chance to tell your customers who you are and what you value. So, decide what you want your story to be. What do you want customers and employees to tell others about who you are and what you value. **SSE**

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ACTION: Earn your customers' business.

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Connecting Through Conflict

Five ways to turn angry clients into happy ones.



by Maribeth Kuzmeski

AS MUCH AS WE ALL HOPE for smooth sailing in our interactions with clients, conflicts are bound to occur. It's what you do when there's a problem that separates the (proverbial) men from the boys. Here are a few tips that will help you keep your business relationships from going bad . . . and rescue those that have started to sour.

Extend a peace offering. It's easy to reach out to clients when things are going well. However, it's all too easy to avoid them when hard feelings are present. Don't succumb to the temptation. Proactively reaching out to your clients can squash any negativity they may feel for you. Even the simplest of gestures can be effective: Offer an apology when you've made a mistake. Then, make things right by extending a peace offering. It doesn't need to be anything extravagant. It can be as simple as a handwritten note, a refund, or a coupon.

Don't follow your strike-back instincts. If an angry client calls you fuming mad, your knee-jerk reaction might be to argue. But fighting anger with anger seldom works. No matter how tough it is, do the opposite of what you feel like doing. Take a deep breath and remain calm. Diffuse your client's anger by immediately assuring her that you will make it right.

Begin working toward a resolution by saying something like, "I know we did not satisfy your needs, and I assure you that we will do better in the future. Can I offer you a free gift the next time you stop in, or a discount off your next service?" Your client may still want to fight, but with your calm and helpful response, you are dispelling her anger. Just smile, take responsibility (even if you feel you haven't done anything wrong), and offer solutions. If you are reasonable, your client will eventually come around.

Get them to listen to you by . . . listening to them. Customers will listen to what you have to say if you respectfully listen to what they have to say first. Knowing that you are truly listening to their concerns can cause your customers to agree to your suggestions much more quickly.

Few people practice Curious Listening. We instead partially listen, prepare to respond, and let our minds drift. By practicing Curious Listening, you differentiate yourself as *someone who cares*.

Here are the four steps:

1. Hear the essence of what your customer is saying by repeating back what you heard.
2. Ask questions so your customer knows that you are seeking to understand why something is important him.
3. Make sure you aren't acting on unsubstantiated assumptions. Confirm with the client that you have correctly understood what he is saying.
4. Listen for the "remarkable." In every conversation you have with a client, he will say something unique and remarkable. If you listen for his



"remarkable," you will be able to come back to that later (even in a subsequent conversation) and connect with him on a different level. The "remarkable" may be something as simple as, "I'm thinking about taking an October vacation to Paris," or, "I'm a Packers fan," or, "We just landed our largest client!" The key is remembering it. It shows you are really curious about what happened, how the other person feels, and what resolution was reached.

Have a standard service protocol at the ready. Creating standards, procedures, and methods of dealing with clients and servicing their needs can really help when it comes to resolving conflicts or handling a dissatisfied customer. By creating a service protocol in advance, you provide a way to "enforce" how client conflict situations are handled. This allows you and your employees to more easily resolve issues and deal with those impossibly and consistently difficult clients.

When developing a service protocol, start by recalling past situations.

Consider how and when a difficult client became difficult. Was a resolution reached? If so, when and how? By examining how difficult clients were handled in the past, taking into account both good and bad examples, you and your staff can begin to set boundaries regarding what is and isn't a proper way to react. Creating a protocol allows you to chart your path to resolution and figure out what you're going to say before a problem arises.

Your service protocol empowers your employees to become connectors. Often, they might think offering a discount or a coupon is the right way to handle a situation, but they may be worried that you, their leader, won't approve. With the protocol, they know exactly what they can immediately offer to the client. You'll find that effectively resolving problems with clients actually makes them more loyal to you because they see that you care about their business.

Ask for feedback. Obviously, you don't have to sit around, anxiously wondering when a problem is going to arise. Avoid some (unfortunately not all!) client conflicts by ensuring that customers aren't suppressing problems. And you do *that* by constantly asking for feedback. A sincere inquiry about a client's satisfaction is a true pathway to making a connection.

Ask your clients what you can do better, how you can improve. Supply them with feedback surveys so that they can anonymously share their thoughts, ensuring that they are as honest as possible. And when a problem has been solved, ask them if you handled it to their satisfaction and find out if there is anything they would like for you to have done differently. Asking for feedback is a great way for you to rectify any possible or growing problems before they become so great that they sour a client relationship.

Clients who feel a connection with you are loyal and will stay with you—sometimes forever. By actively resolving conflicts with your clients, you show them that you are willing to do what it takes to make them happy. You are not just fixing a problem for them. You are also turning those dissatisfied clients into delighted ones who may even become evangelists for your company! And there is no marketing force more powerful than a customer who shares her delight with others. **SSE**

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ACTION: Turn angry customers into happy ones.

Qualifying Calls

Nothing beats a D-A-M-D good lead.



by Landy Chase

EVERYONE LIKES THE PHONE to ring with the sound of a potential new client. In fact, most people get so excited over an incoming lead, they ignore the process of qualifying the call—and pay the consequences later. Do you know how to tell the difference between a *bona fide buyer* and *tire-kicker*?

When handling an inquiry, the aim is to determine if the call is a DAMD good lead, meaning the caller has:

- D = *Desire*, a pre-identified need;
- A = *Authority* to make the decision;
- M = *Money* to afford to buy from you;
- D = *Deadline* or timetable.

How do you set these criteria on the telephone? Here are *eight simple qualifying questions* to ask incoming callers.

Establishing Desire

What prompted you to call? This simple question helps determine the quality of the lead. The more specific the response, the better (in most cases) the selling opportunity. You want the caller to respond with a simple, specific answer: in effect, “I am looking for _____.” If you get this response, you understand the caller’s interest, and can then schedule an appointment.

Those who are vague in their response are tire-kickers. Mail them something if you like, but don’t schedule a meeting until after you have qualified the contact further.

Establishing Authority

Assuming you proceed with this, what would your decision process be, and who else besides yourself would be involved? Ask this question with confidence. Then, once you establish the people involved in the decision, try to have your contact arrange a meeting for you with them. Explain that everyone will have different questions and issues, and that you’d like to get all questions answered prior to putting together a proposal.

Establishing Money

What is your budget? Does everyone answer this question? No, but nobody minds you asking. Another approach is to say, “Our fees will be in the range of _____. Is this within your budget?” If you get a “no,” it’s better to find out now than later.

Establishing Deadline

What is your timetable for wanting to move forward? Ideally, the caller will give you a timeframe, such as “we need to make a decision by (date).” A person who says “we aren’t that far yet” is not in buying mode—and your job is to put them there.

Here are four other questions to ask:

How did you hear about us? This helps you identify what forms of marketing are working for you. Asking this question of every incoming lead is critical to growing your business. Over time, you’ll learn where your marketing dollars are paying dividends—and where they’re being wasted.

What other options are you considering? This is a polite, effective way of finding out about your competition. Usually, if they are looking at other options they will answer.

SERVICE/PERCEPTION

Consumer Perception

It’s the key to business survival.



by Bob Prosen

DURING TOUGH ECONOMIC times, maintaining quality customer experiences is crucial, and getting the right message across to your customers will make or break your business.

While you need to manage costs, you doom your business the moment you sacrifice your customer’s buying experience. To gain an advantage, take four steps:

- 1. Keep your word.** Keep your doors open and stay true to your promises to ensure customer trust and loyalty. Continue providing customers quality products and top-notch service. Before increasing prices, look for innovative ways to provide increased value on things that don’t cost much. Create value-added transactions and involve people in bundling products and services to give customers more for less and generate more profit.

Don’t cancel traditional sales deals. This turns loyal customers off, sending them elsewhere. Instead, raise your level of communication in five ways:

- Tell customers when products ship.
- Provide advance notice of delays.
- Share return and refund information.
- Follow up to ensure satisfaction.
- Send a heartfelt thank-you.

Keeping your customers happy by



Where are you in your meetings with them? Are you the first option? You need to know, before you schedule a meeting, if your buyer has met with your competitors. You can then plan the best strategy for opening your first meeting.

What have you liked and not liked about what you’ve seen so far? This is a clever way to learn how your competitors have performed, how they market themselves, and what their strengths and weaknesses are.

You’re now ready for your meeting! Consider how much better prepared you’ll be for your first call—by asking a few intelligent questions. In qualifying leads, knowledge is power. **SSE**

Landy Chase speaks on professional selling skills. Visit www.landychase.com or call 877-370-8026.

ACTION: Ask qualifying questions.

staying in tune with their needs will build loyalty and enable you to scoop up more market share in the process.

- 2. Don’t compromise the customer’s shopping experience.** Put your client first. Don’t skimp on things that could sour their buying experience. Keep the quality of your goods and services high. Don’t switch suppliers just because someone else can do it cheaper. You usually get what you pay for, and customers will notice. Ask suppliers what they can do to help on price, terms, or upgrades. Don’t fire higher-paid employees just to replace them with cheaper, untrained labor. Customers expect a high quality shopping experience, impeccable service, and enthusiastic, knowledgeable salespeople.

- 3. Empathize with customers.** Show them that *you understand what they’re going through*. If you need to change your business model, ensure your customers know your motives. Take *proactive steps* to be there for your customers, but don’t throw caution to the wind. Some customers will ask for special pricing and terms, but before agreeing, consider asking for longer-term agreements. When requests outweigh the value, say “no.” Find ways to cut *non-essential* expenses.

- 4. Get the message out.** You need to get to the customer base with the right message. Create confidence and certainty for your brand. Your image is what will keep you in business. **SSE**

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ACTION: Manage consumer perceptions.

Build a Better Sales Force

Focus on your first-string starters.



by Nathan Jamail

EVERY YEAR COMPANIES look for ways to increase sales. This year is no different, only with today's economy, the answers seem to be harder to find. One sure way to increase your sales: focus on your first string. This concept of focusing on your first string is very simple in theory, but it is not easy to execute. Much like great coaching of great sports teams, it takes a long commitment to make the team better by challenging the best players and working with them to improve constantly.

When the New England Patriots football team or the Orlando Magic basketball team practices, does the coach spend the week before the game working with the third-string players, or does he focus on working with the first-string players? The first-string players, of course, because they are the ones who are ultimately going to win the game. They score the most points and usually play the most amount of time. The coach spends a lot of time with them because they are good enough to merit his attention. The coach's focus on the first string players sets a positive goal for all the players to strive for. If the third string players want his attention, they have to work for it! If the first string players want to keep their coach's attention, they have to work hard to stay the best! In sum, this program requires every player to desire and pursue excellence.

In business the norm is the exact opposite. Many companies have a culture in which managers leave the top performers alone and focus on the bottom performers. It is very common to hear a sales manager or leader say, "Oh, Bob is one of my top guys, so I leave him alone and let him do his job." Wow, what a mistake! Another organization that understands a different philosophy will eventually approach Bob and inform him that he is being robbed. Bob will be told he is investing all his time and energy in the company, but the company is not investing in him by coaching him and helping him to develop. Bob will thus be wooed over to a new company.

Companies with leaders who ignore to their top performers will soon lose them. Even worse, the company's culture is one that says if the manager is working with an employee on a regular basis, then that person must be a low performer. The leader's involvement with an employee is viewed as a negative. The leader is a manager and not a coach. It is difficult to coach a person if the person feels that the leader thinks he or she is there to manage poor performance. It's like rewarding your kids with attention only when they are bad.

Take Two Steps

How do you fix this disordered culture?

Step 1: Make the commitment. All leaders want to create a culture where



winning and being the best is the goal, and to do that all players have to want to be on the first string. A leader needs to create a culture that dedicates all of their coaching efforts to the top performers and those who are willing to do what it takes to become a top performer. Fight the tendency to leave the top performers alone because you normally focus on the weak. A leader must commit to coaching the top performers or committed performers and manage the bottom performers up or out.

Step 2: Spend your time with the top performers, conducting ride days and practicing role-plays with them. Your goal is to help make them better every month. The leader must let the team know that she or he plays favorites; if team members are successful and doing the right things, the leader will spend time with them, and the others will have limited

coaching. Once this is done, leaders will find their top performers will improve dramatically, and will find their jobs more satisfying. The bottom performers will ask the leader what it takes to become a top performer, and they will do what it takes or they will find another team. Neither one of those options is a bad thing for the organization or the person.

This might sound cold at first, but it's not. Think about a person who is struggling at his job: he knows it and he usually has very low job satisfaction. A leader's job is not to ignore the bottom performers, but instead to move them up or out. A leader who tolerates poor performance is a leader who will always have a struggling team and disappointed top performers.

Many companies find internal competition to be bad because some of the lower producing sales people get their feelings hurt, so they stop recognizing the top performers or stop conducting contests in general. This is another instance of sacrificing the top performers to satisfy the bottom performers. In sales, just like in life, it takes skill, talent, and discipline to be successful. When a salesperson does a great job and delivers great results, he or she should be recognized. Kids love to be recognized and feel appreciated, and professional adults are no different. When a leader tries to recognize everybody equally in order to be fair, his blanket recognition devalues the recognition for the ones who deserve it most. Winning is important, so do it.

The proof is in the numbers. Let's look at this example: a sales leader has five sales reps. The top two reps generate \$100 each while the bottom two sales reps generate \$50 each. If the leader works with the top reps and they improve by 20 percent, then the revenue is increased by \$40. If the sales leader works with the bottom reps and they improve 20 percent, then the revenue is increased by \$20. It is obvious where a leader should spend time. Successful sales leadership comes from focusing on the program or process that gives the greatest return on investment, much like successful retirement plans, marketing efforts, and finances.

If you don't spend time with your first string and invest in their success as much as they invest in the organization, someone else will. **SSE**

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ACTION: Invest in your first stringers.

Moving Into the Fast Lane

Implement a cross-media campaign.



by Crystal Uppercue

TODAY'S CROSS-MEDIA MARKETING campaigns deliver your message in the customer's preferred communication method—via website, direct mail, email, or personalized websites (PURLs). Message delivery is staged, timed, automated, and tracked, with adjustments made in real time.

These six steps are a good framework for a cross-media campaign.

Step 1: Put your goal in writing.

Suppose you want to invite top donors/customers/members to participate in a new donor segment/customer club/member category, using cross-media. Your campaign goal might read something like this:

Use cross-media to reinforce image and brand for continued loyalty, gather data for future targeted marketing communications, and identify new opportunities for marketing to this top segment.

Three tips: start small; be specific; and make your goals measurable.

Step 2: Define and segment your audience. Create a list of your top donors, most active members, or most loyal customers. Develop a profile of them. Start with what you know about them (for example: income level, location, area of interest, type of purchase, age, or gender). Determine whom you are targeting with your message; figure out how you can personalize the message for each recipient to increase the relevance and odds of response; consider attributes a given consumer has that could help you reach your goal.

Step 3: Devise your strategy. Next, develop a strategic plan to communicate effectively with the target group. Use the profile and segments to develop a *personalized message for each group*. Think variable fonts, colors, images, text, and layouts. Consider what has worked in the past; the *most compelling offer* you can make to each segment; how you'll link email, direct mail, and PURL channels; how you'll select your media; and which media channels you'll use.

For example, a cross media campaign strategy might be: *List segmentation—top donors/customers/members (vs. balance of the database); Media—direct mail, web, and email; Response Device—PURLs; Campaign Duration—8 weeks.*

Step 4: Create a workflow chart.

This will help you plan triggers to automate your campaigns. Use a pre-designed workflow chart that fits your campaign or formulate workflows based on your circumstances.

Start with the first marketing communication and map what happens if either the recipient replies or does not reply. Continue with every communication across multiple channels, moving the recipient toward the goal. Use your strategy to make optimal use of the campaign workflow.

Step 5: Devise a plan for collecting data. Collecting information should be part of the game plan. So, when you design your response form—be it via direct mail, email, or PURL—consider: the specific information you need to reach your goal; the information you need to measure campaign

ROI; other information essential to longer-term goals; information that might be helpful to future marketing; and where you'll store collected data.

Step 6: Develop a timeline. A timeline in a cross-media campaign is more intricate. To set a timeline, work backwards from your goal date. Tie a date to each direct mail, email, and PURL communication. Also, consider how soon automated emails should deliver, and determine how long each personalized website should remain published.

Cross-media marketing focuses on the result. Every component enables you to automate the response, collect data, measure results, calculate campaign ROI, and know what worked. **SSE**

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ACTION: Implement a cross-media campaign.

MANAGEMENT/RECOGNITION

Remember Recognition

Sales success is all in the mind.



by David Chittock

WHILE INCENTIVE PROGRAMS can drive temporary behavior change to deliver sales increases, to ensure lasting sales channel success, you need to build a performance culture—one that features the targeted use of recognition.

Recognition can be a powerful short-term tool to grow the behaviors that are critical to long-term sales success.

First, develop a recognition strategy. It's a natural twin to your incentive strategy—in fact, it should leverage incentives. A meaningful recognition strategy should: 1. Link to the goals of your sales organization for channel alignment. 2. Identify behaviors and values that are important to your team's success. 3. Identify traits that define your culture. 4. Include an ongoing communications plan to deliver engagement and mindshare. 5. Train managers how to recognize. 6. Be channel appropriate.

Use 10 percent of the spend on your incentive programs toward a solid recognition process. Provide enough funding to support the three key components in sales recognition:

1. The honor club. Have a year-end celebration of best performers. Great salespeople want and need to be celebrated. Whatever you call it (president's

club, winner's circle), your club needs to be something worth striving for and include a serious public recognition of 10 to 20 percent of top performers, in up to three award levels. Criteria may be as simple as exceeding sales goals, or include additional metrics.

Find a custom symbol of success for your team. One example: a highly visible ring or medallion watch with add-a-diamond capability, so that repeat performance adds to the value.

2. Spot recognition is a powerful tool for showing timely appreciation for outstanding actions, short-term tri-

umphs, sales wins, and small victories. Use a Web-based incentive or recognition system. These programs enable you to go online to send a congratulatory message, e-card or e-certificate and tangible reward (points or a gift) to deserving salespeople. The behaviors, actions, or accomplishments celebrated should relate back to the values and traits you have identified in your recognition strategy. By reinforcing the right actions, you can build the right culture.

3. The personal touch, in the form of a handwritten note, is a powerful and inexpensive way to show sincere appreciation to a salesperson and reinforce great actions. Be specific about the action being praised—even a few sentences will do.

Give the *recognition strategy* the same attention as your *incentive gameplan*. **SSE**

David Chittock is president of Incentra. Visit www.setyourworldonfire.com.

ACTION: Update your recognition plan.



Skip Social Media Marketing

Confirm what your instincts have been telling you all along.



by Jean Van Rensselar

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME you logged onto Facebook to find a prospect or vendor? Have you ever received a lead from any online social medium?

Yet many experts will tell you that if you don't integrate online social media tools into your marketing plan, you'll be left in the technology dust.

The truth is that only 26 percent of B2B marketers have ever used social networking as a marketing channel, and most of those can't prove ROI. Unless your product or service's end user is a consumer that's a heartbeat away from your customers (as is the case with retail suppliers and pharmaceutical companies), social media marketing just doesn't make sense.

See the Differences

To see why online social media tools don't work for B2B marketing, let's review the differences between B2B and B2C marketing. *Market Size:* B2B markets are generally much smaller. *Buying Process:* In the B2B market, the buying process is longer and more complex. *Selling Process:* B2B sales organizations include field sales people, distributors, and business partners, while B2C sales are direct—B2B campaigns focus on lead generation, while B2C campaigns focus on direct sales. *Cost of a Sale:* The cost of a B2B sale is much higher. *Value of a Customer:* With the value of individual sales and repeat sales, the value of an individual B2B customer is much higher than the value of an individual B2C customer. *Brand Identity:* B2B brand identity is created through personal experience (relationships), while B2C brand identity is created through message repetition and imagery (advertising). *Buying Decision:* The B2B buying decision is rational, while the B2C decision is emotional.

The B2B prospect—in contrast to the B2C prospect—is in a smaller segment; requires more time, effort, and money to sell to; is worth more; equates the brand value with personal experience; and makes rational buying decisions.

It's easy to see why the basic differences between B2B and B2C marketing create divergent online marketing paths.

Three Tiers of Online Media Tools

All online media is social media. Some experts segment online marketing tools into three tiers according to their ease of access and popularity—their sociability.

- Top (least sociable) tier includes focused online sales and marketing venues such as e-mail marketing, online ads, search engine optimization, search engine marketing, webinars, and proprietary Web sites.

- Middle tier includes relatively long-lived online technology such as RSS feeds, blogs, forums, podcasts, and on-demand video.

- The bottom tier includes offerings such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter.

Top-tier tools (with the exception of your Web site) create demand while the mid and bottom tiers are for *consumer* (not business) brand building.



The Top Tier

For B2B businesses, your customers and prospects aren't as concerned about what brand they buy as they are about who they buy from. They want specifics, credibility, and proof, and they'll buy from the first company they find that will offer those basics.

- Use online ads, SEO, and search engine marketing to drive business to your site (B2B prospects use the Internet to research vendors and purchases).
- Use e-mail marketing to create interest.
- Do webinars to educate and persuade.
- Use your Web site to make your case.

Webinars are a great way to address customer pain points, demonstrate products and services, and position your company as a thought leader. Webinars, if smartly created, include indexing and tagging that allows Internet users interested in the topic to find the webinar easily. Assuming the video is posted on your company Web site, effective indexing and tagging will also increase SEO and drive traffic to your site.

The Middle Tier

You're likely taking advantage of RSS feeds to get the latest information about your industry and learn what's being said about your company on the Web. You may have tried podcasts—and have found the participation rate so low that it wasn't worth the trouble.

If you've grouped blogs and forums together in your head—ungroup them. The difference between a blog and a forum is that there is only one person creating new content for a blog—others comment on the posts. A forum is a faster-paced, idea-generating, problem-solving roundtable. Forums are a more valuable tool for B2B companies. They allow customers and prospects to participate in an ongoing conversation about your products. And since forums require registration and login, they tend to attract serious professionals.

The Bottom Tier

Unless your goal is *popularity over credibility*, it would be a wise move to forego Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, Twitter, etc. Look at it this way: What is the benefit of posting your CEO's profile on Facebook? Transparency? Is it worth the risk of negative feedback? Why would you want to post your own videos and photos on third party sites, when you can post them on your site and increase your SEO? Remember: the goal is credibility, trust, and respect—not popularity and trendiness.

Here are some sites to utilize:

- IT Toolbox (www.it.toolbox.com). Collaborate with industry peers and generate user product evaluations.
- Google Alerts (www.google.com/alerts). Receive daily reports on what's being said online about your company.
- Technorati (www.technorati.com). Find blogs whose user profile matches that of your prospects.
- GoToWebinar (www.GoToWebinar.com). Services for webinar creation/hosting.
- LinkedIn (www.LinkedIn.com). Networking site for business professionals—best for very small businesses.

Online media is ideal for trend analysis, research, brainstorming, and identifying decision makers.

Whatever marketing venues you use—print or on-line—must respect your prospects' time. Information needs to be easy to find, easy to follow, to the point, credible, and complete. **SSE**

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ACTION: Evaluate your use of social media.

Training Value

Apply seven strategies.



by Doug Harward

TRAINING MANAGERS ARE under pressure to align training opportunities with business objectives. This requires them to use a new business-oriented strategy aimed at creating sustainable value.

What can you do to increase the value of their service? Here are seven actions you can take to better align your training to business goals:

1. Leverage external resources. No organization owns all of the knowledge that their business and customer base needs. Your primary role is to leverage available knowledge and resources by bringing them in-house. For example, external facilities like classroom space can make a good economic alternative to maintaining real estate in-house. Similarly, content development companies can help create courseware on demand, relieving organizations of the fixed expense of instructional design.

2. Think globally, act locally. Your company is part of a vast economic marketplace that utilizes resources worldwide. Consider conducting training events in many countries and languages. Translate and culturally localize material to your audience. Create a global learning strategy and deploy it using local talent. Leadership styles don't always translate directly.

3. Get closer to marketing. Both training and marketing are in the business of influencing behavior. We use the same technologies, techniques, and tools to perform our jobs. We should work together to leverage cost. Meet with your marketing leaders to leverage product knowledge services to drive new revenues. For example, Clinique created a training program teaching potential customers how to apply their products at the point of sale. They leveraged the intelligence of how to use their products into a service, creating more satisfied customer.

4. Simulate real working conditions. Training is best done by doing. We learn best by actually performing a specific activity, by failing to do it correctly and learning from our mistakes. By simulating the actual working environment, training executives create valuable learning opportunities for employees, customers, and suppliers.

Fortunately, new learning technologies have created more simulation at affordable prices. Use them to your advantage. If airplane pilots can learn to handle risky and dangerous situations in flight simulators, maybe it makes sense for your business.

5. Rationalize portfolios and consolidate vendors. Quit doing stuff that doesn't matter. If courses have no value, get rid of them. Don't engage multiple vendors for the same program. Classify training activities based on their strategic value—on a scale ranging from *low strategic and low proprietary endeavors* to *high strategic and proprietary ones*. If the program is of *low strategic and low proprietary* value, stop doing it.

6. Provide all-time access to information. E-mail, Blackberries, and the Internet have created a new freedom in time and place. This includes train-

ing, which needs to serve a client base that's not interested in attending a classroom event for a learning exercise that could be delivered portably, on the learner's own schedule. Supplement structured learning programs by providing real-time access to knowledge.

7. Leverage intellectual capital into knowledge products. The market for intellectual capital is exploding with amazing new technologies and products arriving daily. Seek ways to leverage knowledge into products/services the company can take to market, creating new revenue streams and value.

As you follow these tips, you will create sustainable value for your business and gain valuable respect. **SSE**

Doug Harward is CEO of Training Industry, Inc. Email dharward@trainingindustry.com.

ACTION: Apply these seven training strategies.

SALES/MASTERY

Master Salespeople

Develop five characteristics.



by Paul J. Meyer

AS I CLIMBED MY WAY TO THE top, I met many talented, successful people. They taught me a great deal; I appreciated every one of them. When you look closely, it's no secret how they arrived at their income and position. Five qualities are always present:

1. Persuasive and convincing: The power to persuade has been called "the most important skill a leader can develop." Top salespeople are the best persuaders and convincers on the planet. They use stories, dreams, color, and humor. For me, it's a natural habit. It's intentional. Usually, when prospects see things as I see them, the selling is done.

2. Focused on service: What makes people want to buy from you? Simply put, the answer is service. Master salespeople act upon the Golden Rule of service: *serve others as you would like to be served*. When you focus on service not only do you continue to get a customer's continuing business but they form a referral base for you; they become small centers of influence.

3. Full of integrity in all things: Top salespeople are honest, keep their word, work hard, are responsible, dependable, and act with integrity in all they do. When you act with integrity, busi-

ness grows. When you don't, it dies.

Tim Smith, a top salesman with a leading pharmaceutical company, says it best: *Trust is essential to successful selling because customers don't buy from people they can't trust.*

4. Self-motivating: When you're a master salesperson you motivate yourself regardless of how you feel, regardless of the circumstances around you, regardless of what others say, think, or do. Being able to motivate yourself to accomplish your goals is one of the most powerful assets you can possess.

Self-motivation requires the development of inner strength, conscious willpower, overwhelming desire, and the determination to reach any goal you personally want to achieve. The phrase, *The highest price paid for any form of ability in the world is a master salesperson with a creative imagination* aptly describes the self-motivated salesperson.

5. Full of love for people: The best salespeople care about their clients. They want to leave them better off than they found them once they make the sale. Many of my clients became friends. I turned down deals if I knew someone was being mistreated. Be interested in the things that concern your clients.

To become a *master salesperson*, you must possess these five qualities. They're your ticket to success, and they'll make your life full, worthwhile, and fun! *Selling is the best career you can have.* **SSE**

Paul J. Meyer founded Success Motivation Institute and is the author of numerous books including *Pink Slip Proof*. Visit www.success-motivation.com.

ACTION: Become a master salesperson.

Arm Yourself for Follow Up

Find tools that work for you.



by Judy Garmaise

DESPITE THE STEREOTYPE OF the annoying salesperson who is always pestering you to buy something, the fact is that people want to do business with those who show exceptional follow up skills. While they don't want to be bullied or stalked for their business, they do want to work with a salesperson who takes the initiative to educate them, remind them, and keep them abreast of current offerings.

Unfortunately, most salespeople lack decent follow up skills. They may call or e-mail a prospect one time, but when they get no response, they give up and ultimately lose the sale. Why is this the norm? Because good follow up skills require good organizational skills, and most salespeople are confused on how to stay organized. They haven't found the right tool that works for them, and they haven't figured out their own follow up techniques.

These days there's really no excuse for not following up—the key is to know what works for you and to use it consistently. When you pick a system and use it, you can quickly become a follow up extraordinaire.

The Value of a System

Why is having a system in place so important? Consider this scenario: You promise prospect A that you will get back with him in two days. Rather than put the follow up reminder in some sort of follow up system, you rely on your short-term memory. Two days come and go, and you never follow up. A week later, Prospect A moves on to another company and another salesperson who does follow up, and Prospect A ends up spending a lot of money with your competition.

In order to get the sale, as soon as you promise to follow up with someone, you need to stop what you're doing and jot down, type, or speak into your calendar the correct day and time to make the follow up. If you do that with every promise you make to someone, you can dramatically increase your sales in one year. People will be so impressed with your impeccable use of time that they will refer all

their friends and family to you.

The biggest mistake you can make is believing you will definitely remember your promises. Don't fool yourself; no one is that good. The reason you can't leave anything to your memory is not because you don't mean well; rather, other factors come up and other situations transpire that distract your focus.

Once your mind is diverted to a new situation, it is highly unlikely you will remember that previous detail. Most likely, you will simply forget to call Prospect A, but three days later at 4 a.m. you will wake up in a sudden scare and remember that you forgot to follow up as promised.

That's why all salespeople need some sort of follow up system in place.

Tools You Can Use

To create a follow-up system that works, you need to know your personal style and then understand how to integrate that style into your company's culture and existing systems. The following tips will help:

Know Yourself. Are you a techie? Do you love writing by hand? Are verbal reminders more effective for you than visual ones? Since each person is different, it's completely normal for each person to have a different preferred follow up system. For example, some people are pen and paper people, even though technology is everywhere. They love to write and erase and highlight and handle physical pieces of paper. Other people are techno kings and queens who thrill at watching their iPhone screen move at the flick of a finger from page to page. Whichever technique you prefer, that's the one that will make you excellent at the art of follow up.

Experiment. Once you know your personal style, experiment with various available follow-up tools:

- Microsoft outlook (or other software system) calendar
- Blackberry® calendar
- iPhone® calendar
- Daytime planner
- Sticky notes

Pick one and try it out. If you hate it or don't use it consistently, then try something else. Be open to new things. And remember that just because you love online activities and are a computer whiz doesn't mean your follow up system has to be high tech. You can have one low tech area of your life. Whatever you choose, just make sure it works for YOU.

Combine and Conquer. If necessary, use a combination of methods. For example, perhaps you like using sticky notes. You use a particular color sticky note for the various activities, and your computer monitor looks like one giant rainbow flower. Each time you complete a task and peel off the sticky note, you get a sense of satisfaction. But because you don't want to carry multiple pads of sticky notes with you on sales calls, you rely on your iPhone calendar to schedule reminders while you're out in the field. Then when you



come back to the office at day's end, you transfer the information to your sticky notes method.

You may also need to use a combination method if your company requires you to use a certain system that doesn't work for you. For instance, if your company requires that you use ACT!

so they can track your activity, but you're a pen and paper kind of person, you can use your paper system during the day and transfer your notes to the computerized system at night for tracking purposes. This may seem like you're running two systems at once, but sometimes it takes a tag-team approach to get the job done.

The Success is in the Follow Up

Know what your preferred tool is and go all the way with it. Soon you'll become addicted to whatever tool you implement and wonder how you ever got along without it. That's when your own personal systems will start to develop, and your sales will increase.

When you're organized and using a system you like, your confidence will increase. You'll no longer feel like a failure because you forgot to follow-up with someone. Your prospects will view you as a credible and reliable salesperson with exceptional follow up skills, and they'll reward you by giving you the business you so rightly deserve. **SSE**

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ACTION: Follow up professionally to sell more.

Stop Dysfunction

Create a place where people want to work.



by Roxanne Emmerich

WE'VE ALL BEEN THERE. You walk into a bank, restaurant, or store and suddenly feel that all is not well. It drips from the ceilings and sits in puddles on the floor. The employees are lost in thought, unable to decide whether they'd rather be somewhere else or stay and kill each other. And you're the lucky one bathing in all the poison they can ladle up. *Yeesh.*

I hope you've experienced the other side. You walk in and get a *sense of well-being*. This isn't just a place where people work—it's a place that works. Employees want to be there, and they want you to be there. You feel yourself relax, and you don't want to leave.

So which of these do you work in? And, which environment do you think your employees would rather work in?

Here are nine symptoms of a dysfunctional workplace: 1. Saying one thing and meaning another. 2. Giving lip service to new ideas, only to undercut them in private. 3. Defensiveness. 4. Saying you'll do something and then not doing it. 5. Chaos. 6. Deflection of feedback and blame. 7. People pretending they "missed the memo on that one." 8. Refusal to deal with conflict. 9. Gossip and backstabbing.

When you think of a dysfunctional organization, you might picture a lot of screaming and yelling. But this list has little to do with raised voices, and the only mention of "conflict" is the failure to deal with it directly.

You will have conflict in the workplace. The key is to address it in a healthy, productive way.

First, End Gossip

The most destructive symptom of the dysfunctional workplace is *gossip*. A workplace full of whispered gossip is painful and maddening. It is destructive to the soul of your workplace and the souls of your people who never feel safe and always wonder who is talking behind their backs. If a happy and functional workplace is your goal, there are few more productive places to put your energy than the absolute elimination of gossip.

Gossip is a bad attempt at communication. You can't eliminate it without providing something to replace it—a

healthier way of communicating.

All you have to do is say, "Dude, when you are late with that analysis, I end up on my knees to my boss because then *my* report is late. Please promise me you'll get that to me on time from now on." Reasonable.

If Jack comes to you with gossip, simply say, "Gee, it sounds like you need to talk to Tom directly so you can work this out." Lather, rinse, and repeat until the person wakes up!

Once you set a zero-tolerance policy for talking behind a person's back, give people permission to address conflict head-on, out loud, courageously, and honestly. Create a trusting, open culture and watch dysfunctions ebb.

Solution: A Shared Vision

Many dysfunctions start as people shoot their energy at each other

SERVICE/RELATIONSHIPS

Credibility

Get a relational GPS.



by Ed Wallace

CREDIBILITY IS THE QUALITY that makes others believe in you, your words and actions. Credibility is the gatekeeper quality. If you don't first establish credibility and competence with your prospect or client, you will struggle to create anything more than a transactional relationship.

As client-facing professionals, we all want our clients to trust us. Once they do, we can start doing things for them in order to move the process along. However, until we are deemed credible and competent, why would clients trust us with the three elements of their Relational GPS?

- Goals—personal long- and short-term business objectives
- Passions—business and personal causes and activities they care about
- Struggles—obstacles or commitments that are holding them back

Driving a car equipped with a GPS (Global Positioning System) is now a way of life for us as we travel. GPS relies on satellites that orbit the Earth at more than 7,000 miles per hour, synchronizing coordinates and time and then sending signals to the GPS device in your car. It amazes me how accurate these directions are. They're the new



because there's nothing else to aim for. What's needed is a *single, shared vision*.

Everyone wants to be a part of something bigger, and feel productive and be happy. Give yourself and your team members a *clear and positive picture of where you want to go as a group*. Most will jump at the chance to be a part of it. When people align around a vision of great service, pettiness and dysfunctional behaviors fall away.

Will there still be some who holds on to their dysfunctions? I guarantee it. Gently but *firmly* encourage those folks to find and follow their bliss *elsewhere*.

Do what it takes to end the dysfunctions and create a can-do culture. **SSE**

Roxanne Emmerich transforms "ho-hum" attitudes into "bring-it-on" attitudes. She is the author of Thank God It's Monday. Call 1-800-236-5885 or visit www.thankgoditsmonday.com.

ACTION: Create a single, shared vision.

road map in travel.

The major part of the road map to our success in developing outstanding relationships is to understand the Relational GPS of each of our clients. If your clients believe that you can help them deal with their goals, passions, and struggles on both a professional and a personal level, you can advance through the sales cycle much more meaningfully and successfully. The challenge is that clients—who are people—are seldom inclined to share their goals, passions, and struggles

with anyone they do not deem as credible or competent. The key then is to navigate through the process of launching your relationship and starting to work together. But until clients begin to share their goals, passions, and struggles with you, the relationship is parked in neutral.

How do you get in gear and move forward? Turn the act of asking questions into client identified attributes—like listening and remembering, sharing relevant information, and keeping commitments. When your clients attach these attributes to you, they'll share more about their needs.

Once your clients deem you credible, they'll ask you to do things for them that align with their goals, passions, and struggles. Learn more about each client's Relational GPS, as interests and priorities shift over time. **SSE**

Ed Wallace is founder of The Relational Capital Group and author of Business Relationships That Last (Greenleaf, 2009). Visit www.relationalcapitalgroup.com.

ACTION: Boost your credibility with clients.

Your Selling Career

Consider these impacts.



by Tom Hopkins

ENGLISH PHILOSOPHER Alfred North Whitehead wrote, *The future is big with every possibility of achievement and of tragedy.* How we handle those possibilities, and perhaps more important, how we handle the challenges will determine whether we revel in our own achievement or reap our own tragedy.

When you're faced with tough times, it's time to get busy. The sooner you focus on what's happening and what actions to take instead of bemoaning negative events, the sooner you can improve today's situation.

When we talk about the downside of things, we become part of the problem. We're helping to spread the virus of bad news. Covering our mouths is the best answer to both mental and physical health when we encounter something that is potentially viral, whether it's truly a virus or just bad news. We need to think, act, and live in the present moment.

If you stay in any career for long, you'll see both high cycles and lows. How you handle them depends a lot on what their causes are.

Six Causes of Tough Times

Note these six causes of tough times:

Demographics. People change. Dramatic changes in demographics have enormous impact on the global economy. One such change is the vast number of people from the baby boom generation who are finding their needs shifting. Companies will have to adapt to that approaching tidal wave of change or be swept beneath it.

Companies and individual suppliers must more than ever before focus on building organizations and a product/service mix that meets an incredible variety of specialized needs.

Economic Cycles. Assume the economy will continue to be volatile. In the early days of this century, we saw phenomenal growth in service industries. That's great, but as universal law tells us, every boom is followed by a bust, or a "correction." What goes up must come down. Of course, it will most likely go back up again at the proper

moment in the economic cycle.

Smart business people are in a position to ride the "rollercoaster" through the bottoming out and the inevitable rise. Companies and the individuals who work inside them will have to position themselves as worthy providers through fast action, a proper product/service mix for their market(s), and by providing genuine and personal service.

Politics. There's no escaping politics whether you are anti-big government, pro-big government, or somewhere in the middle. Government, politics, is a major factor in the success or failure of your business, in the achievement of your goals, and in securing a safe, sound, happy future.

A key element in business involves ethics. Think of the prominent scandals that have rocked the business world in years past. The Savings & Loan operations of the 1980s. Insider trading. Worldcom. Tyco. ImClone Systems (Martha Stewart). Enron.

Because of the fallout from these scandals, people in leadership positions are now being held accountable. The bottom line of many of these failures boils down to greed or poor ethical standards. To prevent a future mass violation of business practices, we need add the term *accountability* to our mission statements.

I've always practiced and promoted sticking to the highest standards of business practice. If the standards in your industry are low, don't give in to them. Raise the bar. Adhering to the highest ethical standards will be essential to developing and maintaining customer loyalty—the foundation of all success. Stay close to your client base. Help them through these times and they'll stay with you long term.

Technology. The waves of change continue to roll in as new technologies provide the means to provide better, more personal service at more affordable rates. Yet, technological change has its pluses and minuses. You need to analyze any change you're considering in how you do business against

the end result for your clients.

Why should a potential client trudge downtown or have a salesperson violate the personal space of their home when in the same time they can shop several organizations online? We know the answer is because salespeople are industry experts, and unless the client is interested in investing the same time you do in learning your business, they're not likely to make decisions that are truly good for them. But few consumers understand that.

The solution can be found in the challenge. People can come to believe they don't need you—the salesperson. Technology is great, but only when used as an accessory to genuine personal service targeted to solving each client's individual challenges.

Industry. There are times when certain industries suffer. Some that come to mind are the time share industry, the real estate and mortgage industries,

the automotive industry, and credit-related services. They've all taken hard hits. They've had to police themselves to cure indiscretions and re-invent themselves to stay strong in providing services that are needed and wanted.

Competition. If you don't watch your competition in preparation of making

counter moves to their moves, you'll soon find yourself sliding down the list of top companies in your industry. When a young start-up wants to be a new player, they may make product offers that your company simply cannot beat or come close to matching.

If you're ill-prepared, you could find yourself in an embarrassing situation with a long-term client who expects you to know the story behind this incredible new offer. If you try to avoid it or hope they won't bring it up and they do it late in the sales process, your admission of knowledge only after they ask about it makes you come across as being weak or as trying to hide or sidestep the issue. Timing is everything and if you're operating from an offensive position when it comes to a potential concern, the client will see you as well-prepared and knowledgeable.

As professionals in selling, strive to create a future that's bright with every possibility of achievement. **SSE**

Tom Hopkins is a speaker, trainer, and author of How to Master the Art of Selling and Selling for Dummies and Selling in Tough Times (Grand Central Publishing). Visit www.tomhopkins.com.

ACTION: Navigate your sales career.



Customer Appreciation

These seven tips mean big bucks.



by Kim Goff

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE you referred a restaurant to a friend? Why did you make that referral—was it the food or the service? Maybe it was both, or maybe the service stood out. Let's say the restaurant you refer costs \$50 for dinner for two; if you refer four people, you just made that restaurant \$200.

No matter how good the food is at a restaurant, people always seem to remember how they were treated. It comes down to the service—memorable service makes people come back, whether you are running a restaurant, retail store, or service business.

Here are *seven tips* that will keep your customers coming back.

1. The customer is always number one. "Without customers, there is no profit, without profit, there is no business, without business there is no company, and without the company, there is no you." When you understand importance of customers to the business, you'll start to understand how important your role is as well.

2. Never make customers wait.

Greet your customers as soon as they walk in the door. If a customer calls, answer the phone by the second ring. If you are busy with another customer, do not make your new customer wait a long time. See if another employee can assist them. If no one is available, tell them you're busy with another client and ask if they can wait. Give them an estimated wait time. If they can't wait, ask them if they'd like to make an appointment. Ask customers immediately how you can help them.

3. Never ignore a customer. Even if you greet your customers or seat them at a table, you have to pay attention to them. Check back in to make sure they have what they need or offer your assistance. Many waitresses get stuck with the check because they never check back on customers. Customers will walk out if they feel ignored.

4. Be professional. Being a business professional means looking, acting, and saying things in a certain way.

- *Dress appropriately.* Don't wear anything too casual, like sweatshirts or flip-flops. Women should avoid any clothing that is too tight or revealing.
- *Speak appropriately.* Do not use foul

language or make negative comments about a customer's appearance, ethnicity, economic class, or family.

- *Be enthusiastic.* No one wants to deal with an employee who hates his job. This turns customers off.

5. Show appreciation for customers' business. Show customers how much you appreciate their business. First, tell them, "Thank you for your business; we hope to see you again." You might also offer "freebies," coupons or discounts.

6. Remember your "regular" clients. Learn clients' names and address them by it. Personalize the service by learning what they like or prefer. Learn something personal about them—their hobbies, children, or job. The more you can personalize service, the more appreciated they feel. There's nothing

worse than going to an establishment regularly and having employees ask who you are, or act like they've never seen you before. Personalizing service will make people life-long customers.

7. Invest in customer service training for employees. This is just as important as perfecting the quality of your product. You can have the best product, but if you don't treat your customers well, they won't come back. However, if you treat every customer with respect and courtesy, your service will get your company more referrals. The more referrals your customers make, the more money your company makes. **SSE**

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ACTION: Apply these tips to keep customers.

SALES/QUESTIONS

Crucial Questions

Build trust and reap sales.



by Jeff Mowatt

WHEN YOUR CUSTOMERS aren't sure which of your products or services they should buy, use the SWOT tool: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. It creates clarity and positions you as a trusted advisor.

Every customer is different, and you want to come up with a solution to suit his or her unique needs. So, ask them a few questions.

S: Strengths. "When you think about other products or services in this category that you've used in the past, what have you *liked* about them?" If, for example, you're a travel agent discussing vacation options with a client, ask them where they've vacationed before and what they liked about it. This helps the customer clarify what's important to them and shows that you're not threatened by discussing the positive aspects of competitors' products and services. In your customers' view, this alone makes you different. It's a generous way to build trust at the outset.

W: Weaknesses. "What have you *not liked* about previous products/services?" Customers clarify what they don't want, and tell you the flaws of the competition. This is better coming from the customer. When you point out the faults of competitors, you expose yourself to three negatives: 1) the customer disagrees with your negative assessment—they

no longer trust your judgment. 2) Even if you're right about your competitor's weakness, the customer may not like you running-down the competition behind their backs—it looks like a cheapshot. 3) The customer feels like they made a bad decision in the past and that you think they aren't smart.

It's much more effective when your customer points out the weaknesses. Encouraging them to point out the strengths makes them feel less guilty about talking about the weaknesses.

O: Opportunities. "What would be a *perfect* product/service solution in your mind?" You are asking the customer to dream big. People like this. And you

are creating an emotional connection to the product that is exactly right for them, because *they* are creating the product in their mind.

T: Threats: "What's *prevented* you from buying this perfect product/service in the past?" After the customer imagines the *perfect* solution,

they'll tell you their limits and buying objections. They share their budget, or time constraints, or that they weren't aware that this solution existed. They are telling you what you need to know to help them make a buying decision that's tailor-made for them.

Notice that you haven't talked about your products/services. Instead, you're focused on the customer's unique needs. They then realize that you *get them*. When you cross that threshold, you're no longer a pushy salesperson—you're a trusted advisor. **SSE**

Jeff Mowatt is a customer service strategist, speaker, and author of Influence with Ease. Visit www.jeffmowatt.com or call 1-800-JMowatt (566-9288).

ACTION: Conduct a SWOT analysis.

Good Media Relations

Grow your business fast.



by Pam Lontos

AS A BUSINESS OWNER, you've heard that media exposure can greatly help your company, especially during tough economic times when marketing budgets are low and competition is high. Learning to leverage the power of the media can help you stand out from the competition without expending your resources. If you are new or inexperienced in dealing with editors or reporters, you might feel intimidated.

Apply Seven Keys

Here are seven ideas to help you relax and make sure editors and reporters accept your articles, book you as a guest on shows, or interview you for pieces they are writing or videotaping.

1. Be respectful of the reporter or editor's time. Deadlines are 24/7 these days, and you are one of many people approaching the media with articles, ideas, and pitches. Media professionals are among the most overtaxed and pressured people you will ever meet. If you have initiated the contact, your first question should be, "Are you on deadline?" If they say "Yes," never sabotage the relationship by forging ahead anyway. Instead, ask, "When would be a better time to call you?" No need to risk alienating or annoying them. You can always call back.

2. Become familiar with the journalists you would like to cultivate relationships with. Follow their work, and let them know when you enjoy something they write. Comment on some specifics. Watch the TV broadcast or the talk show. Read the magazine, newspaper, or blog. Listen to the radio show or podcast. Familiarize yourself with the content. Look at the ads to see what audience the advertisers are targeting.

Once you become familiar with the audience, you will understand what the audience wants. This will allow you to tailor your content, making it more valuable to the reporter or editor. Providing great content is the best way to motivate reporters to contact you in the future! Another good way to target your material correctly is to ask the reporter or interviewer if there is anything else you need to know to better

understand his or her audiences. That way you can fashion the content of your remarks as you prepare for an interview or, if you are writing an article, you can strike the appropriate tone.

Reporters, editors, and talk-show hosts will respect you for the extra effort you make to ensure your ideas are valuable to their readers, listeners, or audiences.

3. Be observant during conversations and pick up personal details. If the reporter is heading out the door to pick up children from soccer, make a note of it. Remember to ask about the children's progress next time you call. Also, be on the lookout for items of interest to a soccer parent. You can e-mail or mail the reporter a parenting



article about involvement in children's sporting activities, for example. This costs nothing, and therefore there will be no breach of ethics on the reporter's part to accept it. And, he or she will appreciate your thoughtfulness.

4. Reporters and editors often spend most of their time in the world of ideas. They like to think and talk about challenging ideas. When you are engaged in conversation, bring up the topic they like to talk about. In a similar vein, if you see a subject come up in the news you know will interest a reporter with whom you are developing a relationship, copy and send it to him.

5. Don't let months pass without contact. Send birthday or holiday cards to keep the relationship going. If you stumble across an event or idea related to an area of the reporter or editor's interest, call and leave them a quick voicemail about it. They will get the message that you are thinking about them as people, not just using them for your own narrow purposes.

The goal is relationship building. If

the reporter or editor you'd like to get to know is local, you can drop by the office (with notice), suggest coffee, or even invite him or her to lunch. And when you do this, be sincere about it. Treat the reporter as you would any other friend or acquaintance you truly value. If it's all about you, if you're in the game just to advance yourself, this will be apparent, and you'll alienate the people you are trying to impress.

6. When you are interviewed, give good quotes. Strive for simple, declarative sentences. Use concrete images. Answer the question. Don't go off on tangents that interest you. Remember the reporter is working hard to gain the knowledge he or she needs to write a good story. Or the radio host is looking for that pithy quote the listeners can relate to. Help the reporter do a good job, and your effort will be appreciated.

Be enthusiastic on the phone. Even if you're not doing an interview for broadcast, the reporter will appreciate your passion for the subject. Stand up and smile—your energy and cheerfulness will come across. Laugh or get the interviewer laughing.

If you've written a book on the subject, offer to send it. This will help them learn more about the topic. You can also offer, say, five books as giveaways on radio interviews. Radio stations love promotional ideas.

At the end of an interview, ask about other stories the reporter is covering. Explain how you might contribute and offer a unique angle that may interest their audiences. Remind the journalist that he or she can call you back with questions. And make it clear that you're eager to be an accessible source of information in the future.

7. Don't forget to maintain your relationships once established. Again, thoughtfulness is the key. Sometimes the reporter will call you as a source, but you just aren't right for that subject matter. You can still be helpful by suggesting another person to call. Or, if the reporter needs a second or third source to interview, suggest names of other people. The reporter or editor will remember this and be grateful.

Effective media relations is about relationships. If you develop, nurture, and maintain good relationships with reporters and editors, you'll become the expert source they seek time after time. This will help you stand out from competitors and boost your sales. **SSE**

Pam Lontos is president of PR/PR and author of I See Your Name Everywhere. Email Pam@prpr.net, call 407-299-6128, or visit www.PRPR.net.

ACTION: Conduct effective media relations.

Back to Basics

Three keys to great presentations.



by Ed Barks

I'VE SEEN IT ALL TOO OFTEN. Executives seeking to sharpen their public speaking abilities encounter the confusion of information overload. They appear overwhelmed by advice that, although well-intentioned, offers only a stopgap and one-size-fits-all approach.

Leaders who shy away from public speaking forgo opportunities to build their organizations and their personal platforms. There is a common sense tool that helps stop that quiver in the voice and knocking in the knees.

The *Three Keys to Great Presentations* is a straightforward process that paves the road to a sharper communications edge. This system concentrates on:

1. Preparation. This starts with some basic research into your audience that puts you in position to define and refine your main messages and weave them throughout your remarks. Once you develop a magnetic message, commit to delivering it both during the body of your talk and when responding to questions. Next, fortify your message by developing quotable quotes through the use of stories, vivid words, third party support, numbers, and the like. Finally, *practice, practice, practice!* Rehearse your remarks in front of trusted advisors, colleagues, or family members. Videotape your rehearsals and critique yourself. For an even more powerful learning experience, secure a reputable and dedicated presentation skills trainer capable of improving your delivery over time.

2. Performance. Stride to the front of the room with self-assurance, bearing in mind that you are a recognized leader on the issue at hand. This gives you an added shot of confidence, and helps you shake those jitters that all of us experience at moments like this.

Begin your remarks with a flourish. You might pose a question, issue a surprising or contradictory statement, or present an "inside baseball" glimpse into an issue of import to your audience (note: Be wary of beginning with a joke unless you have developed flawless comedic timing; you will struggle mightily to recover if your humor falls flat).

Engage people during your presentation. The occasional question, show of hands, and interactive exercise serve to keep the audience on your side. Remember, this is about giving to those who took time from their day to learn from you. They, not you, are the center of the universe.

Also, aim for a sharp nonverbal performance, meaning your Video Tools—the way you look—and your Audio Tools—the way you sound.

3. Assessing feedback. Leaders who seek and assess feedback set themselves apart from run-of-the-mill presenters. You should review every performance, as this is how you learn.

Accomplished speakers realize the need to measure performance, then act upon it. Posing targeted questions to audience members immediately after the talk, combined with active

listening and note-taking, provides valuable data. Contact the sponsoring organization and ask how you did.

There are other methods of tracking feedback, too. A trusted colleague can provide an unvarnished review. Videotape or audiotape review of your presentation often delivers learning.

The best assessment arrives when the organization invites the speaker back to address next year's conference, or they pass a name along to colleagues.

Don't try to fix all perceived weaknesses. Work on *one or two items* at a time.

The *Three Keys to Great Presentations*—*Preparation, Performance, and Assessing feedback*—will help you advance. **SSE**

Ed Barks is author of The Truth About Public Speaking and president of Barks Communications. Call 540-955-0600, email ebarks@barkscomm.com, or visit www.barkscomm.com.

ACTION: Internalize and utilize the Three Keys.

MANAGEMENT/PROFIT

Faster Profits

Stop retrenching in 2010.



by Don Schmincke

YOU CUT COSTS UNTIL YOUR knuckles bled. Now what? Is there another, perhaps faster, way to grow profits?

Profits grow faster in tough times when you use approaches contrary to slash-and-burn methods. Add four techniques to your arsenal:

1. Stop retrenching—strike instead. Economic downturns show winners don't retrench out of fear, but strike early. They accelerate their business by taking advantage of the fact that competitors are weaker than ever. Set a strategy by meeting with your staff, laying out a strategic plan, and challenging assumptions. Does the plan show how you'll outmaneuver the competition? Does it show what position you seek? How you will exploit competitor weaknesses?

2. Hire the brave, not the desperate. Cowardice stops leaders from challenging the status quo, holding others accountable, exposing weaknesses, and taking decisive action because it stops the *essential act* necessary to accelerate profits—telling the truth. This drives accountability to new levels; the alternative produces collateral damage:

- Accumulating dead-weight of marginally performing employees.
- Avoiding the real issues, thwarting



meaningful change and profitability.

- Sticking with doomed projects.

Enhance competitive advantage by inspiring bravery.

3. Group think is good. Train your employees to think alike—to think like a CEO. Do they know how every decision affects the balance sheet? Place them in simulations where they have to run a company. With a balance sheet and a P&L statement in front of them, people realize how every decision requires movements of cash. They go back to their jobs with fresh insights on how their actions affect cash flow. They

find money. They detect waste and inefficiencies. Opportunities for improvement surface.

4. Say "no" to customers. Southwest Airlines co-founder Herb Kelleher once received a scathing letter from a passenger criticizing the jokes made during the safety instructions.

Fun is a key value at Southwest, but this passenger was not amused.

Kelleher wrote back: "We'll miss you." Trying to do too much for too many stretches resources, distracts strategic focus, and decimates morale. Instead:

- Assess the Return-on-Energy (ROE) for customer segments (profit they add for the cost of *selling and servicing* them).
- Identify clients whose ROE is minimum or negative.
- Write "We'll miss you" letters.

Accelerate your business. Retrenching only gives your competition a chance to outrun you. Take the lead. **SSE**

Don Schmincke is author of The Code of the Executive and High Altitude Leadership with co-author Chris Warner. Visit www.HighAltitudeLeadership.com.

ACTION: Accelerate your business again.

Turn Visitors Into Customers

Make sure your Web site earns its keep.



by Peter de Pradines

THE WORLD HAS CHANGED. Today 70 percent of all companies and services are originally found by way of the Internet. Tomorrow is will be closer to 95 percent. Will yours be found?

And when yours is found, your web site had better be good. As mother said, you only get one chance to make a first impression—and that's the one that sticks. What she didn't say was that when it comes to web sites, not only must it create a good impression, it must be effective.

But there's a problem. To interact online, you need a way of establishing contact with your visitor. Most importantly, finding out who they are, what they need, and when they need it.

Common Misconception

Let's get one very common misconception out of the way. However good it is, don't expect your web site to sell your organization, your product, or your service immediately; it won't.

Using the Web is called browsing for a reason. Visitors are browsing, not shopping. But be it on the Net or in the local shopping mall, people see things that catch their eye while browsing [aka window shopping]. They do come in and look around. They may not need what you have at the moment. They may not even be able to afford it right now. But they are interested or they would not have browsed around. Your web site's critical task is to ensure that when they can afford it or when they do need it, they know exactly where to find your web site—easily and quickly. How do we achieve that?

A long time ago bookmarking came along to help visitors who needed to remember interesting sites. Although now modernized as online bookmarking sites, apart from a few more bells and whistles, things are much the same. Not a lot has changed. But let's pause and ask ourselves a question.

Of all the sites *you* bookmark, how many do *you* remember to go back to? Not too many, no doubt. And apart from a few bookmarks that you *do* use regularly, the rest have probably gotten a little untidy. Meaning you're not

liable to do anything with them except one day throw them out and start again. You can't remember what most of them were about anyway, can you?

If you are relying on other folks to bookmark your site (a minor miracle in itself) and then come back and visit you later, then Alice may well have found yet another companion in Wonderland. Good luck to you and give our regards to the Red Queen.

If that doesn't work, what does?

Have a Pro-active Site

We used the term *pro-active*. To us web sites that just sit there and wait for visitor requests or signs of interest are re-active (aka: wimps). They do nothing until poked by the visitor. Pro-active web sites poke the visitor—in



the nicest possible way, of course! It is vital your web site finds a way to engage your visitors again in the future. The simplest way to do this is by getting their email address. Then you can contact them. How you do get in touch later, to good effect and without being a nuisance, is a major science all in itself. But if you cannot do it because you do not have their address, all the science and subtlety in the world is worthless. First you must open the contact channel. How?

You must always give in order to receive. The better quality you give, the more you receive. It is a law of nature established long before the Internet or probably even the dinosaurs. Provide a *quality* 'something' to you visitors in exchange for the ability to contact them. Then treat this exchange with the care and respect it deserves and, sooner or later, that visitor will become your client. It may take days, maybe months, but sooner or later, when they have a real

need of what you provide, they will come to you and ask for it—guaranteed. You won't have to sell it. They will want to buy it.

Complete the transaction with politeness and efficiency and they will come back again when they need something else you provide. Not only that, they'll tell others about you and your web site. When was the last time you bought something or joined a club and couldn't wait to tell your friends or show your folks what a great buy you just made?

We're all alike in this respect. We love to show off a good deal or a great move. These happy, satisfied customers are your most powerful advertising. They came to you and they cost you nothing—except a squeeze of effort, a pinch of thought, and a twist good manners; an easy recipe.

Help Customers Help Themselves

Thousands of people may visit your site every day. This is totally futile unless you help them to help themselves. Help them remember you by offering emailed articles, newsletters, RSS feeds, blogs, or whatever does it for you. There are many avenues you can choose from. Whichever you choose, don't just have your web site sit there in the corner looking pretty—and doing nothing. Make it work for its living.

You invested time, effort, and money in putting it there. Make it earn its keep—it owes you that. Ensure it greets the visitor (simple uncluttered home page—saying what you do), makes them feel comfortable by helping them find their way around (good navigation), has plenty of attractive and useful stock (content), but above all else, ensure you make all efforts to get your visitor's calling card (email address) before they leave your store (web site).

Without it, your web site wimped out. It failed.

Get Some Guidance

Need some guidance in putting this into practice? Need a little help with the exact ways to do it on site? We'll review your web and assess its pro-active score. We will make suggestions how it can be improved and show you how to do it. This is an entirely free service—there are no strings attached, no advertising and nothing to pay. If you haven't got your web published yet, we can help build in proactivity right from the start. Contact us at proactive@tcwwd.com. **SSE**

Peter de Pradines is an IT professional, consultant, speaker and author. Visit www.tcwwd.com.

ACTION: Turn your site visitors into customers.

Rebuilding

Let go of the past and risk.



by Tim Ursiny

MANY PEOPLE HAVE HAD finances devastated, real estate values drop, job challenges and other difficulties in the recession. Many signs now point to the end of the recession, and owners and managers must turn attention to rebuilding lives and finances. While rebuilding may be difficult, it is doable if you follow two main steps.

1. Let go of the past. *Main challenge = Accepting the losses.* Many people struggle to rebuild because they refuse to accept the losses. While this is understandable, it keeps you stuck. People who do not grieve do not move on in life. And while some people grieve with tears and others with anger, all of us need to vent our hurts and losses.

Two tendencies keep people stuck:

- *Staring at the rear view mirror.* Glancing in the rear view mirror in your car can help you navigate the road; however, if you were to only stare in the rear view mirror, you'd crash your car. It is good to glance at the past and to learn from it. However, when an individual gets locked in the past they may crash their current and future life.

- *Blame.* Blame has a short-term purpose of protecting one's self-esteem. When you can blame someone else for your difficulties it temporarily makes you feel good about *yourself*. Blame also gives the illusion of control. Sadly, blame rarely serves and distracts from learning all you can learn about yourself when going through tough times.

Breaking Free

One way to mourn the past is to write a venting letter. Direct it to anyone and let all of your emotions out. Make sure that it expresses how you feel at the most primal level. Write until you have nothing else left! Read the letter aloud with passion. Then burn it or tear it up as a symbolic act of letting it go! If done from the heart, this is an effective way to release the past.

2. Develop a captivating plan. *Main challenge = Overcoming hesitancy.* Letting go of the past is not enough; you must also create the future. When it is time to begin again, many people hesitate due to two fears that keep them stuck:

- *Fear of failure.* It is normal to be concerned about failing as you try to

rebuild. But fear of failure is one of the most self-limiting tendencies and must be overcome in order to create a successful and prosperous new life.

- *Fear of success.* Many people fear success because of their perceptions of what comes with success including greater responsibility, less life balance, higher expectations, and even the fear that once they get it they may lose it.

Breaking Free

There are two ways to deal with fear: to dip or to dive. When you enter a cold swimming pool, you have two choices: 1) You can dive into the water—you'll experience a rush of pain, but quickly get used to the water; or 2) you can slowly ease into the water. Neither approach is right or wrong. If you are

MARKETING/CAMPAIGN

Marketing Strategy

Get back to simple basics.



by Linda A. Fanaras

WHEN IT COMES TO MAKING critical decisions about marketing plans and budgets, it's easy to get overwhelmed. There are countless marketing opportunities vying for your attention and capital; you must tune out the fragmented noise and focus on marketing tactics that will reach your target market.

Who Are Your Customers?

Ineffective and scattered marketing efforts often stem from the belief that *everyone is a potential customer*. This is rarely—if ever—true. Every business has a core customer base that shares common demographic and psychographic traits.

Demographic data identifies customers by characteristics like age, salary, and education. For instance, if you own an upscale restaurant, *demographic research* can show that most of your patrons are between 40 and 65 years old, equally male and female, earn \$250,000 a year, and hold a college degree. You can get *psychographic survey data*, revealing customer interests and values, through customer observation, interaction, and surveys. This data could show you that most patrons attend the theatre regularly, participate in social clubs, and volunteer in charitable organizations.

The combination of these two types of market research provides you with a



direction for marketing plans and strategies. Based on your collected data, you'd know that advertising in a local newspaper to a mass audience would be a waste of marketing dollars; sponsoring a theatre production or advertising in a university alumni magazine would be more effective. By focusing on customer data, you can design a *strategic integrated marketing plan* that zeroes in on your target market.

It's All About the Message
Successful marketing strategies begin with *targeted* and *consistent* messaging. Once you identify your target market, you should develop a *unique selling proposition* that resonates with it. Put yourself in the mindset of your potential customers. Based on their demographics and interests, what would appeal to them? Create a *unique selling proposition* about the *customer experience*. Your messages should focus on the *benefits*, not features, of a product or service. Don't just list the features of your product or service (*what it has*)—tell how it benefits consumers (*what it does*). Communicating benefits in a personal way *attracts attention, creates a personal connection, and provides an effective call to action*. Keep up on messaging used by competitors; this will help you achieve a unique and powerful marketing message. With constant media messaging hitting consumers, it takes *repetition, relevance, and distinctiveness* to convert message recipients into customers. **SSE**

Tim Ursiny is founder of Advantage Coaching & Training and author of *The Confidence Plan*, *Coaching the Sale*, and *The Top Performer's Guide to Attitude*. Visit www.advantagecoaching.com.

ACTION: Start rebuilding your business.

Linda A. Fanaras, author of *Getting Back to Basics*, is president of Millennium Integrated Marketing. Call 877-873-7445 or email lfanaras@mill-im.com.

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Linda A. Fanaras, author of *Getting Back to Basics*, is president of Millennium Integrated Marketing. Call 877-873-7445 or email lfanaras@mill-im.com.

ACTION: Create an effective marketing strategy.

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