

SALES AND SERVICE Excellence

THE MAGAZINE OF TEAM LEADERSHIP

NOVEMBER 2010

**Superior
Brands**

**Customer
Kindness**

**Nourish
the Culture**

People Drive Numbers

**Jon Gordon
Consultant**



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Sales and Service Excellence

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MARKETING/BRANDING

Superior Brands

They elicit strong passion.



by Dr. A.K. Pradeep

YOUR BRAND IS THE HEART and soul of your business. Humans have a hard-wired need to have relationships not only with other people, but also with the functional and fun items and tools we use. *The challenge is to present your brand as something your consumers want to have a long-term relationship with.*

We love novelty and change, but we also need constancy and commitment. The brain has neural programs for connecting with the meaningful items in our lives. Learning and measuring the effects of these can guide how you design, present, and communicate your brands to the people you want to reach.

From universal brands like *Coca-Cola*, to micro brands like a neighborhood coffee shop, brands give identity, meaning, and connectivity to our experiences and possessions. We need to organize our lives into the recognizable and the familiar. Yet the familiar can become the mundane, and the recognizable the invisible. At what point does the brain thirst for a novel experience? To understand how and when this can happen, you must understand the dimensions of your brand.

Brand Essence Framework

After studying what brand managers believe is the essence of the brand and what consumers' deep response is to the brand, we find consistent patterns that we've codified as the *Brand Essence Framework*—the blueprint for understanding how the brain creates brands at the subconscious level of the mind, and how to leverage that knowledge to strengthen brands, improve the perfor-



mance of brand extensions, and create successful new brands. The purpose of applying the *Brand Essence Framework* is to build **brand passion**—a breathlessly romantic relationship with the brand.

The *Brand Essence Framework* has **seven dimensions**:

1. Form—the physical manifestation of the brand, the most tangible sensory

and physical connection the consumer has with the brand. In our testing, *form attributes are recognized by consumers in their subconscious as being connected with the brand.* We are biologically programmed to seek out and classify form. Yet, we may not be aware that we're doing this. The formal elements consumers connect, recognize, and embrace in the brand are not easily described verbally, but can play a vital role in how the product is received. Formal elements that are connected in the subconscious might include logos, imagery, iconography, designs, and fonts. Connection could also be *physical features or tangible elements*, such as shape, size, capacity, color, or texture. Form includes not only visual elements, but also audio elements, such as tone, timbre, melody, beat, and harmonic qualities.

The unique style lines and contours of the product personify *form attributes* of some brands. For example, Porsche is personified by the *unique styling* of the front and the rear of the car. Gull-winged car doors scream Lamborghini; while the elongated hood, side coves, and quartet of round rear lights mark the styling of a Corvette.

2. Function—the functions provided by the brand, *especially those that are indispensable and unique to your brand.*

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We emphasize *indispensable* as the critical distinguishing attribute. Elements of function that score highest are ones that consumers rate as *indispensable*. These *functional attributes* contribute to the identity of a brand.

3. Feelings—the automatic emotional associations that arise at the mere thought or mention of the brand. They constitute the *emotional archetype* of the brand. Every well-known brand has a unique emotional identity. The activation of these feelings through appropriate in-store environments, aisle designs, and features and displays constitute implicit priming for the brand. We see a measurable increase in *Purchase Intent* when the emotional archetype of a brand is displayed through explicit or implicit priming.

Feelings can be thought of as a shorthand for a large network of attributes and connections, including elements as diverse as facts, times, places, and people. Rather than requiring recall and a recitation of all the factors associated with a brand, the brain can just call up summary feelings encoded from the larger underlying network. So, for example, the brain doesn't need to remember all the nutritional information associated with a product—it can simply access the good feeling it experienced when the nutritional information was examined. You need to understand the core feelings that have been tagged about the brand.



4. Values—the broader social and moral precepts that a brand may be connected with, explicitly or implicitly. When brands resonate with a consumer's deep social, moral, or spiritual values, the propensity for *brand advocacy* increases across both immediate and virtual social networks. Values strengthen the connection of feelings to brands. They reinforce and connect the brand to goals and objectives outside the self.

Some values endure over time, and others become more or less prominent at different times. We find *several categories of values* to be relevant to the character of specific brands: personal, spiritual, moral, communal, social, political, economic, philosophical, historical, traditional, cultural, national, environmental, legal, or lifecycle-related.

5. Benefits—the personally meaningful rewards we expect to acquire by using brands. They are more general and run deeper than functions. Benefits are usually articulated as statements and affirmations about what the brand can do for us, but they may be expressed implicitly as well. Our measurements across multiple brands reveal that stronger subconscious associations with particular Benefits tend to be correlated with the personal identity and Values of the consumer.

In fact, the *Benefits of a Brand* also serve as attributes consumers want others to know about them. For example, many benefits of Apple's iPad serve as an *aspirational description of the person who uses them*. So the stylish and advanced technology of the iPad communicates to others that the user of the device is also "stylish" and "advanced." The iPad user has telegraphed important cues about how he'd like the world to see him.

6. Metaphors—larger-than-life concepts that can be applied to an object—like a brand or product—with a paradoxical effect: even though it is not literally true, it somehow captures an essential quality of the object. For example, calling a truck "Ram-tough" is not a literal statement—how tough is a ram, anyway? But it represents an aspiration or ambition: it says this truck is *dependable, strong, and stubbornly single-minded*. Metaphors often reveal larger than life expectations that come to be associated with a brand and its meaning to a consumer. The

best brand metaphors become synonymous with a promise or commitment made by the brand to the consumer. Our measurements reveal that the best communication strategies contain at their core a single metaphor that is consistently presented and represented. The metaphor stands for the brand ambition, which is to say, for a human ambition the brand embodies. These human

ambitions provide *the aspirational and inspirational architecture on which the brand builds its strategy*. The metaphor is useless unless it's reinforced through elements of the product, packaging, and communication design.

7. Extensions—what the consumer's brain invites the brand to do. How can you identify *natural extensions of the brand*, those that won't violate *expectations* when compared to the core brand? *Natural extensions inherently make sense in the consumer's mind*. They're derived from *implicit connections* consumers make among any of the other dimensions of the *Brand Essence*. They may encompass forms, functions, benefits, or other attributes of competitive brands as well as your own. Extending a brand is more likely to result in success when the extension is easily processed by consumers, rather than requiring them to readjust their implicit associations to make a space for the new extension.

These seven dimensions encompass the entire spectrum of consumer experience of your brand. They represent *the essence of your brand—the framework for your brand's identity and presence in the marketplace.* **SSE**

Dr. A.K. Pradeep is CEO of NeuroFocus, Inc., and author of *The Buying Brain: Secrets for Selling to the Subconscious Mind*. Visit www.neurofocus.com.

ACTION: Study these seven dimensions.

Mastering Sales

Learn and apply five tips.



by Eric Taylor
and David
Riklan

EVERYONE IS SELLING SOMETHING, BUT today *not everyone is buying*. The ultimate challenge for salespeople is finding a way to get their piece of the pie when companies have cut sales training and education budgets to the bone, and there is more competition than ever.

To become a master salesperson, you must build your sales skills. Whether you are just starting your sales career or have been closing complex sales for decades, you can always improve.

Five Master Tips

In *Mastering the World of Selling*, we offer a compilation of sales advice from the best in the business. Here are five Master Tips from five Sales Masters:

Master Tip 1: Dig for sales opportunities. Today, sales professionals need to uncover sales opportunities rather than wait for leads or for customers to come to them. The best performers recognize that even if there are many leads in their sales pipeline, they need to invest part of their time regularly on uncovering new sales opportunities.

The Master of this is *Dale Carnegie Training*. Their sales masters suggest *four ways for finding new opportunities*:

1. **Create an opportunity chart.** Don't assume your customers already know about everything you have to offer them. List your full range of products and services, list existing accounts, and then fill in which products and services each client is using with an *A*. Place a *B* in boxes that represent selling opportunities. Then call your clients to discuss how you can help fill these needs.

2. **Ask for referrals.** Think of *buyers as partners* who can refer you to a steady stream of new business. Using the name of someone the prospect knows, admires, or respects opens doors. Ask for a referral at the close of every sale.

3. **Look for champions.** Look for individuals who have benefited from your products or services in the past. Your champions should clearly understand what makes your products or services effective. They should be well respected within their company and able to com-

municate with other people well.

4. **Effectively network.** Be involved in organizations that would include your prospects. Follow through on all commitments that you make so that you build credibility that will transfer into your sales efforts. *In sales, it's not really who you know—it's who wants to know you.*

Master Tip 2: Know what it means to be a sales rock star. When you hear a boss talk about her best salesperson, she often refers to her as a rock star. It's high praise. Every salesperson aspires to be so called, but few make the grade.

The Master of this is *Jeffrey Gitomer*. He notes that being a rock star means: You have superior talent. Your fans



don't just like you—they love you! You are respected by your peers. You have proven yourself with consistent quality. You know the business. The best rock stars achieve their status by working hard and loving what they do. They wouldn't trade their positions or situations. They rose from humble beginnings to stardom by taking advantage of their talent. *Loving what you do, combined with your belief in what you do, will determine how hard you'll work and how successful you'll be.*

Master Tip 3: Sell with integrity. The number-one tool in your sales arsenal is integrity. Belief in your products or services is essential but insufficient unless you build this belief on the foundation of integrity. No matter how much a prospect believes that you believe in your product, he will not do business with you if he does not trust you, and trust begins with integrity.

The Masters of this are *Zig and Tom Ziglar*. They note that values determine behavior. Behavior determines reputation. *Reputation determines advantages.* Today, you need every advantage you can get. *Long-term sales success depends*

on your integrity. With integrity, you do the right thing. Since you do the right thing, there is no guilt and no fear because you have nothing to hide. You can talk to customers whom you sold to yesterday—you can talk to them tomorrow, next week, next year—because you know that they made the best deal.

Master Tip 4: Become a decision facilitator. Often we're stuck with the perfect solution, waiting for a buying decision that has nothing to do with us. Indeed, the time it takes buyers to come up with their own answers is the length of the sales cycle. *The Master: Sharon Drew Morgen.* By becoming decision facilitators, we can use our knowledge of our fields to be virtual GPS systems for the decision makers, guiding them along without bias to their ultimate destination. We will then know on the first call if it's a viable prospect; shorten the sales cycle dramatically; save the buyer's time and our time; and increase the number of buyers who can buy. *By facilitating the buying decision, we'll be true servant leaders, trusted advisors and relationship managers, guiding them through their offline buying decision issues.*

Master Tip 5: Evaluate how you communicate. Assess the clarity, likeability, and effectiveness of your messages.

As Masters of this tip, we invite you to *consider all of the mediums of your communication.* You are speaking to prospects, clients, service providers, internal customers, tech support, and administrative assistants. You are communicating face-to-face, over the phone, by e-mail, text messaging, and fax. You are using social media platforms like LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, as well as looks and gestures.

To assess how well you express your personal brand to others, ask the people who are closest to you. Accept the feedback and *evaluate what you can change without compromising your self-beliefs.*

Mastering the world of selling doesn't happen in a day—it happens *day by day.* For you to have *your best sales year ever*, you have to put together 365 days of focus, self-discipline, and commitment, and give your personal best.

Beyond mastering the craft of selling, strive to reach *championship levels of mastery of the fundamentals of life.* No sales tools will work *if you don't become a better you* and have *your personal best year*, as well as *your best sales year!* **SSE**

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ACTION: Apply these five tips.

Accountability

It's now the new normal.



by Marty Stanley

MOST SALES AND SERVICE improvement programs and processes end up in binders and put on the shelf until the next new thing comes along. Some managers become mesmerized by the shiny new thing, caught in the lure that it will save the organization.

Employees, on the other hand, translate the next big thing as the flavor of the month. They assume that if they ride it out and go through the motions, it will go away, and they won't have to change. By playing it safe, they don't become career road-kill when the shiny new process becomes unpopular.

Accountability has never been considered the next big idea because it's not flashy and implies that people might actually need to change. But we've seen that a lack of accountability leads to loss and waste. Every organization has their own horror stories of excess, sacred cows or lack of oversight. When things don't work, it's usually due to a lack of ownership or accountability for decisions and actions that result in lost customers, loss of market share, defective products, or crummy service.

The New Normal is about reviving some fundamental principles such as people are accountable to do the work for which they are hired. It's about having clarity about expectations and following through. When people accept a job, there's an implied agreement to perform the work for which they are hired. If they don't know what was expected, why did they accept the job? It's easy to blame the boss for not explaining what's expected or not providing training to do the job, but that's not a good excuse to slack off. If you don't know what you are supposed to do, why don't you ask?

Four Steps to Accountability

Take four steps toward accountability:

1. Use job descriptions as the basis for hiring or promoting people. It's an objective way screen candidates and assure they have the skills and experience to do the job. Job descriptions reflect how work flows and what each position is accountable for doing. They can be used to hire, train, evaluate, and coach people. They should reflect major accountabilities of each position and show why

the position is integral to the success of the firm. Make sure the job description fits the needs of the organization, and isn't written to match an employee's skills.

2. Share job descriptions with incumbents so they know their accountabilities and let them know this will be used for training, coaching, and performance feedback.

3. Have objective ways to measure and monitor performance and communicate those methods to the people performing the jobs. Provide feedback on performance. Manage both people and processes. Communicate expectations, monitor the key performance indicators to assure things are on track, and relay information in a timely way.

4. Provide training and coaching opportunities to enhance performance. Holding people accountable isn't easy with people who are underperform-

ing. You may think it's easier to do the work yourself, or that you can do it better, or it will take less time than to train and monitor and coach someone else. But is it easier to do your work as a manager—and their work—or to hold them accountable? Unless you communicate expectations, provide the resources for people to do their jobs and hold them accountable, you're underperforming.

By holding employees and managers accountable for their job descriptions and holding the organization accountable for its processes, you can put the systems and structures in place to support your vision, mission and core values, resulting in alignment and integrity. **SSE**

Marty Stanley, President of Dynamic Dialog, is a speaker, facilitator and author of Get Out of BED (Blame, Excuses and Denial). Call 816-822-4047 or email martystanley@alteringoutcomes.com.

ACTION: Hold your people accountable.

SALES/LISTENING

Improved Connections

Take steps to improve listening skills.



by Jeffrey Magee

THE GREATEST ABILITY A sales professional can have is the ability to listen to another person without interrupting.

Coach your sales professionals in the art of listening to the verbal and non-verbal language of the other person. It is difficult to listen to another person if your focus is not on that other person—if there are distractions, hidden agendas, frustrations, or a desire to get through with them and move onto another person or task.

Listening takes conscious effort. Effective presentations and increased sales effectiveness come from the ability to clearly listen to the other person. By listening, you can learn how one thinks (logically or emotionally); immediate needs; future needs; past experiences with you, your firm, other sales reps; what common ground exists; and much, much more.

There are many ways to improve your listening ability. The LISTENS acronym will guide you and help you reduce your talk time, reduce your interruption tendency, and improve your information intake ability:

L = Look and listen. See if non-verbal signals are consistent with verbal signals.

I = Implied interest. By showing that you are genuinely interested in others, they'll become more comfortable with you, thus, more engaging.



S = Summarize key points often, to solicit feedback to help ensure that you are listening correctly to them, and, conversely, that points you make have value to the other person.

T = Territorial sensitivity to the others in respect to their space, knowledge, beliefs, age, race, sex, profession, station in life. Violation of any territory may cause the other person to tune you out. And if the other person violates your territory, you may stop listening.

E = Empathetic position must be taken by the sales professional as to what the other person says. Empathy implies that you understand, not that you agree with them or that they're right or wrong!

N = Names, notes, and non-verbal. Using the names of people in conversation and correspondence keeps the dialogue personal. If you tend to talk too much or interrupt others, start taking notes. It is nearly impossible to write coherent notes and converse intelligently with someone at the same time. Watch the other person's non-verbal signals to ensure that they are consistent with their verbal signals.

S = Smile (not smirk)! Smiling makes people warm up to you. Far too many sales are lost because the sales professional did not smile, talked too much, and did not listen effectively enough.

List one way to improve your listening ability under each of the seven letters. Then, develop ways to apply or perform each in a sales dialogue. **SSE**

Jeff Magee is author of Performance-Driven Selling. Visit www.JeffreyMagee.com.

ACTION: Improve your listening skills.

X + Y = Big Success

Build a winning sales program.



by Wendy Wagner

THERE IS A SENSE OF EXCITEMENT at Performance Plus Marketing (PPM), stemming from our recent win of the IMA *Circle of Excellence Award* for best sales incentive program. Our program was honored for its vibrant and creative sales incentive effort supporting the launch of a new diabetes drug, *Victoza*, by Novo Nordisk, a leading healthcare company with 87 years of innovation and leadership in diabetes care.

PPM and Novo received the award because of our approach to engaging sales teams. We believe that any successful major product launch should stem from an intimate understanding of the people who make up the sales team.

A winning sales launch—and ultimately a winning sales program—requires more than simply acquainting the sales force with the product and target market. Anyone can do that—and just about everyone in the incentives and loyalty industry claims they do. But in reality, they don't all deliver.

The product that stands out as a top performer will, of course, have to be high-quality and responsive to market needs. And, the sales force has to be actively engaged in the effort, committed to the goals and invested in the success of the program. In other words, they've got to be excited and motivated to sell. What does this mean?

Just as you have to know your market to develop a product that will sell, you have to know the members of your sales force to get them engaged, committed and invested. So, when we took on the *Victoza* project—the new TYPE 2 Diabetes drug from Novo Nordisk—that first thing we did was a deep dive into the makeup and mindset of Novo's sales force. They were the key audience; after all, if the program didn't appeal to them, it wasn't going to produce results.

We discovered an interesting blend of Generation X sales managers and Generation Y sales reps, of which 53 percent were female. This insight was crucial. We used our understanding about professionals in that age group to customize a program that capitalized on what motivates these specific generational groups. For example, they are very tech-savvy, they're accustomed to

things working efficiently, they demand a healthy work-life balance, and they expect their work to be fun.

Understanding that the sales goals for *Victoza* were ambitious, we had to launch the program right. Given our insight about the sales force, we couldn't just trot out some hokey sales promotion. They would reject that sort of thing *en masse*. We needed something that was engaging, on top of trends and responsive to their interests.

With that understanding, we developed *Club V*—a virtual, nightclub-type destination that would be the online home for all the reps' training materials, contest rules, and other information to support and inspire their sales efforts.



Club V looks and feels trendy and exclusive. Reps enter on a red carpet and pass a velvet rope guarded by a bouncer. Novo's performers had to be on the list and be ready for a lot of action and activity, including chances to earn incentives while learning about the product. During the week-long launch, this included: individual competitions and certification, including role plays, doctor-detailing, online and written testing; team competitions within districts for regional and national placement; and daily product quizzes.

Rarely does participation in anything garner 100 percent involvement, but Novo's *Club V* did exactly that—100 percent of eligible participants took part in the five-day program, in the individual competitions and in the team aspect of the sales competition. Moreover, the daily quizzes attracted participation from 95 percent of the sales force.

It was also critical that we didn't just tease this group with a virtual *Club V*. We had to supply a genuine pay off. So, the launch also included an evening party at a real-life, bricks and mortar *Club V*. We gave it a Las Vegas-type feel. Participants actually entered

our version of a high-end, exclusive club featuring activities and dancing, and live musical performances by well-known Las Vegas performers.

PPM also designed the program to offer additional benefits that everyone could enjoy, with a little something extra for Novo's top performers—something exceptional for those who could earn it. That's why we designed *The Vault*—a special VIP room accessible only to the Top 10 percent of performers. Where *Club V* was great, *The Vault* was sensational. To emphasize that *The Vault* wasn't for anyone, we made the entrance look like a bank vault, giving it a bigger-than-life, highly-exclusive appearance. The only combination that would open it would be a Top 10 percent sales performance, and that wouldn't be easy to achieve.

However, we made sure it was worth it. Inside *The Vault* were high-end food and drink offerings, along with special performances from Las Vegas-style magicians whose feats amazed our winners. More than 2,000 sales reps, executives, directors, managers and account executives took part. They loved the activities, embraced the competitions, and got every ounce of fun and excitement out of the launch party.

None of that would have mattered if the Novo team hadn't emerged from the launch motivated, prepared, and ready to achieve exceptional sales performance for *Victoza*.

PPM's experience with this type of highly motivational and creative programming told us they would. Why? Because we know that sales reps and sales managers internalize their commitment to programs when the programs reach out and engage them in a way that fits their interests, their priorities and their personalities.

The results of this program won the day. The strategy was well worth it. The ambitious sales goals set for *Victoza* have exceeded expectations since the launch; the product is performing just as Novo Nordisk had hoped it would.

For an 18-month sales program, much was riding on this one-week launch. A half-baked approach, with little thought to the unique characteristics of the sales force, would have failed and left sales managers struggling to hit sales goals.

In order for *Victoza* to get out of the gate full speed, we had to engage the sales force in a way that would leave them fully invested. **SSE**

Wendy Wagner is VP of client services for Performance Plus Marketing. Visit www.PPM.com.

ACTION: Design your own winning program.

Empower Frontliners

You'll save many \$100 bananas.



by June Fabre

IF YOUR SALES AND ENGINEERING staff undermine each other, the resulting delays will reduce client satisfaction; if severe, the conflict could derail the contract. To keep customers happy, all employees need to take quick and accurate action instead of creating *obstacles* and *delays*.

For example, a hospital patient asks for a banana. The nurse calls a dietary manager, who replies, "not without a doctor's order." After talking to two managers, the nurse mentions it to a Senior VP who intervenes; the patient, unhappy about the long wait, finally receives the banana. When you calculate the time taken by each person, the cost of the banana exceeds \$100.

Frontline employees with decision-making authorization save management time and increase client satisfaction. Organizations with cultures where staff can perform at their best attract and retain the best people. *Positive employee relationships generate energy and raise productivity.* You can save money, improve client satisfaction, and reduce expensive errors by following seven tips:

1. Empower your frontline staff to solve client problems on the spot and then support them. *When frontliners hesitate to make independent decisions related to critical thinking, they've likely been reprimanded for doing so in the past.* They've learned to wait for directions from managers rather than function as professionals. To change this habit, you need to build trust by giving your staff consistent support. Don't let your *chain of command* become a *ball and chain*. When you empower frontline employees, you save money, clients are more satisfied, and productivity increases.

2. Building trust enables you to use your intellectual capital. When your staff trusts each other, they save time and money. They can act quickly and decisively. You build trust by respecting yourself and others, by *being a role model* of courteous communication, being sensitive to the needs of others, and making decisions according to *what is right*, rather than *what is easy*. *When you use the intellectual capital of frontline employees, you save many \$100 bananas* and build trusting relationships.

3. Build a positive culture. Having a culture where staff can perform at

their best attracts and retains the best people. *Building a positive culture takes multiple elements: respect, consistency, and integrity.* A positive culture ensures people understand organizational values, enabling them to make smart decisions for clients.

4. Insist that staff collaborate, not compete. Ask: *Is everyone aligned behind our sales strategy?* Good communication and collaboration save time and money, and increase productivity.

5. Brainstorm about opportunities that lie beyond the challenges. In staff meetings, list current challenges. Then talk about ways to *transform these challenges into opportunities*. Perhaps you can redefine your selling proposition to increase sales. For instance, look at both sides of client complaints. Ask yourself if the complaint reflects a client's need for a new product or ser-

vice that your company could offer.

6. Communicate respectfully. Poor communication wastes time, delays decisions, and damages morale. It is also expensive, especially when staff manage to find new ways to sabotage one another in negative cultures.

7. Solve the root causes of problem. If frontline people have no power to solve the root causes of their problems, they create *temporary fixes* day after day. This wastes much time, costs much money, and reduces quality for clients.

Solving the root causes enables you to move from a *product focus* to a *client focus*, building business in *strategic* ways.

Use these tips to *maximize client satisfaction* and *save many \$100 bananas*. **SSE**

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ACTION: Empower your frontline employees.

SALES/OBJECTIONS

Handling Objections

Learn and apply five steps.



by Patrick McClure

MOST PROSPECTS PRESENT you with an objection which you must address and handle before you can move to close. When you learn to handle objections, you can deliver spectacular sales results.

An objection is an excuse or reason why the customer cannot purchase your product or service right now. There are only about 10 to 12 oft-repeated objections, and they are common across all industries.

Here are a few common objections: *I need to think about it. I don't have the money (I can't afford it). I need to talk it over with someone else. I lack sufficient information to make a purchasing decision (can you e-mail/fax me more information?) I don't have the time. Your price is too high. I'm not interested. We already tried it, and it didn't work. We don't need it (we're doing OK right now).*

Before you can excel at overcoming objections, you first need to believe that they are a good thing! They are a sign that the prospect is seriously considering your offer, but has reservations. If you have not heard an objection, you likely haven't tried to close the sale. Most key objections occur after you ask a closing question. When you hear an objection, get excited! If you can handle it, you'll win their business.



Note: never dive in to handle an objection without first clarifying it. Often, the objection that prospects give first is not the *real objection*. For example, they may be nervous about paying for your product, but they are embarrassed to tell you. Instead they tell you they need to "think it over" or "study the material." The true objection is hidden, and you have to probe to find it out. Learn to differentiate between a question and a true objection. This requires discipline and a systematic method. *Questions are simply answered with the facts, but objections are handled differently.*

Keep a list of all the common objections in your industry, and practice handling every single one. Practice makes perfect.

Over the years, I've listed the *most common objections* and my *favorite methods of handling them*. I then simplified this into my five-step **Million Dollar Objection Handling System:**

1. Actively listen with empathy.
2. Paraphrase or restate: "Thank you, I think I understand, but let me just repeat to be certain." Then acknowledge that you got it.
3. Ask questions to clarify the objection.
4. Answer it with a benefit: "Now I understand what you're saying and why it's so important. I think the following might help . . ."
5. Confirm it's handled: "Does that satisfy your concern?"

If you will practice this system until it becomes second nature, it will yield amazing results and closed deals—every single time. Give it a try! **SSE**

Patrick McClure is CEO of Connexia Group. Email patrick@connexiagroup.com.

ACTION: Use these tips to overcome objections.

Dead-On Marketing

Borrow six rules from the Grateful Dead.



by David Meerman Scott and Brian Halligan

WHEN YOU THINK MARKETING VISIONARIES, what companies come to mind? Apple? Google? Microsoft? Each of these companies has come to define marketing in the digital age. But the practices they're pushing—viral marketing, social networking, giving away products or services, asking for and acting on input from customers—have groovier roots than you might imagine.

These marketing ploys were born on the road with the iconic band—*The Grateful Dead*. Yes, they were rock legends, but they were also marketing pioneers. In the 1960s, they pioneered many social media and inbound marketing concepts used today. Most of their marketing innovations were based on doing the *exact opposite* of what other bands (and record labels) were doing at the time. The *Dead* pioneered a *freemium* model, allowing concert attendees to record and trade concert tapes, building a powerful word-of-mouth fan network powered by free music—a model that influenced many of today's marketers.

Here are *six lessons* you can apply:

1. Carve out your own landscape.

Rather than focusing on selling albums, *The Grateful Dead* focused on generating revenue from live concerts, and in doing so created a *fan experience* unlike any other. The *Dead* created a *passionate fan base* that became an underground cult that catapulted them into the rock-and-roll stratosphere. *Products that are highly differentiated can still succeed today, but it's much harder to win if your business model is the same as your competitors.* To build a killer business model, you need to break free from the competitive landscape and *create a cascade of unique benefits* for your customers. Big winners typically win because of *unique business model assumptions*, rather than new technology or complicated improvements. Prime examples include Netflix (vs. Blockbuster) and iPod and iTunes (vs. MP3s and downloading). These companies turned the core assumption of how their industry works on its head to create an *unlevel playing field* for themselves.

2. Choose memorable brand names.

The Grateful Dead is a name that you remember. The dictionary defines the term as *a type of ballad involving a hero who helps a corpse who is being refused a proper burial*. For the *Grateful Dead*, the strange cosmic quality the name evokes—a *world beyond consciousness*—was perfect. The choice of name worked to help advance the *Grateful Dead* to its status as the most iconic band in history. When you select an uncommon name—one appropriate to your company image and target market—it's unlikely that consumers will confuse your product with something similar. They'll remember you. And unique names for your company and products enable you to *own the search engine results for your brands*.

3. Mix up your marketing department. Some argue that the *Grateful Dead* were not the best musicians, but their deeply diverse backgrounds made for a powerful combination that created a sound unlike any other. In addition to having musicians with diverse backgrounds, the *Grateful Dead* often had musicians with very little experience and even less formal education. The mix of unique backgrounds unencumbered by conventional wisdom proved to be a powerful combination. Does your marketing team look like everyone else's? If so, it's time for a change in organization, some new skill development, and new blood. Organize your marketing team in this way: You want someone responsible for *getting found* (filling the top of your funnel), someone responsible for *converting* the folks who are getting pulled in, and someone responsible for *analyzing* the numbers and helping you make better decisions. Look outside your marketing department (inside your company) and look outside the marketing industry (outside your company) to fill in talent gaps.

4. Experiment. The *Grateful Dead* played over 2,300 concerts, and each one was *completely unique* due to their improvisational style. They experimented with musical forms and genres—both as a group and individually—creating *unique musical experiences*. Despite the occasional poor performance, they did-

n't stop experimenting. They continued to push the edge and learn from the mistakes they made. Like the *Grateful Dead*, marketers today need to experiment in their craft in order to make big breakthroughs. Instead of seeing failure as something to be avoided, leaders need to free their marketers to experiment, quickly learn from failure, and experiment again. Like music, marketing is a creative discipline. Instead of worrying about *making mistakes*, start doing at least five times more experiments (start a blog, free your employees to Tweet or write posts for your blog, or leave comments on others' blogs).

5. Lose control of your marketing messages. A *Grateful Dead* concert was about having fun, meeting friends, checking out great music, escaping the everyday, and belonging. Each person defined the experience differently, and the group and subgroups defined the whole. In building community, the *Grateful Dead* gave up a large degree of control over how they were defined and instead gave it to their fans. While this approach is unusual, it is also often very successful. When you insist on operating in a command-and-control culture with mission statements, boilerplate descriptions, messaging processes, and PR campaigns, your strategies can both hamper growth and backfire in execution. Let your community define you, rather than trying to dictate what's said—and how—about your company. When you let others define and talk about you, a community is more likely to develop.

6. Put fans in the front row. Unlike other bands, the *Grateful Dead* controlled ticket sales for their concerts. Having their own in-house ticketing agency enabled them to announce tours to fans first and treat supporters to the best seats, driving passionate loyalty. This teaches us to *treat customers with care and respect* and *put loyal customers first*, rather than ignore them while trying to get new ones. Growth should not come at the expense of existing customers. Your passionate fans are also the people who tell your stories and spread your ideas.

Apply these six lessons to keep your business *rocking on* for years to come. **SEE**

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ACTION: Adopt the rules of dead-on marketing.

Be a HERO

Empower customers.



by Josh
Bernoff and
Ted Schadler

TECHNOLOGY IS CHANGING EVERYTHING about the way you work. Customers are using it to gain power. And you can use it to reach out to your customers.

- **Dave Carroll** is a singer who was upset when United Airlines damaged his guitar in checked baggage, then refused to pay for the damage because he didn't file his claim in time. Dave used the only weapon he had to fight back—his music. His video *United Breaks Guitars* has been viewed 9 million times on YouTube. United wasn't delighted, but Dave's career was supercharged.

- **Heather Armstrong** blogs under the name *Dooce*. When her Maytag washer failed—and three attempts to fix it failed—she got fed up. She gave Whirlpool, Maytag's parent company, one last chance to make things right, and the company's support person spurned her. Then she tweeted "Do Not Ever Buy Maytag—Our Maytag Experience Has Been a Nightmare." That's what her million-plus Twitter followers saw.

These incidents reveal how empowered consumers can be. But the same mobile, social, video-fueled technologies that empower customers also now empower you in reaching out to customers. You can create customer systems that are more responsive, interactive, and social.

We call these technology innovators HEROs (highly empowered and resourceful operatives) because it describes what they do, and evokes the right image.

- **Leonard Bonacci** runs event operations for the NFL's Philadelphia Eagles. His team of two dozen needs to keep 68,000 fans happy and safe on game day. He decided to give fans a code to send text messages if they need help. If the guy next to you spills a beer on your seat—or if a fan near you is having a heart attack—you can text and get help quickly. Now he has 68,000 pairs of eyes helping him ensure the game is enjoyable.

- **Frank Goudsmit** has been an underwriter for Chubb, an insurance company, for 21 years. When Chubb held an innovation contest, Mike shared his idea on how to automate insurance binders for life sciences companies conducting clinical trials worldwide. Chubb funded his idea.

- **Mark Betka** and **Tim Receveur** work

for the US State Department. They found an unused license for software called *Adobe Connect* and turned it into a program called *CO.NX*, a series of video-conferences to spread American ideas.

If these examples appeal to you, you could be a HERO, too. Here's how:

1. **Imagine how the technologies you use daily could benefit your company.** Facebook connects you with your friends; could you use it to connect with your customers? You use a BlackBerry to get airline information; how could you serve clients with it? One HERO, **Rob Sharpe**, a sales trainer at Black & Decker, took inspiration from *YouTube*. Now the sales staff are using inexpensive video cameras to create and share videos about their products and competitors.

2. **Figure out how big a job you're in for.** Beyond conceiving a technology

MANAGEMENT/DEVELOPMENT

Develop Your People Give them more responsibility.



by Jeff Wolf

TO NURTURE PEOPLE'S growth, help them to take on more responsibility.

Support, encourage, and coach them so they can cultivate new skills. Guide them to create their own development plans. *People are more productive when they take ownership of their plans.*

Set high expectations, encourage people to achieve their goals, praise their successes, and ensure open communication. Continually challenge, probe, and ask open-ended questions: *How does that work? What does that mean? If you do this, what might happen? Why do you think it will work? What's your next step? What tools or resources do you need?* These questions teach people to *think more strategically*. You empower them when you give them ownership. It shows your confidence in their abilities and enables them to *succeed or fail on their own*.

What people want most from their leaders are *praise, recognition, and appreciation*. Appreciation improves morale as it engages and motivates people, enabling them to feel respected and important and enjoy a sense of accomplishment. Effective leaders *catch people doing something right*, and rely on an arsenal of positive phrases such as: *You're doing a great job; you*



idea, you need to know what it will take to get it done. Make sure that the effort required is in line with the value created. For example, will you have to get PR approval? Hire developers? Do lawyers need to get involved? On the value side, will you generate leads? Reduce costs? Improve awareness? If you don't assess the pros and cons, you may not succeed.

3. **Work with your management and IT to get your project running.** They can help run interference and align ideas with the strategy. Technology isn't the biggest challenge for HERO projects—*corporate politics is*. In HERO-powered companies, managers and IT aid HEROs.

Be a HERO by developing a reputation for serving today's empowered customers. SSE

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ACTION: Be a HERO in your company.

made a difference in the project success!

An encouraging leader has great influence on people's performance! When people believe in themselves, they can achieve great things. People want to work for a company that has a culture of *high values, ethics, honesty, and open communication*. As Wal-Mart founder **Sam Walton** said, "Communicate everything to your associates. *The more they know, the more they care; and once they care, there is no stopping them.*"

Training is another key to keeping people engaged and motivated. By providing ongoing development, you create a pipeline of talented people who are full of ideas, thoughts, and inspiration. This sends a strong, motivating message to each employee: *We care, and we'll invest in you.* You'll be rewarded with *high engagement and enthusiasm* and become an employer of choice.

Coaching, done well, brings out the best in them and helps remove obstacles to their success.

Coaching is not about telling people what to do or how to do it; rather, you help them discover their own path by asking open-ended questions: *With which past projects did you struggle? What steps will you take to accomplish your goals? What excuses are you making? What's holding you back? What have you tried since the last time we talked?* Such questions make people think through obstacles. Coaching shows that you care, and try to make the workplace an enjoyable place to be. **SSE**

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ACTION: Develop your people for performance.

How Creative Are You?

Become a best place to work.



by Kevin W. Grossman, Marc Michaelson, and John Anderson

WE'RE MOVING FROM THE INFORMATION Age through the Knowledge Age to an Age of Creativity. The generation and application of new ideas is now the cornerstone of sustained economic competitive advantage. Likewise, to achieve their primary goals, organizations are becoming more reliant on the creative contributions of their people.

The challenge of helping people live up to their creative potential requires new and different leadership skills and cultural support, appropriate modeling by management and an environment where experimentation is honored and rewarded. If an organization is to build a better future, it must find ways to promote creativity.

What are the characteristics of an organization that continually reinvents itself? Much depends on the *values, vision* and *attitudes* that drive the culture.

1. A creative organization has a clear vision. It has a widely recognized sense of direction and purpose. The vision must be a clear understanding of the organization's identity to which employees can relate and align their personal goals and aspirations.

2. A creative organization is values based. It is anchored by a set of values that place people first. People are respected and everyone's unique contribution is solicited and recognized.

3. People form bonds of trust. Dialogue in which people express themselves freely and listen actively—is encouraged. Employees perform *meaningful work* that resonates with them creating passion for what they do.

4. People give their best. People do not wish to nor do they do the *bare minimum* or be satisfied with the *status quo*.

5. Creativity is the norm. People are free to tinker with things and discover new opportunities. People believe that *the possibilities for improvement are endless*. They have the confidence to step into the unknown and thrive in conditions of ambiguity.

How creative is your organization?

Is It Worth the Effort?

Building a creative, *best place to work* is about improving your competitive position and reaping a compelling set of benefits—including greater profitability, higher productivity, and increased retention of top talent. You'll increase customer satisfaction and loyalty and achieve greater innovation, creativity, and risk taking. *Best places to work* attract more top talent, have better reputations, and are trusted more by customers and employees.

Organizations that make the *100 Best* list are among the most successful businesses in their sectors with revenues and market positions that can only be won by superior performance. Their employees are inspired to give their best, to collaborate and perform to the highest standards day-in and day-out.

Best places to work are unique in their competitive approaches and cultures. Trust among co-workers and between employees and their managers is a hallmark of these firms. By building *high trust*, managers get the best efforts from their people—bolder creativity, better quality, more productivity, and greater teamwork. A high trust culture enables them to attract and retain the best talent. Trust breeds pride, enthusiasm, dedication, and superior performance.

Leaders of *great places to work* master their own states of being before they try to lead others. They're *self-aware* and *emotionally intelligent*. This enables them to make better decisions, to calmly navigate the growing complexities of today's global business environment, and to successfully engage and inspire people at every level.

L3 Learning Process

Self-awareness and *self-mastery* form the basis of our L3 Leadership Learning Process that addresses three levels:

L1: Leading self: achieving personal mastery. L1 begins with mastering your own state of being—something that must be done before you can lead others. This encompasses who you are, what you believe and how

you behave. Your state of being speaks to the sum total of your attitudes, beliefs, actions, and values. It spans your *vision of the future* and *presence in the moment*. In L1, you manage your personal life, *You Inc.*, including your physical health and energy, emotional intelligence, values and beliefs. If *You Inc.* is operating ineffectively, you suffer from lack of drive and motivation, poor productivity and low energy.

L1 also includes building a particular set of critical skills and behaviors (*Smart Skills*): emotional intelligence, influencing with integrity, interest-based negotiation, stress and change management, appreciative inquiry, and high-level communication skills. *Smart Skills* are needed in order for a leader to facilitate and grow the trust and credibility that a best workplace requires.

L2: Leading with others: Cultivating collaborative advantage. In L2, you learn how to create *collaborative work cultures*. This portion of the model focuses on *collaborative advantage*. *Best workplaces* go beyond mere teamwork by leveraging a *higher level of cooperation and mutual support*.

Collaborative advantage requires that you share your vision; share leadership responsibilities and accountability; share challenges; share power and equity; embrace interdependence; and instill mutual accountability. Leaders who influence with integrity and seek out the ideas and input of their colleagues build greater trust and credibility.

L3: Leading others: Creating the Best Place to Work. In L3, leaders lead with *integrity, credibility, respect* and *fairness*. To create a *best workplace*, leaders champion work-life programs and practices (like flexible work schedules, telecommuting and job sharing, child and elder care services, employee wellness programs, paid sabbaticals, and concierge services). These show *how much you value your people and help employees manage all facets of their lives more effectively*.

Given all of the benefits that derive from creating a *best workplace*—*greater profitability, improved performance, higher customer and employee satisfaction*—it's worth the effort. Today, poor leaders and uninspiring workplaces are being left in the lurch. *Best workplaces* thrive, and *enlightened leadership* is rewarded. **SSE**

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ACTION: Engage in the L3 learning process.



Effective Networking

Plan ahead for best performance.



by Barbara Bergstrom

AS YOU PROGRESS IN YOUR field and become known as a skilled professional, you must realize that *school is never out*. At least five people want your job, and right now they are gaining experience, educating themselves, and searching for ways to compete for your position.

You can't sit back and assume you are secure. Attend continuing education courses pertaining to your career. Join professional organizations to keep up with the latest trends. Also, become active and well known among your peers. Attend seminars, conferences, meetings, and conventions that provide workshops, and take advantage of networking opportunities.

Networking events come in all shapes and sizes. Speed networking (get together and talk to everyone in three-minute intervals) are spin-offs of speed dating. *Business after Hours* has been around forever. Organizations meet regularly for lunch and events labeled "networking" or "meet and greet."

These events fill a social need and enable you to make specific contacts. The *movers and shakers* are at the same events, and they are *working the room* as seasoned professionals. So, every time you walk out your door to attend anything, anywhere, realize that you are on your way to a networking opportunity. Prepare yourself with a supply of business cards, check your wardrobe choice, your accessory choice, and make certain you have breath mints. Planning prevents poor performance. So, prepare, in advance, for a conference, a sales meeting, a business meal, a charity event, a networking opportunity and especially a board meeting.

Who is hosting the event and who is sponsoring it? What is its purpose, and who will be there? Answer these questions before you head out the door. The final question is: what can you contribute to the event's success?

These 12 suggestions will help you when attending any networking event:

- **Make sure your business cards** are with you at social or charity events.
- **Smile—it is contagious.** Start an epidemic; infect the room with yours.
- **Shake hands** with those you know and introduce them to others. You are the consummate professional.

- **Plan ahead of any event** and get an idea of who will be there and who you specifically want to meet.

- **Look into the person's eyes when you shake hands and say his name.** People love to hear their own name. It also helps your remember it.

- **See and be seen.** When you enter a room, stop for a moment, then step aside. Get your bearings, and head in the direction you want to go. Chin up, good posture, confident stride, rather than wandering around trying to fit in.

- **Avoid two persons talking together.** It is a private conversation and should not be interrupted.

- **Recognize your peers.** You'll be appreciated as a team player, but don't spend time talking with them. Cultivate those you don't know.

- **Never write anything on the back of a business card in front of the presenter.**

Walk away and make notes privately.

- **Do not head for the bar or buffet table.** It is counter productive. Eat something before you go.

- **Be selective.** Don't give your business cards to everyone as if they were flyers at a hardware store opening. It appears pushy and unprofessional.

- **Follow-up.** Don't send emails or call everyone you meet. Be specific. Don't waste your time or theirs.

Use these tips anytime you are out of your office. Remember, it's not about you, but how you are perceived by others. Be perceived as a thoughtful professional; you'll be surprised how people will seek you out and look forward to doing business with you. **SSE**

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ACTION: Plan your next networking event.

MANAGEMENT/HIRING

Hiring New Sales Reps 15 mistakes sales managers make.



by Kelley Robertson

MANY NEWLY HIRED SALESpeople don't perform as expected, because many sales managers make 15 mistakes:

1. **They conduct low-quality interviews.** Most managers conduct poor interviews since most companies don't train them how to conduct great interviews.

2. **They fail to ask tough, probing questions.** They ask about work history, experience, and performance, but not about gaps in a resume and previous poor performance.

3. **They're misled by candidates who interview well.**

Salespeople can smooze and make a great impression to make people feel good about them. Just because you like someone *doesn't mean he'll perform well*.

4. **They rely on instinct or gut feel.** Many managers hire reps who make a great impression or have the same personality style as the manager. Once hired, these reps rarely perform to standard.

5. **They don't check references.** Many managers don't want to appear skeptical so they neglect this step—or delegate it to an assistant—and fail to shed light on the candidate's performance.

6. **They do not consider the type of salesperson they need for their culture.** If you require a sales rep to make dozens of cold calls but hire someone

who detests this, expect bad results.

7. **They don't make use of hiring tools, like assessments,** to identify the type of sales culture the rep will work in, the aptitude the rep has for selling, and potential shortcomings or problems.

8. **They don't ask candidates how they'll achieve results.** Ask probing questions to determine how they'll generate the sales that you require.

9. **They talk too much.** Don't talk about the company—ask questions; let the rep talk *at least 70 percent of the time*.

10. **They don't properly prepare for the interview.** Review the candidate's resume *before-hand*, identifying possible gaps and key questions to ask.

11. **They hire to fill a gap.** When you quickly hire people, you focus on *positive aspects* and neglect *shortcomings*, leading to hiring remorse.

12. **They allow interruptions during interviews.** Conduct interviews without distractions.

13. **They only interview people with industry experience.** Hire people who lack industry experience if they fit the culture. They add a new perspective.

14. **They do not get second opinions.** Involve other people in the interview and compile the feedback before making a hiring decision.

15. **They fail to seek clarification.** Don't take a candidate's comments at face value—if in doubt, check it out.

Avoid these mistakes and improve your chances of hiring a top performer. **SSE**

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ACTION: Avoid these 15 mistakes.

Insidious Competition

Take note of the five factors.



by Richard Telofski

COMPANY REPUTATION IS A crucial factor in achieving competitive advantage.

In the *brand age*, where image is crucial to company survival, companies with a better reputation perform better than those with a poor reputation.

This is not new information. What is also not new is that companies have always had rivals, and not just their direct competitors. There have always been *indirect competitors*, those individuals and groups who would like to alter the reputation of a company for their own purposes. In the past, activists, employees, labor unions, and customers, among others, have sought an unrestricted access to a communications medium that would enable them to affect the image of the companies they target. In other words, they want to further *their* own agenda, not yours.

Until recently, getting access to a wide communications medium has been a problem. But today, social media has greatly reduced the problem of getting wide and unrestricted communications access. With social media, individuals and groups are now able to *compete* for what the reputation of your company means.

These *insidious competitors* compete with a company over the meaning of its own image. These new competitors attempt, and often succeed, to redefine just what it is that the targeted company's image means in the minds of the world. Against the intent of the company, they fight for the very meaning of the corporate image. That they compete may be clear, but what perhaps is not so obvious is their *insidious* nature. *Insidious* means that the actions of these competitors are *gradual* and *subtle*. Their actions artfully and slyly build up their damaging effects over time, and in the process redefine the image of the companies they target.

How does this happen? *What does the insidious competitor know that you don't know?* What conditions allow this battle for meaning to occur?

In the social web environment, *five unique conditions enable insidious competition to thrive*. I call these conditions the *Five Factors of Insidious*

Competition. They support the actions of insidious competitors in redefining your company's image without your permission. Here they are:

1. Anonymity. That *anonymity* exists in social media should come as no surprise. Various social networks and other social web venues allow their users to sign-up and participate under any identity chosen by the user. Truth in identity, as well as in content created by those identities, is not a prerequisite on the social web. And under such conditions, in an environment where insidious competitors have no obligation to the truth, no explanation is needed to understand what can happen to the meaning of the corporate image. With identify masked, liability risk connected to statements becomes of little or no concern. Then, almost anything goes, and one of the things that often goes first is truth. What a powerful feeling this is.

2. Power. The anonymity that pervades social media makes individuals targeting your company image feel powerful. And power corrupts. And such power drives and supports individuals to perform unethical behaviors. It's the same principle employed when bandits wear a mask to a stick-up. Anonymity enables bad behaviors and, with no consequences, the feeling spreads. This brings us to the third factor.

3. Contagion. As others in the social web experience the *insidious competitor* spreading disinformation and redefining your corporate image, they feel that under the cover of anonymity they may act this way as well. The trashing of the corporate image then becomes a "pile-on," driven by a human need to be part of the crowd (you've heard of *crowd behavior*, no?).

4. Instinct. That need to be part of the crowd is instinctive. When we as individuals are caught up in a crowd we instinctively feel the need to support the actions of the group. We want to fit in. We want to go along with the crowd and support its collective interests. In social media, a virtual crowd, we can become an insidious competi-

tor ourselves, either wittingly or not. We can't help ourselves. Why? Because it's in our nature, just as its in our nature not to love large organizations.

5. Disdain. Who loves a large, red-tape based organization? I'd bet that mostly none of you answered "me." Men and women have disliked large, bureaucratic organizations almost since the moment they first created them. Ironic, isn't it? Ironic or not, it's pretty safe to say that widespread disdain of big organizations, and companies in particular, exists in society. It would seem that each of us possesses some degree of disdain of organizations. And when this natural disdain is combined on the social web with the other four factors, it doesn't add up to a positive situation for a company targeted by an insidious competitor. Social media is a perfect environment for breeding *insidious competition*.

What's a corporate image manager to do? Ignore this problem and hope that social media and the insidious competitors that lurk within are just going to go away? Social media isn't going away, nor is insidious competition. Neither are the *Five Factors* that exist in social media going to go away either. Those *Five Factors* are as natural as the mountains,



and eliminating them would be like trying to knock down the Himalayas.

These *Five Factors of Insidious Competition* are like hurdles in a steeplechase; if you want to run the race, you have got to deal with them. But how? Just as you have a sales force in the real world to combat direct competitors, you now need a force in the virtual world to combat those indirect competitors. Your social media squad needs to be active on the social web, daily. They need to patrol for instances of insidious competition against your company image, both on a proactive and reactive basis, preempting, seeking, and destroying any false representations of your company's image.

Winning the battle for meaning won't be easy. The first step is realizing that a threat exists. Your company, the instrument through which you solve the problems of your customers and by which you put bread on the table, is waiting for you to save it from the *Five Factors of Insidious Competition*. **SSE**

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ACTION: Beware insidious competition.

Beyond Price

What customers want.



by Walt Zeglinski

ARE YOU KEEPING YOUR customers loyal? If you think the price of your products or services is the reason you are attracting or not attracting and maintaining customers, think again. Today's customers are savvy and want much more from their relationship with your company than just a low cost.

Customers are looking for relationships that deliver unique value. Yes, they want the products to solve their problems, but they also seek a level of satisfaction that goes beyond the intrinsic value of what they paid for. By learning to tap into this deeper emotional satisfaction, your business with current customers will increase and you will uncover a steady stream of new customers.

You may have asked your customers if they were satisfied with their purchase. But the true measure is whether your customers are coming back. In a customer poll, you may find that 8 out of 10 customers are satisfied. That sounds great. But only 4 or 5 purchase from you again. Why? Because rational satisfaction (they were not displeased, the product worked) is only part of the equation. Customers who purchase again are emotionally satisfied. Moreover, emotionally satisfied customers will also recommend your product or service to others.

Here's the bottom line on measuring loyalty: 1) How many of your customers intend to purchase again, and 2) how many of them would endorse your company to others.

Creating Exceptional Value

Exceptional value is created when your customer perceives your product or service to be worth more to them than the price they pay. I see two elements for creating exceptional value:

The first is how well you communicate the unique value of your products and services as compared to alternative solutions. This is important and is likely to result in a high rational satisfaction. However it takes emotional satisfaction to develop a loyal customer.

The second factor—building deeper, trust-based relationships—is the key to emotionally satisfied customers. This happens when your employees show your organization understands a customer's needs, delivers more than is ex-

pected, and helps them achieve their goals.

Exceptional value stems from exceptional employees. Your people are the secret sauce in your ability to deliver on the value promise. You have to hire and retain the right people to make it work.

These employees are those who do not need management mandates to engage customers and adhere to company values. They are your customer's problem solvers. They provide the discretionary effort and intellectual capital that can take your customers from satisfied to loyal. And, an increase of only 5 percent in customer loyalty can add from 25 to 100 percent to your bottom line!

Developing emotionally satisfied customers who enjoy extrinsic value (beyond functional benefits) is an achievable ideal. It is the connection you should seek to

develop with your customers. You want to deliver more value than the functional benefits inherent in your product or service. You want your customers to experience the extrinsic value you bring to the relationship by being emotionally engaged throughout the buying process.

By optimizing the key performance drivers of value creation, you can tap the emotional bonds of your customer relationships. This takes the right people, the right process, the right leadership, and the right commitment. The investment you make in enabling your team to develop loyal customers will enrich your core business and enable you to gain market share. SSE

Walt Zeglinski is president and CEO of MAP, Inc. and former Managing Partner for Vital Factors. Email wzeaglinski@vitalfactorsinc.com or call 480-255-1120.

ACTION: Deliver unique value.

SALES/DISCOUNTS

Art of Discounting

Activate dormant customers.



by Rafi Mohammed

IN TODAY'S ERRATIC ECONOMY, the key to growing your business involves activating dormant customers using strategic discounts. By dormant, I mean customers who are interested in your product or service, but refrain from purchasing due to price.

The art of discounting involves offering lower prices to attract new budget-conscious customers in a way that minimizes the possibility of current buyers (who are paying full price) taking advantage of these price breaks. However, it's likely that some existing patrons will buy at the lower price. Thus, for a discount to be successful, profits from new customers must be greater than the margins lost from current buyers.

Sell through discount channels. More upscale retailers are seeking growth from outlet stores that target budget-conscious customers. Outlets have been a long time strategy for upscale retailers. Outlets are rarely located in major metro areas; thus, they target different geographic customers as well as provide credible hurdles for current patrons to jump over—a long drive coupled with a limited selection—in order to reap discounts.

Not all companies can open up a new outlet, however they can sell their products (and services) through distribution channels that target price sensitive customers in a way that reduces

the chances of cannibalization (current customers buying at a discount). High-end brands have sold discount gift cards through Costco, for instance.

Create a discount brand. It's common for companies to create a new brand to serve a price-sensitive audience. And while companies can't start a new brand tomorrow, they can sell their products at a discount via private labels. To protect their brand, many companies don't want the public to know that they are selling discounted products. With the right confidentiality contract in place, who makes house-brand products can remain a closely-guarded secret. About 65 percent of all

food and beverage companies are involved in private label manufacturing.

Use tried-and-true tactics, such as coupons, sales, and promotions. Instead of viewing these discounts as a way to move merchandise, think of them as avenues to activate price sensitive shoppers while

keeping your current base paying full price. This involves creating hurdles (such as early morning sales on off-peak days or making customers clip and redeem coupons) that allow budget-minded customers to credibly say, "Price is important to me."

When a company loses 15 percent of its sales, its leaders tend to take a slash prices and hope for the best stance. I focus on the fact that 85 percent of customers are still paying full price. The art of discounting involves maintaining current prices and implementing pricing strategies to activate dormant customers with low-price options. SSE

Rafi Mohammed, Ph.D, is author of The 1% Windfall (Harper-Business) and founder of Culture of Profit. www.amazon.com/1-Windfall-Successful-Companies-Profit

ACTION: Activate your dormant customers.

Customer Kindness

Turn clients and prospects into raving fans.



by Maribeth Kuzmeski

ONCE CUSTOMER SERVICE meant more than pressing 2 to wait for the next available representative. Companies valued those who bought their goods and services and went *the extra mile* to make them happy. Today we're more likely to hear about a company that's ripped off its customers than one that delights them.

Failing to make your customers happy is more than a shame—it is slow-motion suicide. To make it in today's crowded, recession-wracked market, you must create clients and customers who *rave* about your company.

So, what's the big secret to getting clients to go wild about your business? There must be an overriding and strong emotional connection—the *same kind that we feel when we cheer for our favorite sports team, or support a cause that means something to us.* You can get others to connect to your company, product, or service by *emotionally energizing* them through a *passionate delivery of information.* This is a true differentiator, since so few people and businesses act with such enthusiasm. When someone is passionate about something, we take notice.

To cultivate loyal clients and generate growing sales, you need to trigger a *strong emotional connection* in the minds of prospects and clients—followed by a response that is so powerful that your loyal clients can't stop talking about you.

Don't get caught up in trying to find the *perfect* clients. You can't *find* the perfect clients; you have to *create* them. You must give your clients reasons to keep coming back. You must connect with them so strongly that they cannot help themselves from telling their friends, family, and colleagues all about you.

Businesses that create a loyal following of passionate and vocal clients follow **five core marketing principles:**

Principle 1: What are You doing that no one else is doing? In order to gain exposure, it helps to be or to offer something unique—or do something that no one else dares. It's true that standing out from the crowd is the riskiest of the five principles. However, it's equally risky to run a conservative firm—you risk becoming an anachronism. While successful firms stick to their values,

they also find ways to be so exciting that people don't have a choice but to pay attention—and buy. Gaining exposure for your products and services today often requires a Herculean effort. To cut through all the noise, you have to step outside of the current norms and stand out. And to be noticed in a credible way, you must have a *compelling reason for grabbing people's attention.* Your product, promotion, offer, staff, or culture—or something about your business—must be unique.

Principle 2: Focus your marketing on benefits, results, and a call to action. Ensure you are answering the question, *What's really in it for me?* for your clients. Too many businesses accentuate *features* of their products or services



rather than the *benefits*—what your clients really care about. Benefits are *value statements* about the features of a product or service, with an emphasis on what the customer *gets.* For example, a benefit might be that a product makes you look slimmer or saves lots of money on gas. Don't leave it up to your prospects to figure out the benefits of your products or services. When you try to sell them on features alone, you're asking the customer to do all the work. It's in your best interest to draw a clear picture of a product or service benefit for prospective buyers.

Principle 3: Go viral! A *viral message* is an idea, notion, or practice that's transmitted from person to person through speech, gestures, the internet, email, or other media. *It ignites and motivates people to move the message.* Most viral marketing programs give away valuable products or services to attract attention—free benefits, information, software programs, or downloads. Do everything possible to make it easier

for people to access information or material that may go viral. This is an effective way of marketing and selling: proving your worth, earning followers, and continuing to provide value that people come back for again and again.

Principle 4: Leverage your business network for incremental growth. It takes a plan, but using your network—business and otherwise—can be the miracle alternative to the typical grind of cold calls and prospecting. A productive business network is filled with respected, well-connected, influential people—called *Centers of Influence*—that share your target market and have a complementary rather than a competing service or product. You can capitalize on these connections by creating strategic alliances or by simply sharing your networks and making referrals.

Your clients are the best source of leveraging in your business. When customers are delighted about their experience with your product or service, they become outspoken promoters. They can be your most powerful marketing force to gain sales and increase your exposure and influence, and can serve as unofficial—and unpaid—salespeople.

Principle 5: The ability to execute is vital to your game plan. In today's fast-moving, networked world, superior execution drives success. The best marketing strategy is the one you can pull off completely. If you choose one particular approach—for instance, setting up a referral campaign—and execute that one strategy fully and with precision, you are implementing the very best marketing strategy for you. It is not the strategy as much as the execution that achieves desirable results. Many businesses give up too early on a particular approach when they don't see immediate results. They then employ another strategy. The real problem occurs when companies try to execute a game plan that is focused on implementing outdated or poorly considered strategies.

People want to do business with those they feel they can trust. They are attracted to businesses that go out of their way to provide them *the absolute best products or services available.* And the best way to elicit that trust in prospects is by having clients who cheer you on. It comforts people to know that someone they trust is doing business with you and loving it. *Develop a marketing plan that will influence your clients to go wild for you.* SSE

Maribeth Kuzmeski, MBA, is the author of five books, including *And the Clients Went Wild!* (Wiley) and *The Connectors* (Wiley). She is founder of Red Zone Marketing. Visit www.RedZoneMarketing.com.

ACTION: Turn your customers into raving fans.

Winning Sales

Use creative techniques.



by Ken Rogner

I RECENTLY HELPED JUDGE SOME creative sales techniques. It reminded me that *creativity is always the way to win the sales game*. Most of the time sheer creativity is what sets you apart! Here are seven examples of winning entries:

1. Finding and selling an off-season product to season-only customers. The difference here was in how the customers were identified and contacted. Historically, this would have been by phone or in person; in this case, the new contacts and customers came via e-blasts and Facebook. The strengthening feature of the new product promotion, however, was still a billboard ad campaign. *How can you use technology to attract new customers or promote your creative ideas to existing customers?*

2. Seeing that a competitor's customer was about to lose his supplier due to bankruptcy, one salesperson had a new showroom display model of his product delivered to himself, at the customer's address. When the retailer called to inform him of the *mis-shipped* package he apologized for the error and promised to stop by and pick it up. When he asked if they'd enjoy seeing the about-to-be-released product version and received a *yes*, it was the strong *buy* signal. He got the business for the year. *What unexpected or remarkable things can you do to open the door or attract your potential customer's attention?*

3. Taking advantage of his bi-lingual abilities, this salesperson appealed to his service contractors (with counter card displays in Spanish) and asked for leads to other similar businesses. He offered added support and leads and spiffs in exchange for new contractors signed up. This program was so successful that he added a second level for referrals to other contractors in different businesses. That was also a success. *What strengths or unique talents can you utilize to win business from competition?*

4. Tie your promotion to a high profile name or event. During the World Cup soccer finals in South Africa, this European rep named his July promotion after the country's coach and team and alluded to their earlier-than-necessary demise. Because the event had all of his customers talking, his promotion

was a huge success. He *doubled business* from last year's promotion. *What event could set a timetable for your promotions?*

5. Creating unique reports to remind customers (and field salespeople) of an on-going promotion. This sales manager created *unique and customized reports* that could be e-mailed to field salespeople and their customers. The reports indicated progress made and unit sales still required to attain agreed to sales growth incentives. His sales center achieved *more than double* any other center's gains. *How can you use custom reports to remind customers of how they can achieve success in a promotion?*

6. By doing night-time, updated sales training and offering custom presentation booklets for a retailer's sales staff (and Saturday deliveries), this salesperson took 100 percent of the business away from competitors.

SERVICE/FUTURE

Future of Service

Tell customers when you add value.



by Scott Gross

THE ONE WORD THAT DESCRIBES a free-market economy is *choice*. Capitalism rests on our *freedom to choose* what products we bring to the market and the price we ask. And then there's this *little matter* of customers being *free to choose*. *To buy or not to buy—that's the question!*

For decades, customers were told, *Price, Quality, Service: Pick any two*. Today's consumers have a new sense of empowerment: "Price, Quality, Service? Yes, thank-you—we want all three!"

The New Challenge

In most industries, *quality* is no longer a big competitive advantage. Prices have driven many products and services to commodity status. *In tomorrow's economy, customer service will be the last point of difference*, a last chance to stand out. The new challenge will be to *provide the level of service your customers expect at a price they will pay*.

The challenge is delivering great customer service efficiently. Ritz Carlton service is now expected at much lower priced hotels. Some, such as Hampton Inns, have responded to the challenge. Car dealerships, hair salons, and septic pumpers are all compared to the Ritz. Being the best service provider in *your* industry no longer counts as consumers compare your service proposition with



The new round of sales training plus customized presentations rejuvenated this customer's consumer-business. *What unique training can you offer that will help a customer regain sales?*

7. Being creative about how products are assembled, packaged and delivered can increase volumes because of shared savings. This salesperson worked with a customer and created a check with order process that, coupled with a 12-model program, reduced costs for the distributor and the retailer. When the savings were passed on to the consumer, business increased dramatically. *How can you find creative ways to save costs and pass the savings on?*

Creatively solve a problem for your customers. *Help them regain lost sales. SSE*

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ACTION: Use more creative techniques.

those of providers in any industry. *Great service everywhere* is now expected.

In the 70's John Naisbet brought us *Mega-Trends* and the idea that *High Tech needs to be balanced by High Touch*. Today, *High Tech is High Touch* which leaves the door open for computerized customer service. *A computer, properly programmed, can deliver service that is just as fast and not nearly as surly as the kid with the nose ring behind the counter.*

For years I advised clients: *the value of face time, time spent nose to nose with customers, is growing*. I was right. But we're seeing technology change the definition of *face time*. *Face time* (think *Twitter* or *FaceBook*) is measured by a new standard. *You don't need to be physically present to win face time points!*

Successful players will obtain, maintain, and effectively use customer information. *Knowing your customers as individuals will be the single most competitive advantage.* You must *deliver service efficiently and inform your customers when you deliver value-adding service*; if the customer is unaware of it, you only add cost, not *perceived value*.

Years ago my wife showed me a cartoon that read: *If a man speaks in a forest and there is no woman to hear him, is he still wrong?* She thought he would be.

Providing great customer service can be like speaking in the forest. *You must know the customer, love the customer, give them what they want, and tell them that you did it—at a price the customer will pay. SSE*

Do you have a different idea, a question, or a comment? Let's talk! Scott@tscottgross.com.

ACTION: Tell your customers when you add value.

Whine or Shine

Avoid the double dip.



by Rick Johnson

IMAGINE THAT YOU WERE recently hired as the new VP of Sales for a company that has several branches. The former VP of Sales was fired due to stagnant sales (zero growth) for the past three years. Your challenge was stated clearly by your new boss, the President: **"Focus on growing market share!"**

The president promises you *all the support and resources you'll need* to get the job done. You have 18 salespeople and a National Accounts Manager reporting to you. However, two people who report to you were resentful of their former boss being fired, and you had to let both of them go. You feel that the President shows no sympathy and is not providing you with the resources to get the job done. Moreover, your Accounts Manager has become ill and is on sick leave. Now you have to fill this role as well. You told the President that you have too much on your plate to be effective, and yet you grew sales 6 percent during your first six months and personally secured two new major accounts that will contribute at least one million dollars to next year's sales.

You think that you're doing a great job but need help or you may lose the momentum, leverage, and excitement you've created. Your fearful feelings were bolstered by the President's reply: **"I'm not worried—that is why we hired you! I can't hold your hand."**

You then complain to your wife Amy, a Sales Manager for a medical device manufacturer. Her response is revealing but leaves you with questions:

"You are suffering from the frustration of a new challenge. Frustration can inhibit your progress, even immobilize you. You can't think or act rationally. If you are convinced that your requests for support are not working, you are much more likely to reduce, rather than increase, your chances of success. Remember, you are in control."

"Start with prioritization—Of all the challenges you are facing—which ones will have the greatest long-term impact on the company's success and growth? Focus on those. Which of the challenges are going to have the least long-term impact? (These are balls you can afford to drop or delay)"

Although your expectations for resources

and support are not what you had hoped, you knew you were walking into a mess. Get the right people on your team soon. Don't procrastinate on replacing the two people who left. The owner, as well as yourself, believe in your ability to be the best person—no—the only person capable of accepting and meeting the challenges you are facing. Does that mean you won't make some mistakes? Absolutely not. Does that mean some balls won't get dropped? No. Although you are the very best person to meet these challenges, you are still human."

"So, stop whining and create an outline of your plan and the resources necessary to succeed. Sit down with the President and go over your plan and seek the resources necessary demonstrating your needs with facts. This is your most important sales presentation. Be persistent and don't give up. Remember, he believes in you or he never would have hired you. I believe in you. If you don't get everything you want, deal with it. Remember, you are only human, but you are in control."

Do you think the President's response to Jimmy is appropriate? Is Jimmy over reacting? If so, how? If not, why not? Do you agree with Amy's advice? Why? What would you do or say if you were Jimmy's boss?

Recovery or Double Dip?

So, *how do you position your company to gain market share and be ready for anything in 2011?* Your gut should tell you if you, your team, and company can now **walk the walk**.

Confidence in execution means you are on the winning side of turmoil and confusion. You have faced tough challenges, made tough decisions, now is the time to execute and leverage your competitive advantage.

Your leadership has provided a *clear plan* with clarity of purpose and participation of the employees; raised the bar with relevant accountability; and defined a marketing and sales strategy.

You are now in a position to execute your initiatives. Improve your sales process first. The sales process is at the heart of your success. You have asked

and answered *many questions* in creating a platform for success: *What determines a profitable customer? What are your competitive advantages? What are your competitor's competitive advantages? What initiatives do you have to improve highest delivered value? How do sales reps spend their time? How often do you plan formal reviews to compare expectations to results? How do you measure costs? Who reviews and is responsible for customer profitability? How do you track lost business and lost customers? What single thing has the biggest impact on your profitability? What is your market share? How do you measure growth? How do you maximize account penetration? What is the*

role of inside sales staff? Do they proactively solicit business? How do you analyze operations? Is your plan working?

Now you must take action based on those answers and develop a **sales effectiveness-sales management process** with built-in accountability and a strategic plan to take advantage of opportunities. **Leadership is often measured by your ability to**

take action. The more proactive you are, the more productive you will become.

Try these four tactics:

- **Create self-imposed deadlines** to stay focused. Create *timelines* and *milestone markers* to judge progress. These can be *mini-goals* leading to your ultimate goal. Assign KPI's (Key Performance Indicators).
- **Don't be a perfectionist.** Don't let perfection or analysis *paralyze you* or your team into *inaction*. Sometimes *good is good enough*. Once you decide on your initial actions, you can always adjust or react to circumstance. Remain flexible.
- **Don't prioritize based on how difficult a problem is and leave it for last.** Prioritize based on the impact on your goals, importance and success. It's better to get *tough tasks out of the way first*.
- **Be proactive in all you do.** Taking action is always the best way to conquer challenges and master change. Doing nothing is not an option.

Your responsibility is to create change, instigate change, and then manage change effectively, knowing that most people resist change. Accept change as a *positive force* and convince those who follow you that *change is nothing more than a roadmap to a new and better destination.* **SSE**

Rick Johnson is a speaker and the founder of CEO Strategist, helping clients create competitive advantage. www.ceostrategist.com, email rick@ceostrategist.com

ACTION: Boost your performance in 2011.



Nourish the Culture

Stop obsessing over numbers.



by Jon Gordon

IF YOU ARE IN A FUNK AND I can't seem to pull out of it, you may be focused on the wrong things. By building engaged relationships, you can revitalize your culture and build a winning team.

Despite all the hopeful talk of recovery, we are still stuck in the recession muck, trying to survive the *new normal*—working twice as hard for the same (or worse) results. The anxiety is almost palpable—and performance is suffering.

Most managers are so busy they can't slow down to worry about a *little thing*, like how employees feel. That's the problem. How employees feel collectively adds up to *culture*, and *culture isn't a little thing*—it's what will pull you out of its slump—or not.

For years, managers focused on the numbers, and the numbers were good. So morale was up. But then the recession hit, and the numbers went down, along with morale, engagement, and performance. *Managing by the numbers* isn't working anymore. Trying to meet the same numbers and failing creates fear. *Managers need to change their focus*, but most don't know where to begin.

The new focus should be on culture, purpose, morale, and loyalty. All of that boils down to *engaged relationships*. These are interactive, collaborative, meaningful, and essential: To effectively lead, coach, work with, or live with someone, you must know them and have a strong bond with them. No matter how busy you are, you're not too busy to create these bonds.

I see a clear connection between engaged relationships and a nourishing culture. Here are *three key insights* on building engaged relationships:

1. Busyness and stress sabotage our efforts to build engaged relationships. With projects to complete, to-do lists to accomplish, goals to hit, and outcomes to achieve, life can feel like you are on a runaway bus. And instead of taking the time to get people on your bus, you run them over. You become so focused on *creating success* that you don't make the time to develop the relationships that lead to sustainable success. In times of stress, the brain goes into *survival mode*; you stop thinking about serving other people, mentoring them, and helping them thrive.

Just when you need to be the *most engaging*, you become the *least engaging*. What your people need the most, you're delivering the least. And so the problems multiply. It's a vicious cycle.

2. Where there's a void in communication, negativity fills it. These are uncertain times. Employees are wondering what will happen next, whether their job will be impacted, what action to take. *Uncertainty creates a void.* Unless you fill the void with *clear and positive communication*, people assume the worst. Fear and negativity creep in and dominate their *thoughts, behaviors, and actions*. In uncertainty, you need to communicate with *transparency, authenticity, and clarity*. Even when the news is *negative*, you can communicate it *positively*: Tell the truth, give them a plan, and help them believe, *we can turn this around*.

3. Employees need nourishment in order to thrive. Every employee wants to know, "Do you care about me; can I trust you?" If *yes*, they'll be more likely to work with you. Employees who feel

cared for, honored, and nourished are more engaged in what they're doing. Learn to view your employees like a *functional family*. This will change the way you treat them. You'll see them as *people who deserve your trust and love and require communication, transparency, and authenticity from you*. Be someone they can trust, and take the actions necessary to earn it.

Amid all of this talk of *engaged relationships and nourishment*, you can't ignore the numbers (numbers are indicators of success). Just know they are a byproduct of your culture, leadership, morale, engagement, and execution.

It is not the numbers that drive people—people and relationships drive numbers. Don't get so busy trying to achieve success that you forget to take the time to *develop the relationships that lead to success*. Relationships are the bedrock on which winning teams are built. SSE

Jon Gordon is a consultant, speaker, and author of Soup: A Recipe to Nourish Your Team and Culture (Wiley). www.JonGordon.com, www.Soup11.com, 904-285-6842

ACTION: Nourish your culture.

SERVICE/EXCELLENCE

Service at a Premium

Customers are willing to pay more.



by Zach Conen

IF YOU PUT CUSTOMER SERVICE on a pedestal as a core component of your offering—and mean it—you'll like *The American Express Global Customer Service Barometer*. It reveals on one hand that consumers are willing to pay a 10-percent premium for what they consider *excellent service*, and on the other hand may defect over a *single negative experience*.

If you consider *service excellence* to be a pillar of your offering but struggle to put a number on it, this is a soothing headline. If you have long wished to make service a priority but have been thwarted by those demanding a hard-and-fast return, this is a strong future argument (even before you begin calculating the lifetime value of that customer or the cost of acquiring new customers in the instance of customer defection).

The study provides reassurance that service is important and that service is a worthwhile investment, but also leaves open the question: *what exactly is excellent service?* The answer, of course, differs by industry, company, brand, and target market. Defining how you



deliver excellence is the art in customer experience delivery, and there is no "one-size-fits-all" way of getting there.

However, you can ask yourself three questions:

- **Is there someone in your organization who is responsible for the customer, across departments?** Not a head of customer service that handles issues in a call center, but someone who serves as the customer ombudsmen for the entire lifetime of the relationship?

- **Are you actively measuring performance**, both on the customer sentiment side (i.e., voice of customer feedback, surveys, communities) and the operational compliance/service delivery sides (quality assurance evaluations, mystery shopping). What are you doing with this data?

- **If you walked up to a line employee in your company, would they be able to articulate clearly what is expected of them in terms of serving the customer?** Would they be able to do it?

How you answer those questions provides insight into what size fits you, and how close you are to making that fit. It isn't always easy or quick, but it's well worth it. SSE

Zach Conen is Senior VP of Sales and Marketing, LRA Worldwide, a research and consulting company in Customer Experience Management (CEM). Visit www.LRAworldwide.com, call 1-215-957-1999 or e-mail zach.conen@lraworldwide.com.

ACTION: Deliver service excellence.

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