


SALES AND SERVICE Excellence

THE MAGAZINE OF TEAM LEADERSHIP

JUNE 2013

A close-up portrait of Michael J. Burt, a middle-aged man with a receding hairline, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and blue patterned tie. He is smiling slightly and looking directly at the camera.

Michael J. Burt
Consultant

**See the
Last Touch**

Amazement

**Jungle
Survival Guide**

Tame the Gorilla

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SERVICE/EXPERIENCE

Customer Experience

Create an amazing service culture.



by John Tschohl

EVERY DAY WHEN YOU STEP into your office, you should ask yourself these questions: What are we doing to build an incredible customer experience at our organization? How easy is it for customers to do business with us? Do we have stupid rules and policies? Are our employees empowered to make decisions in favor of our customers?

Many organizations are always trying to charge the customer more, to take advantage of the customer—not *Amazon.com*. For example, once I called Amazon about a gift package of food items I purchased from them. The person it was sent to did not want it; so I contacted Amazon to return the \$40 item. They told me they do not accept return of grocery items, but that they would give me credit for the item. “Just keep it or donate it,” they said. Wow. I was impressed. I buy a lot from Amazon, and I love them. The employee never said, “Let me check with my supervisor” or “I’ll get back to you”.

This incident reinforces how awesome they are. In the last two years, they’ve grown 41 percent! Amazon is one of the most feared competitors of

Best Buy, Walmart, and Target. Customers love great prices, service, speed, and an *awesome customer experience*. Amazon is the best of the best—and hence, their customers are returning and recommending them by the millions.

Creating a Service Culture

Take these *seven steps* to ensure your service culture success:



1. Understand the service strategy. Money falls from the sky to firms that have mastered the service strategy. Read books about service leaders and customer service. Steal ideas from the service leaders.

2. Eliminate dumb rules and policies. Focus on creating a great customer experience. For example, when I landed in Kiev Ukraine on April 11 it took only a few minutes to clear customs and

immigration. They no longer require you to fill out a customs form. They use technology and speed. In Mexico they have three forms. You always have to tell your sex because they are evidently unable to tell the difference. All the critical information is on the passport. Governments tend to have unlimited money to waste hiring employees to collect this information. They then hire managers to make sure the information is collected. What do all these countries do with these forms? Russia, Germany, South Africa, Dubai and Denmark now just use a passport. What stupid rules and policies do you have that have NO value, cost money and upset the customer?

3. Hire only employees who love customers. Service driven firms like Metro Bank London, hire 1 out 100 applicants. If you hire the cream, it is easier to develop them. Many firms have *dead employees*. They destroy your brand. Learn to become 100 times more careful on selection. At Metro Bank if you don’t smile in the first interview there is no second interview.

4. Empower your employees to make decisions on the spot in favor of customers. You should have only one objective every day . . . to have overhappy customers. If this happens your

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competition is screwed. Too many unexpected things happen during the day. You want employees to make very fast empowered decisions in favor of the customer.

5. Master speed. Customers today want everything *now*. How can you provide your products and services faster than the competition? It saves you money and allows you to separate yourself from the competition. The problems you need to overcome are employee mindset and policies and rules. Clearing customs and immigration in Kiev took two minutes. Saves them time, fewer employees are needed, and customers are happier. Less managers are needed. With Southwest Airlines, it takes 20 minutes to unboard and board passengers. Then their planes are back in the sky. It saves them billions in aircraft. American Airlines, which is still in bankruptcy, keeps their planes on the ground.

6. Train all employees on the skills and art of customer service—and add something new and fresh every 4 months.

One-shot programs have one-shot flavor of the year results. Focus on creating a service culture. NO magic program will turn your employees into perfect high-performers. Our programs change attitudes and behaviors, teach the art of customer service and build employee morale and teamwork.

7. Measure everything. Your goal should be to crush the competition like Apple, Metro Bank London and Southwest Airlines do. Measure sales, profit, market share. We have 11 areas you can impact.

Create Customer-Driven Employees

In 1979 I saw firms spending a fortune on advertising trying to bring in new customers, but when they walked in the door employees hit them on the head with baseball bats (figuratively) driving them away. My concept was that if you loved the customer, and treated them like a king or queen business would soar.

The world's first customer service program, our flagship *Feelings* program (released in 1980) was designed to be implemented in hundreds of locations simultaneously, and be facilitated by customer-driven employees. Customer service training creates *customer service cultures* in organizations.

Sadly, the level of customer service today seems as bad as it was in 1980. Everyone talks about poor customer service. Most CEOs believe their customer service is awesome, but what customers really think about customer service is very different.

Six Skills Frontline Employees Need

All employees need to master six skills to improve the customer experience.

1. Feel good about yourself. Help employees to focus on personal excellence and believe in themselves. If employees feel good about themselves they communicate it on the job. Most employees have personal problems that make their day very difficult. Employees that feel good and feel good about themselves love going to work and are far more productive. Not enough executives understand why this is so important.

2. Practice habits of courtesy. It only takes a few seconds for a customer to feel appreciated. It takes seconds for an employee to communicate they care. It doesn't matter if this is on the phone, email or in person.

3. Communicate in positive ways, both verbal and nonverbal. Do you smile? This is so simple, but often so rare. I recently spent two weeks in Russia and the Ukraine. In Russia, it seems like there is a law against smiling. It appears that the world has just come to an end. Do you call the customer by



name? A customer can read your body language and tell how you feel. It takes only 1 to 3 seconds to smile and say something specific to the customer. You could go to any university and learn none of these skills. The best retailer in the U.S. to observe great service is *Apple*. They are consistently awesome and they reap the benefits. Apple has the highest sales per square foot of \$7000. Now, that's awesome!

4. Perform. Do what you said you are going to do. You can be the nicest employee in the world but if you do not deliver on what you promise customer service sucks. Speed is part of this. If you promise to call someone at 9 a.m., call. If you promise to ship on Tuesday, ship on Tuesday.

5. Listen. How often when you call a firm and give them your name do they ask you 30 seconds later for your name? The reason is very few employees really listen and tune in to the answer. Listen to what the customer is telling you not for what you want to hear. Re-phrase what you thought you heard to make sure you *really listened* to the customer.

6. Learn about your products and services. Customer-driven employees learn everything they can about the products and services. I can tell *in seconds* if employees know what they are talking about. Instead of watching TV or going out with friends, spend time developing you and becoming more valuable. Learn everything there is about your organization. Be ready to *fill in* for any position. This is how you *move up*.

Applying these six skills is the difference between winning and losing. **SSE**

John Tschohl is CEO of the Service Quality Institute.
Email ServiceQualityInstitute@genoomail.com.

ACTION: Gain and apply these six skills.

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Leadership Excellence
1806 N. 1120 W.
Provo, UT 84604
1-877-250-1983
1-801-375-4060

Sales & Service Excellence:

Debbie McGrath, CEO, HR.COM, Publisher
Ken Shelton, Editor-in-Chief
David Whitmarsh, VP Sales
Brandon Wellsbury, Corporate Sales
Adnan Saleem, Design and Layout
Chris Watts, Circulation Manager

Contributing Editors:

Debbie Allen, Curtis Bingham, Tom Hopkins, Dave Kahle, Richard Ilsley.

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Customer Engagement

Avoid these six deadly sins.



by Sharon Daniels

IN OUR RECENT STUDY, WE SURVEYED 5,500 consumers and conducted in-depth interviews with outstanding customer service employees in seven countries. Among the major findings are these:

- Customers are sharing their rants and raves about their service experiences around the clock and around the globe. Almost 40 percent report they post complaints about a company or brand after a bad service experience.
- Negative experiences have a bottom-line impact. Half of those surveyed said they would defect to a competitor after only one bad service experience.
- Consumers give low ratings to customer service. Only 25 percent of respondents said that service employees “make me feel they are on my side.”
- Service employees’ interpersonal skills make or break the customer experience. One third of respondents believe it’s more important to be *listened to and shown respect* than to resolve their issue.
- Most people *want real interaction*. They prefer communicating with service employees by telephone (43 percent) or personally (37 percent), compared with email (18 percent) or text (2 percent).

CEO Kevin Peters of Office Depot invites customers to a prototype store near company headquarters so they can *help design a superior customer experience*. Their input affects factors like the shelves on which products appear and where employees stand as they stock shelves.

Here are *six sins* of customer experience:

1. Not minding your metrics. Leaders are failing to take full advantage of new tools that make it easy to monitor customers’ experiences, including various CRM systems, voice-of-the-customer software, customer-interface technology and predictive analytics. Data on customer retention and the results of cross-selling by service reps can be valuable.

Review customers’ opinions and actions through quantifiable metrics. Regularly survey them on key points—

whether they recommend your company, what influences their buying behavior, what ideas they have for improvement.

EMC, the IT storage cloud computing company, identifies aspects of the *customer experience* that impact loyalty, which ones require immediate changes, which to improve over time, and which to promote as its strengths.

2. Underestimating the power of emotion. Even when the service provider can’t *immediately* fix the problem, customers can be satisfied if the *employee connects with them on a human level*, walking in the customers’ shoes and listening actively so they can communicate sincere understanding, using a voice tone/body language that shows *empathy* with the customers’ emotions—even when the customer caused the problem. Angry customers may expect *urgent concern*, while confused ones may be satisfied with *kindness*. When appropriate, an *apology* can work wonders.

3. Fumbling defining moments. The first one occurs when the customer is greeted, and it sets the tone for the interaction. A drive-through customer at a fast food outlet wants *speedy service*, as does the chain. KFC drive-through employees are required to greet the customer *no more than five seconds after the customer reaches the intercom*. Another defining moment is when



the customer has a complaint. The Ritz-Carlton hotel chain, which prides itself on providing an *excellent customer experience*, allows all staff members to spend as much as \$2,000 to resolve a guest problem *without seeking approval*. A customer who returns a product faces another defining moment. Customers often complain about return policies. Zappos, which has a *100 percent satisfaction guaranteed* return policy, encourages customers to order several sizes of a clothing line and return what’s not wanted. Another defining moment is when an employee answers a customer’s questions. The employee has to answer directly, without evasiveness or circumlocutions.

Another is when *asking* questions. The employee has to clarify the customer’s concern without putting the customer on the defensive. Customers shouldn’t be put on hold for a prolonged period.

3. Employees on autopilot. Service people must stay engaged by asking a blend of *open questions*, which keep customers explaining, and *closed questions*, which help confirm facts and isolate the customer’s needs. Employees should explain what happened in terms the customer understands. They should be clear about what they know and don’t know about the situation. They must *avoid blaming anyone* for the problem—the organization, another employee, or the customer. They should provide the service each customer needs. Geek Squad sees that customers have different levels of knowledge about technology products and serves them accordingly.

4. Focusing on features. Some well-meaning service providers, hoping to give their customers insights about the product, talk too much about its features rather than the customers’ problems. This is no time to try to *up-sell* or *cross-sell*. Customers get annoyed when an employee talks about things other than their problem. Customers dislike *complex processes* and want to be spared details of internal activities and issues.

5. Getting negative. What employees say and how they say it leaves a lasting impression on customers. Interactions must be positive. The words *can’t* or *won’t* send the conversation spiraling downward. Give service employees lists of *words to use* and *words to avoid* with customers. Verint Systems, a consulting firm, identifies words and phrases that antagonize customers: *you people, let me speak, and you promised*.

6. Escalating anger. Angry customers may express their feelings by verbally assaulting service providers. Employees must avoid responding with anger. Help them see that customers aren’t attacking them personally. Teach them how to ease tension and clear a path to address the customer’s problems.

Customer loyalty is built one interaction at a time. Customer-facing associates are *the critical link* between the customer and your brand. *Indifferent* or *unhappy* buyers/customers can be converted into *brand promoters* by taking a holistic view of *the customer experience* and determining how employee skills and behaviors fit into it. **SSE**

Sharon Daniels is CEO of AchieveGlobal, providing performance-improvement consulting and learning solutions in leadership, sales, and customer service. Email sharon.daniels@achieveglobe.com.

ACTION: Avoid these six mistakes.

Loyalty Divide

Now you can bridge the gap.



by Mark Johnson

MARKETERS OFTEN HEAR the refrain: Connect customer data to CRM initiatives, media plans, and individual customer experiences to drive brand engagement and loyalty programs. But most marketers fail at this, leading to diminished loyalty, profitability, and brand value. Savvy marketers blend data from multiple sources to provide customer engagement that is authentic, relevant, and consistent to the brand, nurturing familiarity, safety, and trust.

A staggering 94 percent of marketers don't consistently apply useful and relevant insights—like an individual's lifetime value, social influence, or attitude—to create meaningful customer engagements. Without these relevant insights, customer engagements lack substance to create behavioral change.

No one piece of data describes consumers or predicts what they're likely to do all the time—it takes connected data, online and offline, attitudes and behavior, branding and performance marketing to enable better decision-making and assess the impact.

The best multivariate models, grounded in richly connected data, perform 55 times better than untargeted advertising. Connected data makes marketing perform better, and connected experiences make it perform better for a lifetime by helping customers engage with products they love on their terms, customized and consistent, no matter how they choose to engage. Your most loyal advocates expect you to put the custom in customer dynamically, seamlessly, and regularly.

Marketers are making progress by adopting new marketing technologies and trying to use customer data to improve results and make each customer interaction important, but marketers' efforts are stymied because brands don't devote the resources, technology or necessary budget. Often, vital data is inaccessible and isolated within systems that are difficult to integrate with marketing systems. This disconnect creates the divide between loyalty as part of a holistic, customer-centric enterprise strategy, and loyalty as an afterthought. Loyalty should be focused on behavior between customer and

brand. The inability to connect and personalize customer experiences—across channels and partners, and over time, is divisive, not nurturing.

Many marketers fail to make these connections for these reasons: lack of easy access to data; an unfulfilled desire to access all customer data in a single location; and being limited to only using customer data available at hand. More than half of marketers collect social data, but don't optimize this information when selecting audiences and measuring results.

Brands face the challenge of effectively tying back social data in context to the transactional data from retail loyalty programs and other third-party data. So what should marketers focus on to connect invaluable customer data with CRM initiatives and individual customer experiences?

Use all available insights such as customer lifetime value, to identify lifetime customers and prospects who think, look, and act like them. Be aggressive but considerate when gathering information. Customers provide more details when offers become more relevant to them. Collect data from outside the brand and use the combined information to optimize media and campaign decisions.

Use data and insights to determine which customers should receive short-term rewards while seeking to build long-term trust. Understanding explicit and implicit customer expectations—and exceeding them—sets brands apart and increases their utility in interactions. SSE

Mark Johnson is CEO of Loyalty 360, The Loyalty Marketer's Association and coauthor with Acxiom of The Loyalty Divide, a research paper. Visit loyalty360.org.

ACTION: Bridge the brand loyalty gap.

SERVICE/ADVOCATES

Delighted Advocates

Go beyond satisfying customers.



by C. Richard Weylman

THE NUMBER OF SATISFIED customers and their degree of satisfaction is the low bar by which most service platforms are measured. A satisfied customer base falls short for those who want a sustainable business. When customers purchase your product, they expect that if it doesn't meet their expectation, the purchase will be made right. To simply deliver good service isn't enough. Yes, it may provide satisfied customers, but such customers are nearly always loyalty neutral. Daily satisfied customers are moving their assets, buying their insurance, changing their service to someone new! Most people buying today were doing business somewhere else!

The aim is not to have satisfied customers but to create delighted advocates. Satisfied customers like the transaction, products or interaction, but nothing stands out in their mind. They tell people when asked, "Yes they do a good job," but they don't proactively tell others about their experience. Given a chance to take their business elsewhere, they likely will. They may be satisfied, but not delighted.

Delighted advocates deliver rave reviews. They talk about the elevated experiences and personalized proactive service they receive. They advance your business through positive word of mouth.



They talk about their experience and interactions at every opportunity.

Most organizations talk about P (products, platform, plan) and S (service). To create delighted advocates you need to deliver E: an elevated experience in all service and personal interactions. When you do, customers believe that they can count on you. This consistency ultimately creates trust and credibility. In *Raving Fans*, Ken Blanchard and Sheldon Bowles talk about improving the moments of truth when customers are in direct contact with a business. When companies exceed expectations at all customer contacts, T occurs: transformation of the customer relationship and delighted advocacy. The result: marketplace distinction. Customers are less concerned about price; they see, perceive and receive great value from the business, and tell others.

Elevating customers' and prospects' experience means answering the phone promptly with, "How may I help you?" in a positive, expectant tone. It is asking, "May I place you on hold?" Customers want to feel included. Invite your best customers to events that appeal to their interests. Small gestures elevate the client experience and create advocacy. Ensure every interaction is personalized, humanized, and elevated. Assess current service platforms and focus on specifics that can be elevated and integrated to create and keep delighted advocates. SSE

C. Richard Weylman is Chairman/Managing Director of The Weylman Consulting Group, author of *The Power of Why*. Visit www.WeylmanCenter.com, Richard@richardweylman.com or 800-535-4332.

ACTION: Create delighted advocates.

See the Last Touch

The last impression counts as much as the first.



by Chip R. Bell

YOUR MAMA ALWAYS TOLD you: “A first impression is a lasting impression . . .” and, “You don’t get a second chance to make a good first impression.” For customers, that is especially true. Also true is this: “A last impression is a first memory . . . and, you may not get a second chance to make a good first memory.” Yet, too few service providers think much about their last touch with customers.

Call center operators use a closed question—“Is there anything else I can help you with”—to signal to customers that the operator’s call handle time is far more important than the customer’s first contact resolution. Even service providers who decorate their in-store or online experience with lots of joyful TLC and attention to details, then make online check-out, paper invoicing, or the cash register encounter seem like it was concocted and managed by an IRS agent eager to do an audit.

How many utilities make customer bills—sometimes *their only touch point with their customers*—a boring, bureaucratic, and mind numbing experience? Is it any wonder that fewer than half of utility customers indicate they read their bill inserts? Most assume the reading on the “bland meter” for the insert likely matches the reading they put on their bill. How many companies play games with customers by making the “past due” amount a much larger font than the “pay now” amount potentially seducing “paying on time” customers into paying more than they should? How many service providers put Happy on the sales floors and Grumpy at the check-out register? High end customers even get to deal with Sleepy in valet parking . . . another last touch!

The last encounter with customers is sometimes their attempt to return merchandise. The manner you handle their return item could determine if they ever return! Sometimes, the last encounter is a departing customer seeking to close their account or sever their relationship. This is the point

when customers are most ready to trash you on social media. And today, most customers review online comments before deciding to do business with you. Think about that! You lose before you even begin. Take special care of all disappointed or departing customers. They hold your brand reputation in their hands!

Extending the Last Encounter

Customer experience more likely remains embedded in memory if the experience is extended beyond the farewell. Johnny Adair is my world-class hairstylist. The first time he cut my hair, he commented that he was not only interested in how it looked when I exited the barber chair, he was also eager to ensure it looked great when I attempted to replicate his artistry in my bathroom the following day. So, I got a short take-away lesson—much like a circus souvenir. Giving me a hand mirror and turning the barber chair so the large wall mirror was behind me, he said, “I want you to watch how I style your hair as I blow dry it so you’ll know how to keep it looking *exactly like it does when you leave here today.*”

Nordstrom is famous for stretching out the service experience beyond the main event. “We try to guess what is beyond the customer’s purchase,” says John McClesky of the men’s suits department at their Dallas store. “If a customer buy’s a sports jacket, the obvious extension might be a tie. But if you learn the customer is buying the jacket for a cruise, you might explore dressy shorts or an ascot.” John continues: “But, slipping a complimentary set of collar stays in the newly purchased jacket pocket (a frequently forgotten item on a trip) can leave a customer awed.”

Giving Customers a Life Line

“Committed to helping men dress better than they have to.” These words are the tag line of a radio ad for Pocket’s Men’s Wear in Dallas. Pocket’s was founded over 30 years ago by David Smith, a 26-year-old

veteran of a men’s wear chain. The ambiance of the store completely matches a store on a mission. The merchandise is GQ cover material. The setting is sophisticated but warmly comfortable. But, the feature that brings customers through the door is their emergency service after the sale.

Salesperson Sharon Kuhl, proudly relates the service heroics that have become their trademark—like the guy who spilled salad dressing on his shirt at lunch right before the BIG meeting. “We had a replacement to him in minutes,” she says. Smith adds other examples, like the out-of-town, non-customer whose pants cuff had come unraveled. “We had the tailor repair it, press it, and the customer out the door—no charge. That customer now *flies to Dallas to buy clothes* at Pocket’s. We’ve done our job when our customers dress better than they have to . . . because they have caught our passion and love for great fashion.”



First/Last Impressions

The first impression is important with customers since it sets the tone and style of the customer relationship. A rocky start can make fostering a trusting partnership take much longer. We all remember a host with the most who demonstrated great “welcoming” powers—genuinely making you feel important as you crossed their threshold en route for the snacks. But, equally vital to your customer’s positive memory is the farewell—how you close the relationship and how you extend it beyond the customer’s exit. Smart service providers know that customers remember how you treated them long after they have forgotten what you did for them.

Let your next empathy walk with customers focus on the customer’s last encounter, not their first. Look at all the moments of truth toward the end of the service cycle that could turn a great service experience into an indifferent or disappointed memory. Get customers involved in teaching you about their “last touch” expectations—and, then find ways to exceed them. Keep your focus on ramping up the “sweet” on the “sweet sorrow” of your customers’ partings. **SSE**

Chip R. Bell is a customer loyalty consultant and the author of several best-selling books including (with the late Ron Zemke) Managing Knock Your Socks Off Service. He can be reached at www.chipbell.com.

ACTION: Make a memorable last impression.

Relationship Selling

Salespeople need to learn the art.



by Richard Secord

IN THIS ERA OF TECHNOLOGY, the next generation of sales professionals, Gen Z (born 1995-2010), will learn the basics of selling but will struggle with building relationships with potential clients as a result of spending minimal time creating relationships with their peers and prospects in early development.

Many Baby Boomers and Gen Xers (born 1945 to 1965) and Y (born 1966 to 1994) learned to *place client relationships first* to gain client loyalty and referrals.

Since computers, laptops, Ipads and smart phones tend to limit personal interactions, new salespeople tend to struggle in creating long-lasting client relationships—unless they are mentored or trained to develop this skill.

If selling today depends on being more focused on quick deals within minimal client interaction, then Gen Z will prosper. Recently, some top sales pros are focusing more on quick presentations, handling objections, and closing the deal. While this may be profitable short term, it doesn't provide continued repeat business, client referrals, and up-sell based upon trust—the aim of relationship selling.

To build your relationships and your client base, immerse yourself in your local area. Be involved in local civic groups, attend meetings, join committees, become a leader, and *network at events* to build a client base. Ask open-ended questions of clients regarding their personal interests and discover *mutual activities and involvement*.

If possible, visit their office; observe the photos, certificates and awards displayed on the walls or desk. Make a comment that relates to some personal item. This puts clients at ease; they'll appreciate your interest. Recognizing anniversaries, birthdays and births is a great way to stand out and capture the client's loyalty and purchasing power. Taking a client and his family to baseball, football or basketball games will always be a memorable experience. Follow up on this outing quarterly if this is one of your top accounts or one you are attempting to capture.

Never take your current client's loyalty for granted. New methods and new sales managers are always trying

to win the customer's business, especially if it's high volume or offers substantial commission fees. Stay current with your top accounts and maintain involvement to minimize your risk of losing the client to a competitor.

Strong relationships built on trust, straight-forward collaboration, and quick response are major factors in maintaining the client's business.

With regards to technology, I recommend two tools. *LinkedIn* is great for keeping track of several clients and learning about new potential clients. You have the option to join various groups, learn about skills that the client's possess, and review their career path. This enables you to call the client and start a dialogue based on information you found by pulling up there name in *LinkedIn.com*.

The app *CamCard* enables you to

take a photo of a business card and add the info to your phone contact list.

When networking at a reception to gain new clients or nurture current clients, I suggest: *always gravitate to the center of the room*. Those who linger along the walls are more introverted. Customers who interact more fluidly in the center are often decision makers. Spend more time meeting attendees and less time eating. Set a goal for meeting new clients. If clients attend, ask to be introduced to their acquaintances and *show positive interest in them*.

To succeed, learn your product/service; study your competitors; fine-tune your presentation to client needs, and *build relationships with potential clients*. **SSE**

Richard Secord is a Sales Consultant and Trainer. Email livesforsuccess@aol.com or call 561-951-0722.

ACTION: Learn the art of relationship selling.

SALES/PAUSE

Power of the Pause

Use silence to create opportunities.



by Mark Hopkins

WE NOW COMMUNICATE IN small bursts and at the speed of light. Because of the flood of information that inundates us, we jump from receiving to reacting, without even pausing between the two. But in that moment you can change relationships by taking the differentiating approach of responding thoughtfully, and showing that you genuinely care. Your personal satisfaction and influence will skyrocket.

Between the bings, dings, rings, beeps and tweets, your day is filled with information—from clients, customers, colleagues and beyond. But what if instead of reacting to every email, call, and request, you pause and think how to respond in a meaningful way that would benefit you and the recipient. It means better business for everyone!

To add value to your daily dealings and waste less time, take **four steps**:

1: Get your filters working. You need to clear the information decks to make time for what really matters. Go beyond a good *spam filter* to avoid opening well meaning e-mail whose subject could be translated into "Contains well-meaning but worthless information". Save such e-mail for *the rainy day* that never comes.

2: Be a world-class listener. When you hear or read information from a

person you care about, focus on it. Turn your self-focused lens around. Read an email completely, not just the first sentence and assume you know where it's going. When somebody is talking to you about a key subject, *don't multitask*.

3: Pause. Think about the source of the information. What is the issue at hand and how does it look to that person? What is her perspective? What does this person need? How does she prefer to communicate? You can usually come up with the answers to these questions quickly, in seconds. Integrate what you hear and what you know from experience. How do your insights enable you to add meaning to the subject or solve a problem?

4: Offer clear, thoughtful ideas and communication in response. Provide a response that gives the person what she needs and shows her that you've listened carefully and care enough to consider the issue from another angle. Your response will be more meaningful, increasing her perception of your intelligence and *ability to add value*.

You are better off taking the extra 10 to 15 seconds to frame your answer with the recipient in mind, with a goal of adding value. Your response will build trust by reinforcing that you care enough to supply a thoughtful answer.

The next time you are about to fire off a cryptic, less-than-helpful e-mail, take the approach that is more satisfying and raises *your perceived value*. **SSE**

*Mark Hopkins is the author of *Shortcut to Prosperity: 10 Entrepreneurial Habits and a Roadmap For An Exceptional Career*. www.shortcuttoprosperity.com.*

ACTION: Use the power of pause in selling.

Amazement

It's a service mandate.



by Shep Hyken

CUSTOMER SERVICE GIVES you the competitive edge—in any economy and in any market. It's that simple. If what you sell is the same as what your competitor sells, customer service can tip the scale in your favor. Some customers will be willing to drive farther, wait longer, and even spend more money to get a better level of customer service.

Companies that deliver a higher level of customer service are, in a word, *amazing*. Stay with me just a bit longer to understand what makes these companies amazing, and how you can and should be able to deliver that same level of customer service.

First, we must define customer amazement. *Amazement* isn't an over-the-top WOW level of service. Amazing service can be service that is just a little better than average . . . but what makes it amazing is when it is a little better than average *all of the time*. It's the consistency that makes the difference. It's the consistency that creates confidence. It's the consistency that drives customer loyalty.

And, a little bit better than average is within the grasp of everyone and every company. Sure, there will be some people and companies that have opportunities to WOW the customer with over-the-top service, but that is impossible to do every time. When you study the best companies, what you will find is that they are simply better than average, all of the time.

Typically, *over-the-top customer service* is a *once-in-a-while* incident. Something has to happen that enables employees to fix a problem, react to a situation, or take advantage of an unusual occurrence. However, the best companies don't wait for that incident to happen. They look at typical *touch points* that a customer has within their organization, and find ways to bump up the experience just a notch above average. Their goal is to *operationalize* that level of service it and *make it standard*.

The secret to amazement is to operationalize customer service. The first question to ask: How does a company begin on the journey to *Amazement*? The start is to *operationalize a customer*

service culture. Interestingly, this doesn't start by becoming a customer-centric organization. It actually begins by becoming an employee-centric organization. An *amazing customer service culture* begins by *amazing employees first*.

My role model for *Amazement* is Ace Hardware stores, as they epitomize the concept of operationalizing customer service. They have branded their version of amazing customer service. Their tag line is *The Helpful Place*, and they have truly operationalized the word *helpful* into their culture. That is their version of customer service. *Helpful* is what gives them a competitive edge. They want to be known as the most *helpful hardware stores on the planet*—and, they are. That's how they compete in their very competitive



industry, going up against much larger hardware and home improvement stores like Home Depot and Lowe's. They win their game because they deliver a level of service focused on more than *nice and friendly*, but also on *helpfulness*.

Ace Hardware embodies all of the customer service, loyalty, experience and branding principles I write about. Zappos.com, Nordstrom, Apple and others are the business "rock stars" of today—and much has been written about them. So, why Ace Hardware? Because it is a large and small company at the same time: A multi-billion dollar corporation and a network of individual stores—4,600 of them in 70 countries—with more than 3,000 owners. Because *Business Week* named Ace one of the Top 10 customer service brands in America. Because JD Power ranks Ace Hardware *highest in customer satisfaction* in its industry. Because Ace has been a rock solid company since 1924, with a customer service track record that is second to none. Because, if you want a company that has a sus-

tained track record of actually living a customer-focused culture, you can't do much better than Ace.

The secret to their success, and other companies that share similar success, is that they don't start by focusing on the customer—they focus first on their employees. Ace is very serious about this. It isn't just a theme that lasts for a month or a year. It's their culture that has been around since the first store was opened in 1924. It is the reason they exist. They hire the right people to fit into their culture. They train them both technically and on how to deliver their brand of *helpful* customer service. Management and employees treat each other with dignity and respect, and in turn, the employees treat their customers in a similar fashion.

The employees of any organization must be in alignment. They must know the reason the company exists. It's not just to make money. The only way to make money is to have customers. And truly successful companies have customers who come back, and just as important, recommend the company to their colleagues and friends. The only way this happens is when employees of the company realize that the function of the business is not to make money, but to serve the customer. When they do that, the money follows.

While there are many tactics and strategies I could share in an article like this, none of them will make a difference in the long term if you don't have a company culture that is focused on serving the customer, and this first starts by serving the *internal customer*, or employee. The employee experience must be at least as good as how the *outside customer* is to be treated. Employees must become role models for each other, which starts with managers and leaders treating employees like they want the customer to be treated, maybe even better.

Creating *Amazement* by delivering a high level of customer service is what wins in business. However, you can't do that without a foundation, which starts by building an employee-centric organization. The culture is the backbone of *Amazement*. You can't have a customer-focused organization without first focusing on your employees. In short: *Whatever is happening on the inside of an organization will be felt on the outside by the customer.* SSE

Shep Hyken is the Chief Amazement Officer at Shepard Presentations and bestselling author of *Amaze Every Customer Every Time*. www.AmazeEveryCustomer.com.

ACTION: Amaze your customers.

New Path to Purchase

Deliver both value and service.



by Leslie McNamara

THE FINANCIAL ATTITUDES and spending behaviors of customers have shifted the *why, what and when we buy*. And we are seeing a matching shift in the *how* of shopping, as technology is firmly embedded in the customer experience.

Once, there was a *straight decision line* to making a purchase: awareness, consideration, purchase, retention, and advocacy. Today, it's like a line on a seismograph, requiring retailers to adopt a *new approach* to the new brand and retail paradigm. There are traditional media, social media, promotions, brick-and-mortar stores, e-commerce, and more. This path involves more information-gathering—a *pre-shopping* experience that forms product choices and preferences early in the sales cycle and eliminates some impulsivity in the consumption chain. Such access to data fuels a confident, prepared consumer.

Social Media/Reciprocal Dialogue

In today's new path to purchase, the impact of *connected and tech-savvy consumers* participating in social media, brand management and advertising is rising dramatically. The old model of one-way, brand-controlled messaging around products and organizational attributes via mass media is falling in the social *recommendation economy*. Empowered consumers are taking control of the brand discussion and posting both critical and commendable feedback around products and services. And *their voices matter* (78% of consumers trust *recommendations from peers*; only 14% trust advertising).

While the loosening of control in shaping brand reputation may make companies uneasy, there's great value in *sourcing first-hand knowledge of the customer experience from customers*. This shows a responsiveness that is as genuine as it can be viral. A survey from Empathica finds consumers feel retailers were not listening to their feedback: 83 percent say they are more loyal to a brand when they believe action has been taken based on their feedback. Isolating yourself from consumer feedback distances you from the conversation around your brand which leads to escalated, irreparable brand damage.

Social feedback, big data and mobile technology shape this new branding paradigm and offer opportunities for immediate and relevant dialogue with customers. *Successful companies* will be defined by their ability to have personal and reciprocal relationships that improve customer experience.

Omni-Channel Management

The idea of delivering messages, products or services in discrete channels is being reshaped by customer behaviors, as they take control of the marketing experience. We see them *pre-shop* through online research, shift to a brick-and-mortar environment for first-hand product experience, then leverage smartphone technology to refer to trusted sources for product features, opinions, and reviews.

Most smartphone activity in-store

is viewing the retailers' own website for more information. Supporting consumers' desire to shop with content and confidence is vital to developing a relationship with the connected customer. So, transform your fear of *showrooming* into *showcasing* your ability to deliver both value and service.

Separating tools or channels in the customer-directed brand experience—or having disjointed merchandise availability and pricing—can become a big customer deterrent. *Informed customers* can drive your brand agenda, so listen to your connected consumers by becoming *part of the conversation*. You will impact purchasing decisions, create customer loyalty, and *become a leader*. **SSE**

Leslie J. McNamara is EVP, Partnership Management, for Retail Services, the Citi business unit, providing credit products, solutions and services to retailers.

ACTION: Deliver great value and great service.

MANAGEMENT/CHANGE

Transform Business

Stop struggling to just survive.



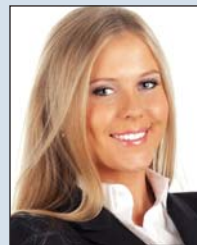
by Barbara Trautlein

LEADERSHIP IS THE KEY TO successful turnarounds. Major change efforts have a failure rate of 70 percent! But it's possible to lead *successful, sustainable change*.

Workforces are confused. Employees thirst for guidance but are *distrustful and disenfranchised—not engaged, empowered, or equipped to do what is needed* to help their companies transform to thrive.

Those who lead change must first change themselves. Here are *five effective ways* to change:

- **Change your story.** Reframe *resistance*. It's like the immune system in the body: it protects against harmful invaders. Like pain in the body, resistance is a sign of a malady. The goal is not to eradicate it, but to *surface it*, so you can explore and honor it. See resistance as an ally, not enemy.
- **Change your stance.** Picture a triangle. We often view ourselves on one angle, others at another angle, and *the problem* on the third angle. It feels like it's *us against them* as well as the problem. Instead, re-envision yourself and the other people *working together to solve the problem*. Move from being and feeling and acting *against* others, or doing something *to* others (or in spite of them), to working *with* and *for* them. By making this mindset shift, your *relationships* become *partnership-oriented* to them.



- **Change your seat.** What you see depends on where you sit. Change looks different at different levels. Those at the top are typically *isolated*. Those at the bottom are most *resistant*. Those in the middle are *squeezed*. Sit in others' seats and appreciate their pressures. Adapt your approach and messages to *the needs and concerns of different others*.

- **Change your style.** We all know the *Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would want them to do unto you*. In leading change, follow the *Platinum Rule: Do unto others as THEY want to be done unto*. Tell stories they can relate to. Share statistics relevant to them. Show what's in it for all of us to work together in new ways.

- **Change your strategy.** What looks like *resistance* is really that people don't get it, don't want it, or can't do it. Engage the brain by explaining the *why* and *what* of the change—

help the *head* understand the vision, mission, and goals. Clarify the target and end game. Inspire the *heart* to care about change goals by engaging with others, actively listening, dealing with fears and insecurities, and building trust. Help the *hands* apply the change—provide tactics, training and tools, and eliminate barriers in people's way.

These prescriptions are about *shifts in mindsets and behaviors—the flexibility to adapt our leadership approach to get us all where we need to go*. When we change, others change. So, *be the change you wish to see in the world—that's leadership*. **SSE**

Barbara Trautlein, Ph.D., is a change consultant and author of Change Intelligence. www.change Catalysts.com.

ACTION: Become an effective change leader.

Jungle Survival Guide

Overcome chaos, and tame the gorilla.



by Micheal J. Burt & Colby B. Jubenville

YOUR POISONOUS CULTURE MAY BE HOLDING you back and tying your hands. How can you put cooperation, growth, and innovation back in the spotlight?

Has a 10,000-pound gorilla taken over your company? Before you reply with a quick *no* and refocus on your to-do list, note that this giant beast is known by a second name—*culture*. And taming him is imperative because his destructive behaviors can keep your company's tribe from doing what it was brought together to do.

Here are three tell-tale signs that the gorilla inhabits your organization:

- Several positive change initiatives are in the works, but the old guard refuses to alter *the way we've always done things*. They aren't receptive to new hires and won't train them. Rather than working to move the company forward, they make excuses for why things should stay the same.
- Your employees pat themselves and each other on the back—often celebrating empty wins like getting a client's order right on the second try or passing an angry customer on to another department. Such *celebrations* only serve as a smokescreen to hide stagnation and lack of progress.
- Most employees seem *too* comfortable. They gravitate toward and *nest* in the familiar. At times, you wonder if innovation, creativity, and motivation are foreign concepts to them.

The gorilla's constant bellowing drowns out other messages, enabling poisonous cultures to dominate. Prepared and proactive leaders can provide clarity, unite the tribe, and—yes—tame that unruly gorilla so that cooperation, growth, and innovation are once again in the spotlight.

Leaders who combat culture gorillas are members of a new breed: Zebra and Cheetah (Z&C) Leaders. They exhibit *qualities of both breeds*. Like *zebras*, they boast a distinctive appearance that others easily recognize. Like *cheetahs*, they possess great speed and are quick accelerators. And like *both*, they utilize their senses so well that *they excel in*

adapting to their environments. These leaders adapt to the fast-paced, highly competitive business world, and lead diverse tribes. Z&C Leaders recognize that 10,000-pound gorillas are sustained by individuals who, unlike themselves, refuse to adapt to the ever-changing landscape of reality.

To stop feeding the gorilla, overcome chaos, and create clarity, Z&C leaders must do *four things*:

1. Get real about the reality your tribe is facing. Chances are, the path your tribe once took through the jungle was wide, well marked, and free of most obstacles. You could count on easily visible indicators, typical benchmarks, and annual performance ratings to keep you going in the right direction. And if any doubt cropped up, your fearless leader—the lion-like king of the jungle—would dictate who should lead, who should follow, and what should be done. To hear your change-averse gorilla tell it, that's still an accurate portrayal of reality. But don't let him fool you. *The good old days* are long gone. Today you can't expect the journey through the concrete jungle to be easy. The path can quickly change, or disappear altogether. You might encounter rockslides or quicksand at any moment. And predators—competitors—constantly nip at your heels.

Z&C leaders draw a clear picture of the actual circumstances their organizations face, regardless of how positive or negative they may be. Only then can you cut through the smokescreen your gorilla may be throwing up and unite your tribe in pursuit of an overarching dominant aspiration.

2. Ensure your tribe understands the complex order of the concrete jungle. In nature, *jungles* contain many animals and plants that compete for resources and survival, and the ecosystem supports the many populations that call it home and enables them to thrive. *Synergy* refers to diverse individuals *achieving more together than they could alone*. However, it doesn't matter how balanced and well calibrated your tribe is on paper if all members don't

understand *where, how, and why they fit*.

It's natural for people to worry about their futures. That's why new ideas, policies, and people spark pushback. Tribe members worry that they're being edged out or becoming an *endangered species*. Such uncertainty feeds the gorilla. It beats its chest and attacks what it mistakenly perceives to be competition, effectively halting growth and progress.

Z&C leaders leverage their tribe's talents, and ensure all members understand where they fit in the ecosystem.

3. Clearly define success. Once tribe members understand the order of the jungle, Z&C leaders outline *what exactly constitutes success*. Left to their own devices, each individual is likely to define that outcome differently, in ways that benefit them most personally. In this scenario, some employees mistakenly believe they've *made it*, while others struggle, strive, and snipe their way in the wrong direction.



We refer to the force of a tribe working toward success as *collective passion*. First, *collective* suggests that everyone in the tribe is working together toward a shared dominant aspiration or goal. The word *passion* involves deep affinity for something, and its Latin root *passio* means to *suffer*. The struggle to survive and

succeed in the global economy won't be pleasant or easy. But if your tribe goes through the metaphorical fire together, it will emerge stronger and more efficient. *Collective passion* creates a cooperative, unified environment—a culture in which gorillas can't survive.

4. Create new levels of professionalism. When your tribe's members have collectively survived the crucible, their relationships will change. Competition *within* the tribe will be replaced by *new cooperation* once everyone sees what they're capable of achieving together. Then the competitive focus falls where it belongs: *outside* the tribe.

If you see signs that the culture *gorilla* is creeping up (tribe members start excusing their inadequacies or backstabbing those they see as more productive), nip those behaviors in the bud.

When you kick the gorilla out and get your tribe members to trust their Z&C leader, you'll enjoy transparency, accountability, and productivity. **SSE**

Micheal Burt (www.coachburt.com) and Colby B. Jubenville, Ph.D., (www.redherringinc.com), are coauthors of *Zebras & Cheetahs: Look Different and Stay Agile* (Wiley). Visit www.zebrasandcheetahs.com.

ACTION: Kick out the culture gorilla.

Sell or Be Sold

Take four steps to success.



by Grant Cardone

MANY PEOPLE DISLIKE SALES, salespeople, and the sales profession—and this disdain is costly to companies. Many retail companies are struggling, others are out of business, and millions of colleges graduates are moving back home because they can't sell themselves and land a job in their field of study.

To boost revenue, you need to be getting attention, and every person in your company needs to be involved in sales. I see every part of my business as a sales position. If your revenue is down, it's because you have a problem with selling your product or service correctly to what your true market value is. You need to be able to sell yourself and tell people what you are worth.

You're either selling or you're not selling. They are selling you and you are buying it. Whether you are doing the buying or you are being sold. Want to know an effective tactic? You should always agree with the customer. The old adage that *the customer is always right* is not true, but there is no need to make them wrong—some people are just complainers. Start by agreeing with someone. What is the single most important factor when you've always got to be closing? Learn how to overcome objections, add more value, get your price, and close the sale.

Here are **four steps** to sales success:

1. Get attention. To win a client, get a job or raise or increase revenue, you first need to *get the attention of a prospect*. If you can't get attention, your proposition, product or proposal will never be seen. Don't think naively that because you have a great product or idea, the marketplace will buy it. Wrong!

2. Make a presentation or proposal. Once you have the attention of a decision maker and someone who can benefit from your offer, *present your product, service or idea and get the prospect sold on it* to the point where they'll give something up to have it. The challenge is not a monetary one but rather getting the company to make your proposal a priority. This requires great sales abilities in today's noisy world with executives overwhelmed with projects.

3. Ensure that everyone knows that getting attention and selling products

and services are the most important tasks of the company. Daily in my company, I talk about selling being the single activity that will keep us employed, ensure our futures, guarantee bonuses and enable us to expand and grow. I sell the idea of us *selling daily* to every position in the company not just the sales department.

4. Sell your products and services in quantities great enough at prices high enough to grow the business. Companies fail when they can't do this. We are talking *sales*—the thing Ron Johnson was unable to do at JC Penney. If you or your revenue isn't what you want it to be, it is not because you lack ideas or good products—you're not selling your products or services.

You're either doing the selling or you are being sold on not doing the selling. If you won't push, persist and demand

that your products get in customers' hands, you're not completely sold on yourself, your company or product.

Sell yourself and your company on what you can do today to get the attention of those prospects you most desire and then get your team figuring out creative ways to *turn attention into sales*.

You have to stay sold to make a sale. Get sold and stay sold on the fact that you, your product, company and yourself are the best deal available anywhere for any price. You've got to make it so true to yourself that you can say it to others with such conviction that *no one would ever challenge you*. No dream becomes reality until someone sells that dream to another. **SSE**

Grant Cardone is author of Sell to Survive, The Closers Survival Guide, If You're Not First You're Last: The 10X Rule, Sell or Be Sold. Visit CardoneUniversity.com.

ACTION: Take these four steps to boost sales.

SALES/LEADS

Lost Sales Leads

Correct four common problems.



by Brandon Stuerke

U.S. BUSINESSES SPEND BILLIONS of dollars generating sales leads only to lose 70 percent of them because they don't make contact quickly enough, but that's not the only way they're losing out.

A study by Dr. James Oldroyd of MIT found that the odds of a lead entering the sales process are **21 times** greater if the business makes contact within 5 minutes of generating the lead (*the average response time to a generated lead is 42 hours*).

Generating sales leads is big business: \$23 billion is spent on internet leads alone. You may also spend money on direct mail, invitations to seminars, TV commercials, and print ads.

How many leads are you generating, and at what cost per lead, only to lose them?

I find **four ways** people lose sales leads:

- **Advertising calls to action that are all-or-nothing.** Most salespeople offer only a face-to-face meeting or a telephone appointment as their *call to action* in ads. That's asking a lot of prospects who are exploring options. Those are leads that, *three to six months from now*, may become sales—but they're lost early. Instead, offer an easy option such as *download this free report* in exchange for their information for follow-up.

- **No lead capture on your website.** Many sites fail to capture information



about visitors, such as an email address. Prospects enter and leave the site, and the business never knows they were there. A free report, or series of reports or videos with useful information based on your expertise are good lead capture tools. Buyers turn to the web for information, so that's what you should give them. Offering *free resources* in return for a little information is a way to do it.

- **Indifference in interactions.** For consumers, shopping includes researching. They compare services, expertise, and experience before deciding who best deserves their patronage. If your interactions with prospects fail to *wow* them, they'll quickly move on. But most professionals lack a storyboarded plan for

giving prospects that experience, which is what is needed for consistent results. An automated system that delivers carefully planned interactions is a great way to achieve this.

- **Using social media without a plan.** Delivering consumer-friendly, *useful content* through

social media attracts followers and cultivates prospects. Don't use social media to post one-way communication with *no call to action*. Have a *call to action*. Lead prospects back to a website that is designed to capture leads.

These problems stem from focusing only on *the hottest leads*—people who are ready to buy today. Instead of letting cooler leads fall away, capture and cultivate them. *You'll harvest new clients.* **SSE**

Brandon Stuerke is president of Advisors Edge Marketing, creator of Automated Advisor, and president of the Strategic Alliance Program, Winning With CPAs. Visit www.advisorsedgemarketing.com.

ACTION: Stop losing valuable sales leads.

Why Teams Matter

The end of fierce individualism.



by Bruce Piasecki

AMERICA LOVES A FIERCE individualist. Yes, there is something *inspiring* about the lone enterpriser or executive blazing a path into the valuable future. And yet, while our culture celebrates the individual, business must acknowledge that *the whole is greater than the sum of its parts*. The near future will be all about innovation for sustainable value creation, led by teams.

When a larger-than-life personality is allowed to steamroll over the rest of the company, morale suffers, which destroys results. Teams, not individuals, drive performance. The best organizations—the ones with real staying power—are fueled by well-run teams.

In the global economy, companies that get fast results excel at collaboration and innovation. Ideas that enable a company to achieve, grow, and prosper emerge when teams leverage their combined skills and hold themselves mutually accountable. No individual, no matter how brilliant, has the skill set to take projects from start to finish.

Managers can guide employees to a better way to work—while tapping into and maximizing their raw talent—when they understand that *managing teams*, with their web of hidden politics and complex interplay of human differences, is very different from *managing individuals*. I share **eight insights**:

1. Great teams are led by captains.

The word *leader* is so overused that it has lost all meaning. *Anybody* can call himself or herself a *leader*. *Anybody* can follow *dos* and *don'ts* in leadership manuals. But it takes a special leader—a captain—to create not just a loose affiliation of individuals but a *true team centered around shared values and focused on a common goal*. Captains recognize the capabilities of their team members, including strengths and weaknesses, and plan around those capabilities.

2. *Fierce individualism has no place in teams.* Captains need to ensure that the *MVP syndrome* doesn't define their teams. Identify individuals who lose sight of the team that gave them an identity—the group with whom they worked to produce the fame for which

they are now known. In such situations, workplace ills such as favoritism, sexism, and criminal activity flourish. Seek to hire *coachable* individuals rather than individualist-minded high performers. Promote and reward teamwork rather than individualism. Signal that *strong teams* (not *strong individuals*) make up *strong companies*.

3. *Teams hold the bar high for everyone (especially the superstars).* In all teams is an inherent desire to protect superstars and keep them winning. (Never mind all the others whose quieter, though no less critical, contributions are downplayed.) We're all aware of conditions when everyone else was willing to go along with a wrong and where embezzlement seems the norm. Yet it is harder to see when victory shines so brightly. Captains must be mindful of this tendency, in themselves and in others, to look the other way, to give our victors the benefit of the doubt. We must be vigilant to wrongdoing, and ferret out corruption in the highest echelons, to bench the MVP, even to fire the superstar for the good of the team and the sake of integrity.

4. *Teams must be willing to lose sometimes or they'll eventually self-destruct.* When teams keep winning, they can become addicted to victory—feel entitled to it even—and go to illicit extremes. When we don't tolerate failure, we'll do *anything* to keep the adulation coming. Great teams keep things in perspective and understand that no one can *always* win. If a team is addicted to victory (can't tolerate failure), it tends to go to illicit extremes to keep winning.

5. *Great teams revel in the pleasure of persistence and the thrill of striving.* Great teams stumble and fall from time to time, yet get up and try again in spite of hardship. In our leadership training, we emphasize these lessons: how to play through pain; how to resist the criminal opportunities inherent in being an MVP; how to keep grounded despite being a member of special teams with special force; how to outlive uncomfortable appointments,

such as when selected for teams that are a bad fit; and how to behave when chosen for teams you do not want to play on. Life can be a tough slog, and victories sporadic. Maybe we can't win, but we can keep going. This striving brings with it its own unique rewards.

6. *Successful teams share values, integrity, and commitment to one another.* In preparing for a team event, or in becoming a team member, a transformation occurs where *team members end their individual associations and create a team identity* through sharing experiences with others. A strong bond is forged from that preparation, from the obstacles everyone has to overcome to get there. When joining the military, everyone has a crucible, basic training. This crucible is something all members have to overcome. *Individuals reshape their identities into a shared identity.*

7. *Teams must feel at home with uncertainty and complexity.* In a faster, flatter, and more competitive world, *uncertainty and complexity are the rule*. Teams and their captains need to be comfortable in this environment. When outcomes are unknown, the temptation is to play it safe. But yesterday's *safe* is likely to be today's *not enough*. Teams must work on instinct, often at a



moment's notice, and constantly move forward. Effective teams learn by doing and stay focused on results; *they are not bound by method or processes*. That gives them the flexibility and resiliency they need to thrive.

8. *Effective teams take risks.* Since *yesterday's guidelines can quickly become obsolete*, team captains can't become bogged down by *rule following* and *order taking*. They push boundaries when it's proper (when ethical and moral lines aren't crossed), since *great innovations happen beyond existing laws and rules*. When led by great captains, teams work beyond normal and limiting boundaries to increase productivity and success. They encourage the risk that involves seizing opportunities, while eliminating the risk of negative team behavior—of allowing the *dark side* to encroach on ethical behavior.

Creating and captaining a team will determine whether you merely survive or *thrive* in the new economy. **SSE**

Bruce Piasecki is president of AHC Group, a management consulting firm, and author of Doing More with Teams: The New Way to Winning (Wiley). See www.brucepiasecki.com and www.ahcgroup.com.

ACTION: Create a team culture.

Content Strategy

Keep it tight, and to the point.



by Jean Van Rensselar

IF YOU ARE STILL CREATING marketing documents the same old way, it's time to change. Since the proliferation of new technology and international audiences demand a new strategy, you need to make some core communications changes. The strategy for creating text for documents that relate to B2B technical products and services is clearly changing. Here are three reasons why:

1. Proliferation of mobile devices.

It's not true that mobile device readers have a shorter attention span, or are less willing to read long copy than laptop and desktop readers. In fact, the opposite can be true. Most people bring either a phone or tablet into meetings and seminars. Not only is this a time saver, but it's a sanity saver as well. Stuck in a boring meeting with nothing else to do, people will read long emails and attachments that they would otherwise delete. The only real consideration for creating *mobile-friendly content* is to eliminate as much white space as possible. Mobile content isn't just created specifically for mobile devices, it's any content that's destined to go online (just about everything).

2. Lack of time. Technology is replacing people—and in most regards it's doing a good job (whether this is a good thing is another topic). But everything that technology cannot do—i.e. read marketing material—creates a greater burden on the people that remain. This means material needs to be easily accessible, easy to read, well-organized, fact-driven, and logical. No quasi benefits or emotional appeals. The reader's credibility test is whether the statement is capable of proof (i.e. 3 terabytes of memory vs. an astonishing amount of memory).

3. An increasingly international audience. There is a fine line between adjusting copy to accommodate an international audience and ensuring that the copy is interesting to a U.S. audience. Remove unnecessary idioms and clichés. Also, don't overuse contractions; international audiences have trouble deciphering them. Finally, stick with *Basic English* and use *simple words and modifiers*. Be aware of difficult phrases and opt for simple words.

Two Aspects Stay the Same

Two aspects of content strategy for products and services haven't changed:

1. It needs to make a convincing case to buy—no matter how many words it takes. A 6,000-word white paper is not too long if that's what it takes to lay out a logical, fact-based case to buy. Making that case for technical products and services, especially *expensive* technical products and services, is going to take a lot of words. The length is not the issue—it's the content.

2. It needs to be precise and succinct. The goal is to *keep the reader . . . reading*—avoid anything that makes the reader lose interest and stop. Don't include any information that the reader already knows. For example, don't start a sentence with "It goes without saying . . ."

Keep copy as crisp, concise, and fact-based as possible. Don't make any thin claims or promote overblown benefits. Don't write anything that will harm the document's credibility. Successful retail stores are designed to lead the shopper in a profitable direction. Smart, strategic marketing text will do the same.

Eliminate white space in anything that's destined for digital; be respectful of other people's time by making the copy easy to access and read; make minor adjustments for an international audience; and don't worry about *length* but about *interesting, valuable content*. **SSE**

Jean Van Rensselar is CEO of Smart PR Communications. Email Info@SmartPRCommunications.com or call 630-363-8081.

ACTION: Improve your content marketing.

MANAGEMENT/INNOVATION

Innovation Killers

You can't read the label inside the jar.



by Maria Ferrante-Schepis and G. Michael Maddock

BIG BREAKTHROUGHS ARE NEVER THE result of conventional thinking. To echo Harvard professor Ted Levitt, "In every case, the reason growth is threatened, slowed or stopped is *not* because the market is saturated. It is because there has been a *failure of management*." Many of the world's biggest companies are simply riding on inertia.

There's a great saying in the South: *You can't read the label when you are sitting inside the jar*. It's hard to see a need and invent a way to fill that need when you've been inside one business or industry for years.

Recognizing those needs requires stepping outside of the jar and viewing things from the outside. *You can't innovate from inside the jar*, and if you aren't innovating, *you're just waiting for the expiration date on your business*.

We bust **five myths** of innovation:

- **The preference of four out of five dentists doesn't necessarily matter.** Years ago, when we consulted with P&G to develop new oral health care products, Crest was recommended by most dentists. However, the market had shifted; consumers became more interested in *bright smiles* than healthy gums. Many industries get their insights from *their experts* rather than asking *consumers*.

- **Giving all your love to those who**

already love you. To preserve customer morale, many companies focus on *those who already love their service*. But companies need to focus on what's *not* working in order to improve. The haters often offer well-targeted insights that can tremendously improve products, customer service, or operations.

- **"We tried that idea. It didn't work."** *What idea?* People who are in the jar interpret new ideas based on how they last saw them. You *may* think you've tried or tested an idea, but if you applied it in a conventional way, you haven't really tried it. Consider the term *auction*—in-the-jar thinkers envision Sotheby's, not the more practical eBay.

- **Trying to impress with insider jargon.** *Communication* is a huge part of *innovation*. Policies in health insurance, for example, include language that may make sense to insiders, but *say nothing* to the average middle-class customer, which is prohibitive. Be very careful about the language you use. In this case, "*voice of the customer*" should

be taken literally. Customers recognize, respond to and build from their own words more than from yours.

- **Staying at your desk and in the office.** Doubling down on what already has not worked for you is not innovative. *Get outside your office and act like an anthropologist*. Spend time with your customers and bring an expert interpreter and two members of your team. Compare notes; you'll be shocked at *how differently you see the situation*. **SSE**

Maria Ferrante-Schepis is managing principal of insurance and financial services at Maddock Douglas, and coauthor with CEO G. Michael Maddock of *Flirting with the Uninterested*. flirtingwiththeuninterested.com.

ACTION: Avoid these 5 innovation killers.

Agile Selling Model

Start selling through someone else.



by Robert Wollan, Naveen Jain and Michael Heald

MOST COMPANIES STRUGGLE TO MEET their sales goals consistently—for many reasons. Perhaps the biggest one being that the core elements of their sales models have become too rigid, too costly and too complex to deliver what sales needs to be effective in today's hyper-competitive markets.

Consider how much the world has changed in 10 years in how people *buy and use* products, but how little the *selling model and ecosystem* has evolved.

The Internet has become the main platform on which consumers entertain and educate themselves, purchase goods and services, and stay in touch—while becoming a key part of how companies operate. Powerful, pervasive and connected mobile devices, market globalization, and expanded support operations add to the impact. Hence, *business as usual* results in sales teams that are too slow, too poorly armed, or in the wrong place to compete.

So what's the answer?

Companies in four industries—consumer goods manufacturing, pharmaceutical, high-tech and insurance—hold the clues, as they deal with market and channel complexity, face heightened market volatility, and operate with tight margins.

They use an *agile selling* model, based in part on *selling through someone else* to make better use of their sales team and of greater selling forces not owned by the company—intermediaries, other channel partners, customers, and even competitors. They thus infuse more flexibility, accountability, efficiency and responsiveness into their sales efforts and, subsequently, are better positioned to grow consistently and profitably.

Five practices indicate *agile selling* and illustrate how it creates advantages:

1. They systematically apply sales analytics across the selling ecosystem.

They use analytics to assess the effectiveness of channels and routes to market, and ensure that each step in the sales process contributes to ROI. For example, consumer goods companies use analytics to learn about distribution coverage and cost to serve and use those insights to devise new channel strategies to support their sales efforts. Channel-management analytics and segmentation capabilities also help companies reward the right partners (whether they sell more, sell more profitable products, service the enterprise customers most effectively, or provide valuable end-customer information). This analytics focus isolates their key sales decisions, targets their analytic horsepower in areas that drive real growth, and turns off the analytics that just add noise to the system.

2. They provide salespeople with the targeted resources they need. Many give channel partners access to what they need to grow their business—better



tools, data, training, and insights—thus creating a sustainable reason for those partners to sell that company's products. They also focus tightly on returns since empowerment can be costly. For example, pharmaceutical companies equip field sales forces with tablet computers, while consumer goods companies

provide their salespeople with in-depth data on in-store activities and performance, as well as category, market, and shopper trends, so they can have fruitful discussions with retailers. Many high-tech companies provide sales reps with *product configurators*, enabling reps to configure the options and features. In advanced situations, sales reps receive *solutions design aids*: software that allows them to provide a combination of products, software, and services using the customers' requirements as input parameters to determine the right configuration.

3. They create differentiation from digital channels to avoid the "Sea of Sameness." With more end customers embracing digital channels, many companies excel at creating *compelling*

online experiences. Consumer goods businesses spend more each year on digital channels and less on traditional media. Increasingly high-tech companies use social media channels as "listening posts" to understand what end customers are looking for. Insurers have made inroads in property and casualty markets by combining digital and live-agent selling and service across their products. This *differentiation* focus allows them to use digital capabilities (online, mobile, cloud) to extend the sales team's impact.

4. They involve intermediaries and customers. Consumer goods companies use *crowd sourcing*—loosely defined as *outsourcing information-gathering tasks to an undefined public rather than a specific group*—to support product launches, perform simulations, and deploy field-based personnel to gather data in stores. High-tech companies often work with partners in special facilities to co-develop customer-focused solutions. Pharmaceutical companies leverage their relationships with specialists in specific diseases, therapies, and technologies to enhance product development, improve clinical trials, and market more effectively. This channel innovation focus skips superficial efforts at collaboration that merely create *electronic suggestion boxes* in favor of *orchestrated collaboration* in product development and real selling improvements.

5. They exercise channel versatility. Knowing that they can best reach their goals through *dynamic ecosystems*, many managers seek ways to redefine channel boundaries and develop relationships with new partners. Consumer goods companies use multiple channels with partners, including in-house and third parties (exclusive and multiparty distributors and wholesalers). Some high-tech companies have embraced channel segmentation and evolving business models to become *superstack leaders*: builders of *powerful multi-company sales forces* that can dominate sectors or industries. Pharmaceutical companies are developing interlinked channels that align with physicians' and patients' needs. This *channel ecosystem focus* creates an agile route to market in both mature and emerging markets.

Apply these five practices to improve your sales operations. **SSE**

Robert Wollan is managing director of Accenture's Sales & Customer Services practice, and Naveen Jain and Michael Heald are managing directors. They are co-authors of Selling Through Someone Else: How to Use Agile Sales Networks and Partners to Sell More. Visit www.accenture.com.

ACTION: Adopt an agile selling model.

Publicity Campaign

Use four vital keys to success.



by Russell Trahan

EVERY YEAR, MANY LEADERS decide to take a crucial step in their progression: a national publicity campaign. Often a few critical missteps, made at the outset, impede their momentum and impact their ROI. PR can increase visibility and name-awareness, but without proper preparedness and implementation, visions of magazine covers and news interviews can be ill-fated pipe dreams.

You can take **four actions** to guard against PR pitfalls and gain more from your publicity campaign.

1. Start sooner than later. A common misconception held by newcomers to PR is that the appropriate start date is when the final touches have been put on a new product or location. This is typically the initial obstacle that has many professionals sputtering out of the gate: your PR campaign should begin at least four to six months in advance of your anticipated launch. Properly executed publicity involves creating a snowball-effect by ever-increasing mentions and features across a wealth of publications; by the time many businesses feel they are ready to proceed with PR, their window of opportunity has already begun to close.

2. Appoint a company spokesperson. The decision to finally pull the trigger on a company-wide public relations campaign is enough to create a palpable buzz around the office. The prospect of increased sales numbers and an expanded client base as the result of increased visibility will generate excitement amongst your employees and coworkers, but frequently lost amid the enthusiasm is the responsibility to delegate a media spokesperson. Many CEOs tend to view their operations through a prism of team-oriented achievement, where each member of the company provides their expertise to work toward a common goal. While this is a terrific model for fostering harmony, it doesn't work when a reporter is seeking a specific person for a quote. Appointing a spokesperson to handle all media matters and requests is vital to maximizing the likelihood that your thoughts and ideas make it to print. Reporters and editors adhere to deadlines, and often the contact that provides the content they desire first will

be the source quoted. Publicity by committee leads to confusion, dragging feet and, ultimately, missed opportunities. Nominate a spokesperson to handle all public relations activity.

3. Stretch your message. Business managers tend to adopt a form of tunnel vision: you become so close to your skills and knowledge that it's tough to view things from a third-party perspective. As a result of this myopia, many lucrative opportunities fall to the wayside or are ignored—cast aside because they don't fit into the schema you've formed about the nature of your business or expertise. Stretching your topic to apply to what's in the news is key to a profitable campaign. So, expand your audience and extend your reach. Never decline a publicity opportunity because of a perceived lack of expertise on a topic.

4. Stir the pot with unique perspectives and controversy. Nothing whets the media's appetite like controversy. They dominate headlines, are the fodder for conversation, and sell papers. This does not mean to delve into the gutters of tabloidian gossip, but providing a unique counterpoint to common beliefs or opinions produces attention and awareness. Nothing builds public notoriety and brand awareness like controversy.

A carefully crafted and properly executed publicity strategy will enhance your company's profile. By embarking on a PR campaign with clearly defined goals and an action plan, you position yourself to enjoy profitable quarters. SSE

Russell Trahan is President of PR/PR, a boutique PR agency. Visit www.prpr.net or email mail@prpr.net.

ACTION: Take these four actions in publicity.

SALES/STRATEGY

Sell More Now

Reduce non-sales activities.



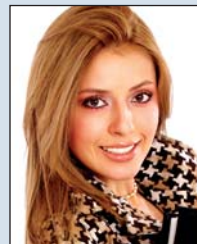
by Leslie Groene

MANY BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT salespeople ask me how they can sell more solutions or products so that they can increase top line revenue. Salespeople easily get distracted by production issues, pricing, contract writing, internal paper work, and other activities that take them away from selling.

If you log how much time you spend daily in *Revenue Generating Activities*, you will see how much valuable time is spent in *non-sales activities*.

Since we're all selling our time, **time is our most valuable resource**. So, analyze where and how we spend our time: Are we pursuing the correct prospect—do they buy what we sell? Are we spending time selling to the right clients—do they appreciate our value/are we making money? Are we calling on the decision maker? Do we know when to stop calling on a prospect and move on? Are we building a trusted relationship? How can we move the selling cycle to the next step?

We must be clear on how we spend our time so we can be as productive as possible. It is understandable that we all need to perform a certain amount of account maintenance activities and paperwork to satisfy the work flow and billing process. Try to delegate as much of these time suckers as possible and



focus on market facing selling and relationship development. You are not being a sales rep unless you are selling!

Back-to-Basics Sales Strategy

You can grow your business in two ways: Find new customers and sell current customers additional solutions. We need to maximize our relationships and use effective selling strategies to maintain or grow our market share which can include new solutions.

Now, we need to prospect and find new opportunities. As our customers cut back spending or consolidate vendors it is apparent there are fewer revenue dollars to go around. The technology continues to evolve in the printing industry, but we need to stick to the fundamentals. For example, there is great buzz about the new QR code applications. So if you are going to offer this new technology, be sure your team understands the benefits to the client.

Before you add new technology, survey current clients to see what other solutions they are buying now and may be considering using in the future. Be sure you're adding relevant solutions that help you win business. This will also ensure the salespeople are confident knowing they are offering their client base resources they already use or want to use in the future.

Having new solutions to sell gives salespeople reasons to meet with clients and increases your market presence. SSE

Leslie Groene is a sales coach, consultant, speaker and author of *Picture Yourself & the Life You Want*. Visit www.GroeneConsulting.com.

ACTION: Reduce your non-sales activities.

New Networking

The old game has changed.



by Porter Gale

THE PROCESS OF NETWORKING to like-minded people for pleasure and profit has altered dramatically in methods and potential. The days of reading of newspapers or bestseller lists to impress someone at a cocktail party, sharing the latest office gossip to bond with a colleague, or controlling your subordinates as you claw your way to the top are past. We've entered a new era where shifting cultural values and improved technology enable you and your employees to network in vastly improved, more focused, and more enjoyable ways that are more in tune with your personalities and passions.

The old way to network involved climbing a ladder while pushing others down or to the side. It was about competition and materialism, about your position in the game and degrees and titles. It worked for some people, but not for most. Thankfully, networking has evolved. Today, connected, well-networked employees are assets.

Here are *five things you need to know* about networking and its impact:

- **Networking has gone from a transactional game into a transformational process.** It's not just about *who you know*, it's about *who you are becoming as a person*. The new way to network is about living life based on your passions, and being the best you can be. Healthy, passionate employees are happier and more connected. Encourage your HR team to help employees identify barriers that might be standing in their way (lifestyle choices, fear of public speaking, shyness) from making authentic connections. Develop and re-inforce programs that support employee wellness and personal growth.

- **There is less separation between contacts.** Technology has accelerated how we connect and reduced the separation between people. Whether you are excited or discouraged by the bewildering array of social media choices, technology and social media can help improve the networking productivity of your team. Dick Costolo, CEO of Twitter, said: "Twitter has eradicated the psychological status barriers that exist between us." He told me, "The OSU fraternity

guys won't call NBA star Kevin Durant on his cell phone and say, 'Come play flag football with us.' That's not going to happen, but it did on Twitter. The president of Rwanda will respond to tweets, but you'd be hard pressed to go to the steps of the presidential palace and have a conversation with him. Twitter has changed how we get things done and how we connect with people." Encourage your team to use technology to connect with key influencers, sales leads, potential recruits, and more.

- **You have an increased knowledge of candidates at your fingertips.** A 2009 survey by CareerBuilder found that 45 percent of companies prescreen candidates on social media. Of those, 35 percent said they had found content that had caused them not to hire a candidate, with red flags cited including inappropriate photos, photos of excessive drinking, poor communication skills, excessive swearing, discriminatory comments, and *confidential information* posted about previous employers. Ensure your HR and legal teams know the *do's and don'ts* of using social media for pre-screening and networking with candidates.

- **Employees who give back and work in collaborative environments tend to make stronger, more authentic connections.** Encourage team members to express themselves as full human beings, not merely employees. That may mean volunteering, helping others, sharing contacts or mentoring. Jana Rich, an Executive Recruiter with Russell Reynolds Associates said, "When it's not just about making money, it is about something bigger, and all of a sudden you know your colleagues in a deeper way, too. It is creating a deeper sense of connectedness, and workers will return to the office with an energy that benefits them and the company."

Amy Rao, CEO of Integrated Archives Systems, had a similar viewpoint about her 60-plus-person team: "The greatest joy isn't when they bring in the big elephant; what I love is seeing when one of them gives back. If they

are giving a hundred dollars or a thousand dollars or a day of time, that is all I care about. What are you giving back? That's what defines us."

- **There has been an explosion of technological recruiting and networking tools.** "Look no further than LinkedIn, a company with a staggering \$18 billion in market capitalization, as evidence that a connected company is more efficient, will grow and thrive more than those that are not, and that networking is a vital business organ," said Bill Beer a Partner at Daversa Partners. "An \$18 billion market cap. It's networking. It is a business-networking tool. Is that not all the proof you need?" Beyond LinkedIn, there are many new tools that analyze online data, score the "value" of



a person's network and more. For example, Reppify is a software tool that internal recruiters can use to rank candidates based on online data, their connections and more. Or, Here On Biz is a mobile App that alerts you when people in your network are geographically close to you. Encourage your team to stay on top of technological advance-

ment that can help your teammates improve their networking, connecting and recruiting.

Set networking goals for your company. Do you want to improve employee morale and team collaboration? Do you want to grow your overall employee network for candidate leads, recruiting and deal flow? Consider how networking has evolved and encourage your employees to make authentic, focused connections. Talk about the power of connecting and reinforce behavior that supports building and maintaining relationships. Remember, networking has evolved from a transactional game to a transformation process, the degree of separation between connections has reduced, giving back and collaboration is a key to networking and everyday new tools are being launched in the networking space. Today, a connected company is more likely to be a profitable company. Ensure your employees know you value and support networking so your team can unlock the power of their connections for greater *wealth, success and happiness.* **SSE**

Porter Gale is marketing and networking expert and author of Your Network Is Your Net Worth: Unlock the Hidden Power of Connections for Wealth, Success and Happiness in the Digital Age. Visit www.portergale.com.

ACTION: Set and achieve networking goals.

Team Building

Are your exercises effective?



by Kevin E. O'Connor

HOW CAN YOU EDUCATE, engage and develop your team? *Team-building activities* (like ropes course, golf, horseback riding, softball, cooking) are often seen as fun add-ons to meetings devoted to sales figures and quarterly goals. But do these experiences meet the goal?

Fun is rarely the only goal. Leaders want teams to *trust better*, to *understand more*, and to *communicate* with one another in useful ways. **Building a team requires three elements:** *engagement, education, and development*—all with a twist.

1. Engagement. *Engagement* involves obtaining a *yes* from the other person. This agreement begins a cooperative relationship that seeks to align goals, minimize judgmental responses, and maintain momentum. In marketing, commitment is demonstrated with a signed letter or contract. *Engagement* is an *agreement* that both parties will move forward together. This agreement can't be secured in one event. Team leaders must monitor signs of stress, unrest, and frustration by listening to what team members *say, don't say, or can't say*.

Here is the twist: listening closely to the words and feelings of team members enables you to *feel* your engagement. Empathy skills help you avoid being judgmental. When you're in tune with your team members' *heartbeats* of engagement, you can know when somebody becomes an outlier and use other skills to bring them aboard.

2. Education. Many meetings are based on dumping data, spreadsheets, bullet points, and manuals on people. The word *education* comes from Latin *educare*, meaning to *lead out* or *draw forth* from. Socrates asked questions to *draw forth* from his students. What if the presenter invited the team to *talk with one another* about the issues; what if the team divided into groups of three, brainstormed a few concerns, and then had the facilitator reflect on each one; what if you simply had a Q&A session; what if the expert asked questions, guiding the team toward answering "What do we need to do to prepare for the future we want to make?"

Here is the twist: when we ignore that *education* is about *drawing forth* from our collective experience, we waste the

resources extant in our teams. Witnessing this *collective knowledge* is a strong formative element for a team. This is often what scientists experience working in a *think tank* session, or what a Broadway cast feels on opening night.

3. Development. To move forward quickly, many leaders start sharing *takeaways* from the experience. Instead, team leaders might ask, *What did you notice? What did you learn about your colleagues? What skills did you learn? Do we need those skills in our office?*

Here is the twist: we must allow individuals to *apply lessons for themselves*.

It's okay to take the team golfing, horseback riding or out for drinks, but *don't think that activity alone will build the team*. One executive used team-building activities involving teaching skills

of extraordinary customer service, improv acting, fine dining and preparing food to teach his team of scientists how to reflect on personalities, roles and goals. These field trips also resulted in a well-formed team, seriously fun engagement, and a memorable experience. Each activity was designed to build the team, increase interpersonal skills, and create a useful memory. Each *built* the team even after the team-building event.

People learn more when the collective team experience is *drawn forth*. And the act of *looking back on what the team learned and experienced together* is a vital part of building a team. **SSE**

Kevin E. O'Connor, CSP, is a facilitator, medical educator, and author of *Fearless Facilitation*. www.kevinoc.com.

ACTION: Engage in effective team building.

MARKETING/PROPOSALS

Follow Your NOSE

Except for client renewals.



by Tom Sant

IF YOU HAVE ATTENDED ONE of my workshops or read *Persuasive Business Proposals*, you recognize the acronym NOSE—*Needs, Outcomes, Solution, Evidence*. It describes the structure of persuasion.

Start by addressing the customer's *Needs*—problems they face, their challenges, opportunities they want to capitalize on, and so forth. These are the drivers that lie behind the deal, the reasons they are willing to read your proposal or listen to your pitch.

Then focus on *Outcomes*—how solving these problems and addressing these Needs will change things for the better. Decision makers are interested in vendors who understand their *Needs*, but they are motivated to choose vendors who can deliver positive *Outcomes* in areas of performance that matter. They seek increased revenue, a bigger market share, greater operational efficiency, lower carbon emissions, or any of a hundred other specific *Outcomes*.

Then recommend your *Solution* and back it up with *Evidence* that shows you can deliver on time and on budget.

This NOSE patterns works. It works for executive summaries and cover letters and sales presentations. It works because it matches the pattern of questions that a decision maker asks himself when making a choice among vendors: *Are we getting what we need? Is*



it worth doing? Can this vendor actually deliver? It works so well that companies who have adopted this pattern in their sales messaging have seen an average 39 percent increase in their win rates.

But there is one exception to this pattern and it's worth noting. If you are writing a proposal to win renewal of your existing contract, insert one bit of content ahead of the NOSE. Start a renewal proposal by reminding the customer of how much you have already accomplished and how much better things are than they were before you arrived on the scene.

After all, if you start by pointing out problems that the customer has, the first question the decision maker is likely to ask isn't *Are we getting what we need?*, but rather, *So why haven't you fixed these issues? You've had this contract for the past several years—why didn't you take care of this?*

Sometimes the customer's situation has changed dramatically, because of competitive threats, changes in the economy, new technology, or other factors. These changes have given rise to a new set of challenges or Needs. But sometimes the business environment is not that much different from what it was when we first became their vendor. In those situations, it's vitally important to *remind them* of what we have accomplished and how far forward we've helped them move. Thanks to the work we've done in the past, we can now address the *new challenges*. **SSE**

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

ACTION: Follow your NOSE in proposals.

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