

SALES AND SERVICE Excellence

THE MAGAZINE OF TEAM LEADERSHIP

AUGUST 2010

**Influence
Results**

**Pinpointing
BP's Pitfalls**

**Networking
It's Like Dating**

**Lucy Rosen
Consultant**



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Sales and Service Excellence

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MANAGEMENT/PUBLIC RELATIONS

Pinpointing BP's Pitfalls

Eight ways to reconnect after a disaster.



by Maribeth Kuzmeski

FOR THREE MONTHS, OUR eyes have been glued to news of the Gulf Coast oil spill. With each barrel that gushes into the Gulf, our anxiety and frustration rises. Much of our ire is aimed at BP. With each passing day, the oil company is buried deeper in the disaster. And, worse is how BP has connected with the media and the public—resorting to misleading information, poor communication, and neglect in order to dodge responsibility.

The way BP has handled the oil spill should serve as the standard to avoid for any company facing such a disaster. Obviously, preventing the spill is best, but once the damage was done, the company could have mitigated the backlash it received.

You can expect public opinion to be at its worst right after the disaster. With the BP spill, backlash continues to get worse—because its leaders haven't communicated effectively. And it's not just BP's image that has suffered. Poor communication has negatively affected the public's view of the government. People are looking to the president for solutions and until recently they had

been mostly disappointed. Neither BP nor the U.S. government has successfully connected with the public since the spill began. When it finally stops, both could be left with irreparable damage in public opinion.

You are not likely to be involved in disasters of the magnitude of the BP oil spill, but bad things can happen—a financial scandal, contaminated or



faulty product, or high-profile lawsuit. What's essential is *how you react and connect with your most important publics.*

To create strong business relationships, repair broken ones, and reconnect with your customers and the public after a disaster, engage in eight practices:

1. Practice full transparency and full disclosure. Until you decide to lay all the cards on the table after a disaster—to be upfront about your decision making and solutions—you're stuck. You can't rebuild

relationships with customers and the public if you aren't being honest and upfront with them about what has happened. A lack of transparency attracts closer scrutiny and suspicion. At different stages, BP wasn't *completely truthful* about the spill. At one point, it wasn't allowing the media to get close to the site. By not being fully transparent and disclosing what they know, BP officials have affected their credibility. Many people wonder if they can trust any communication the company puts out.

By not being fully transparent, the U.S. government also missed a chance to get the public on board with them. People want to hear what the government is doing to stop the spill, and what it plans to do to help the citizens of the Gulf Coast. Only recently have we received a clear picture from President Obama about government's role.

2. Get out in front of the disaster. After several people died from taking cyanide-laced *Extra-Strength Tylenol* in 1982, Johnson & Johnson immediately accepted responsibility, recalled all Tylenol products (even though it was an isolated incident), and developed a tamper-proof seal. They showed us that they were doing all in their power to *protect us and fix the problem.*

When you get in front of a problem,

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you show people that you are doing something about it and that you care. *Caring is a key point of connection.* Your public has to see that you care enough about them to forget your own well-being for the time and do what you can to restore *their* safety and *their* well-being. So much of it is perception.

Because BP was slow to accept responsibility and show they care about what the spill has done to the Gulf Coast, people perceive that the company cares little about them. That is difficult to overcome when you're trying to rebuild relationships.

3. Step up and take responsibility. To reconnect after a disaster, you need to accept responsibility. J&J's quick acceptance of responsibility is why they recovered so handily after the Tylenol scare. BP only reluctantly took responsibility. During the early days of the spill, there was much finger-pointing. No one wanted to say it was *their* fault. BP should have recognized that *no matter whose*

fault it was, they would fix it. They should have said, "There was an accident. It's horrible. We apologize for our role in this, and we'll do all we can to fix it as quickly as possible."

The government too seemed to deflect responsibility for its role. It was two months before the president openly acknowledged that the mismanagement of the Minerals Management Service played a role in the events leading up to the rig explosion and the spill. Until *someone* takes responsibility, the public doesn't feel that *anyone* will fix the problem.

4. Remember quantity and quality of communication count. Stay in front of the public and keep them constantly informed. In the case of the oil spill, the U.S. government too needs to stay in front of the people—after all, it stands to damage the livelihoods of U.S. citizens in addition to the long-lasting effects it will have on the environment.

When there is *insufficient communication*, the result is anger. And when you are dealing with a disaster, anger makes it difficult to connect. Even if you *eventually* get it right, it takes a long time for the anger to subside.

5. Don't shy away from tough questions. There is nothing easy about reconnecting after a disaster. People want difficult questions answered. Be prepared to answer them. BP executives have seemed annoyed that people are questioning them. "The company's spokespeople, including its CEO, Tony Hayward, often come off as dismissive. When dealing with a disaster, if you have to answer a question a thousand times, just answer it. When you're dismissive or act like you don't want to answer a certain question, you diminish the public's trust in you.

BP has tried to avoid answering certain

questions—it is another example of how the company has made things worse for themselves by not being upfront about all issues.

6. Be authentic—but think before you speak! When a disaster strikes, companies go to the script. You naturally want your communication to be well-thought-out. But your communication also has to be *authentic*. People connect with other people—not with scripts. So let your human side show. But *don't* be *authentic* in the ill-advised way BP's executives have! They have stuck to scripted apologies and statements. One of the few times Hayward went off script, he angered people by saying *he wanted his life back*. If your authenticity does not match up to your scripted statements, stick to the script. If you speak your mind, choose your words carefully. In his talk with President Obama, Chairman Carl-Henric Svanberg mentioned BP's concern for the *small people* affected by the oil spill. Naturally, that statement rubbed

many people the wrong way. People need to feel you truly mean what you are saying, but what you are saying needs to *help* your cause, not hurt it.

7. Couple your communication with action. Back up your communication with action. As time passes, Obama needs to take action. Thankfully, with the announcement of a \$20 billion payout from BP, it seems that he is holding BP's feet to the fire. Such action needs to

continue. You can't be all show and no go. You have to have clear communication followed by activity.

8. Make the public part of the process. In a disaster, you must assess who you should collaborate with, who can help you, and how they can help. When you do so, it shows people that you are working toward solutions, and they join your side. Make sure that all of the decision makers and managers are involved in what is going on. Get everyone in the room together collaborating. If they feel like they're part of the process, then they make sure they are part of the solution.

Now is the time to get the people of the Gulf Coast and beyond involved in the clean up. The government could take initiative to organize the clean-up. By bringing people into the solution, people can better see what the plan is. They become *insiders* rather than *outsiders* whose only weapon is to criticize.

BP took a terrible situation, and, via *poor communication* and *mismanagement*, made it worse. To salvage public opinion, BP and the U.S. government must work to *reconnect* through honest and open communication. **SSE**

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ACTION: Reconnect with your constituents.



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Master the Close

Move beyond ordinary.



by Patrick McClure

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN outstanding salesperson and an ordinary salesperson can often be reduced to one essential: their ability to close business deals.

In sales, you're rewarded or punished entirely for your ability to win new clients, close new business, and get new orders signed. You may be a nice person, you may be a rotten person, you may be a tyrant, you may be the favorite of the CEO, but when it comes time to pay the commissions, the top performers rise to the top of the list.

Top performers deserve the highest rewards. Top performers are almost exclusively *the best closers*. Therefore, it should be your top priority to understand in great detail the anatomy of a closer. Your success, your income, and your happiness depend on how well you master the secrets of Closing.

If you're already a great closer, you don't need to read further. However, if you're not a great closer—or you'd like to become a better closer—this is for you.

The Attitude of a Closer

If you are a salesperson, you're wired for performance. I think of Salespeople as Olympic athletes. They are highly competitive, they practice diligently, they love to race against their peers, and they live for the thrill of victory!

To be an outstanding closer, you need to have the correct attitude, and that begins with your self-image. Do you see yourself as a successful person? Are you naturally positive? Do you feel your life is good and getting better? Do you enjoy being a salesperson? Do you enjoy being around people? Are you generally optimistic? If you answered these questions generally in the affirmative, that's an important start.

Your *expectations* of what will occur in sales are powerful. If you expect that your prospect will want to buy your product, if you expect they'll be interested in learning about it, if you assume they will be friendly, if you are positive they will share your enthusiasm, then there is a very high probability it will be a pleasant and successful encounter.

On the other hand, if you approach

the sale with a black cloud over your head, with pessimism oozing out of your pores, and with a negative attitude ("they'll probably say no and this is a waste of time") then that is precisely the attitude your prospect will reflect back to you. No begets No!

What's this have to do with closing?

The most important part of your sales presentation is the *Close*, and it is vital it be approached with the correct attitude. This is where you will summarize the benefits and value to the client, and this is where you will ask for the order. This is where you look



the prospect squarely in the eyes, ask a closing question, shut up and wait for their response.

If you are worried, if you are nervous, if you are fearful, if you are negative during the close, it will broadcast in high-definition full color images to your prospect. If the close is fumbled, it will drive your prospect away faster.

Good Closers practice their lines, over and over and over again, until they can say them in their sleep. They know exactly what they will say and when they will say it. They know how to verbalize with impact, they know the right emotions to display, and they know how and when to listen. They know exactly how to respond when they encounter questions or objections. They are confident, well-trained, and relentless. They will not give up until they win the race!

All this requires experience and practice. Good closers make it look easy, but that's because they have mastered this important task. And so can you!

Sales Presentations

"The Close is the logical conclusion to a well-delivered sales presentation,"

notes, Eric Lofholm. A well-delivered sales presentation is a sequence of selling points, each with its own unique value proposition, supporting material (facts, diagrams, stories, testimonials, proof points) and trial close. To sell any product or service, you need to reduce the argument to a small number of compelling value statements, and then you need to have your prospect *agree* with each selling point. Each point winds up with its own trial close, and each requires a *positive affirmation* from the prospect. This could be a series of "yes" responses, it could be a head nod, it could be a big smile or laugh, it could be leaning forward in their chair with anticipation. The body language and verbal signals will deliver the message loud and clear: "I agree with this point."

As each point is made and agreed upon, the excitement builds. The atmosphere becomes more and more positive. The client begins talking in terms of "when" and not "if." When you talk about them using the product/service with great benefit, they will add additional benefits. They will begin participating in the sale. In many cases, they will even sell themselves while you sit back and watch it occur. Your job may become staying out of the way while they rush into signing the order.

Your observation skills during the sales presentation are vitally important. If you do not "land" the selling proposition and don't get a positive response, it's time to stop and figure out what went wrong. If your prospect is not agreeing, not smiling, not leaning forward, you've just been signaled: Warning! Danger! Do Something!

Immediately pause, begin asking questions and listening. What did they disagree with? What confused them? What didn't make any sense to them? What did they miss? Listen carefully to what they answer and to their emotions, and you will be able to understand how to get things back on track.

As soon as you're back on track, proceed with the rest of your sales presentation. Remember, keep it simple, keep it compelling, keep it short. Most sales presentations delivered to a single prospect can be completed in 30 minutes, even allowing for questions.

With the correct attitude and with a well-delivered sales presentation, you are now perfectly prepared for the final touch: the closing question and gathering the customer's signature! **SSE**

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ACTION: Master closing sales.

Sales Training

Ensure that it gets results.



by Kevin J. Sensenig

IN 2008, A LARGE AUTOMOTIVE service company best known for its retail business decided to refocus and accelerate its commercial business segment. Its new strategic focus was to achieve a 50 percent commercial sales mix by 2012 and to become the dominant retailer in the industry through increased brand offerings and availability.

The first step was to create the new position of VP of commercial sales. The new executive recognized that the sales reps (route salespeople with industry expertise) lacked the tools or competencies to succeed. They needed to learn professional selling skills—a new way of interacting with customers, approaching potential new customers and building long-term customer relationships.

Current sales reps knew the company's products and called on existing customers. Under the new VP's direction, the organization took a new approach—hiring strong salespeople, rather than industry veterans, and teaching them all about its products.

To develop commercial account managers (CAMs), the company needed a training program that combined the cultures and skills of the newly hired strong sales professionals from outside the industry and of existing reps who lacked selling skills.

The goal of the program was to teach CAMs to: Communicate value and serve from a customer's point of view; master the consultative selling process to grow sales profitability with integrity; inspire and serve customers to build business and customer loyalty; and develop a sales system that generated predictable sales results.

Customized Training

In first quarter 2009, the company hired Dale Carnegie to deliver two pilot programs to train the newly hired CAMs in the standard five-step sales process: build rapport; question customers to identify and understand their needs; recognize opportunities inherent in those needs and challenges and develop a suitable business solution; recommend the solution and help the customers in the decision-making process, motivating them to take

action; and follow up to ensure the solution delivered expected benefits.

In April 2009, a director of commercial sales training was hired to assess the sales training's effectiveness. She found the training program to be too complex. So, we simplified the process, integrating the five-step approach with a four-step sales process they'd developed. The outcome was a **four-step program**: 1: Gather—build rapport; 2: Ask questions—generate interest; 3: Solve—provide solutions; 4: Sustain—follow up.

Participants practiced the sales process with the company's products as they learned how to question customers and present their solution.

The training program merged two aspects of selling—human relations and sales skills—and changed route salespeople into business partners. CAMs learned the new selling process and

immediately improved their results. Sales managers were excited to build a sales team, not just manage individuals who were in the field servicing customers. The sales team changed dramatically, impacting the organization.

This blended model of sales coverage is driving terrific results, and the new approach has been well received by customers, who express surprise at the change they see in their reps. They now see the company as a business partner, as sales professionals work with them to grow their businesses. As a result of refocusing the sales culture, providing training and changing its approach to the market, the company is achieving its strategic transformation. **SSE**

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ACTION: Improve sales effectiveness.

MARKETING/SOCIAL MEDIA

Use Social Media

To build your opt-in list.



by Marsha Friedman

THE POPULARITY OF SOCIAL networks, and the meteoric rise of social media marketing (SMM), are exciting new directions for PR and marketing.

One drawback is the speed with which you can be forgotten. Even the social-

media savvy struggle to stay memorable. Being an active social media marketer, posting and participating frequently, does not guarantee your messages will be seen by everyone you'd like to reach. Tweets are here and gone in a flash. If your posts aren't showing up in someone's news feed or social network home page when they happen to log on, your only hope is for them to visit your profile to see what you're up to. Sadly, most of your prized connections are probably missing your posts.

My solution is to support my SMM with traditional email marketing activities. Try this one-two punch: My weekly newsletter helps my contacts remember me and what I do, and leads directly to new business relationships. That is the real reward of combining your email and SMM efforts.

The trick is to turn your social media followers into opt-in newsletter recipients.

Here are five tips for using social media to build your opt-in list:

1. Join targeted groups and post effective discussions. Choose groups that are active within your target market. Post discussions to demonstrate your expertise and drive people to your website. Make headlines short and interesting. Post a teaser, telling people what information you have to share and include a link to your website. Close with a question or solicit feedback. When readers comment, your post will be at the top of the group list where more people can see it.

2. Make sure your Website is "opt-in" friendly. Ensure your opt-in form is prominent on your website, with a message telling visitors that when they sign up for your list they'll receive helpful information. Include incentives for opting-in.

3. Invite every one, but don't pester! Every time you get a friend request or a new follower, send a message introducing yourself; include an invitation (with the link to your site's opt-in form) to sign up for the info you send.

4. Be direct, but not too often. If you have a valuable incentive to offer, post updates inviting your friends and followers to get it!

5. Be consistent in your social networking! Stay active in your networks and groups. Post often and wisely, and pay attention to group members.

Participation in social networks can be enjoyable and rewarding, so start posting and have fun! **SSE**

Marsha Friedman is CEO of EMSI Public Relations, providing PR strategy and publicity, and author of *Celebritize Yourself*. Visit www.emsincorporated.com.

ACTION: Build your opt-in list.

Get Social, Act Local

Learn to boost your findability.



by Heather Lutze

YOU MAY THINK THAT TO BE successful, *you must dominate the world*. But often, the real business is right under your nose—in your own backyard. But knowing how to attract and capture a local search audience and convert them into paying clients is a big challenge.

Fortunately, you can learn to increase your *Findability*, dominate web search results, and attract new local customers. How do you stay competitive in a local market where competition is fierce and your company offers the same perceived product or service as everyone else in the area? How do you achieve a real competitive edge in a localized market? Often, it's about two key things: *Get Social* and *Get Local*.

If you want to stand out in your local market and increase your web ranking, follow these key ways to get social, get local, and get more business.

Get Social

Social Media Marketing (SMM) enables you to show how your company is different, and gives a real voice to your online presence. If you now do some SMM, you likely do a good job of helping consumers find their social media platforms off the main website and keep their accounts updated with high-value information. However, to harness the potential of these platforms, you need to have a localized spin that facilitates search engine marketing.

Tip 1: Get everyone and everything on the same page. Your blog is the most important social media element you can create. So, it needs to be a part of your main web site and support your brand. Just having a blog on the Web doesn't cut it. You can have the best blog, but if it isn't an integrated part of your web site, it's useless.

Most businesses have a blog that acts like its own website, separate from the company's main web site. As such, the blog often gets more traffic and better web rankings than the main site. The blog gets all the credit for the owner's regular posts; the web site gets none. Ideally, you want your web site to get everything. The goal is not for consumers to read your blog, but to read

your blog, and then visit your site and take action. So, port your blog directly into your main web site. Ideally, users will see the same header and footer as the main site, making it easy for them to jump from a blog post to a relevant section on your website.

Tip 2: A little keyword research goes a long way. If you keep your social media platforms up-to-date and informational, then you'll want your potential customers to read them. The power of social media marketing is gaining search engine ranking by optimizing your platforms, getting found in the search engines and getting traffic to your platforms.

You're likely already giving great information, uploading videos and images, and giving customers a real value-add. Now, pick one strategic keyword per post and do some post optimization, and you'll have search engine ranking. For each blog, use a keyword tool (such as Google's free one, <https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>, find a keyword with good search volume, and add it into your post title and in the content.

Now, here is the trick for using a keyword tool to localize posts. You probably won't see the tools diving in deep enough to get search volume for Fairfield, Virginia, or for any town. However, what works for Americans, works for "Fairfieldians." If there is great search volume under *Cosmetic Dentistry*, for example, there's likely good search volume under *Cosmetic Dentistry, Fairfield VA*. So think global, but act local with your keywords.

Get Local

When it comes to marketing on the Internet, the sky is the limit for really narrowing in and getting in front of your target audience. Local searching is no exception. Here are a few tricks of the trade that can help you dominate local search results.

Tip 1: Use geo-targeting carefully. Many local businesses that do Pay Per Click advertising use Geo-Targeted criteria, which means your PPC ad

will only show if the searcher has a local IP address in the geographic area you've defined. The biggest gap in running only a geo-targeted by IP address campaign is that people who are not physically located in your area when searching won't see your ads.

For this reason, Geo-Targeted Pay Per Click accounts need to have two campaigns. Campaign 1 is the localized campaign that only shows ads to consumers in your area, and Campaign 2 is a statewide or national campaign with keywords that have local modifiers. Using our cosmetic dentistry example, in Campaign 1, you could show ads for keywords such as "cosmetic dentistry," knowing that only consumers in the surrounding areas would see them. For Campaign 2, you could show ads for keywords such as "cosmetic dentistry Fairfield VA," knowing that wherever that person is located, they have a need for a dentist in Fairfield.



Tip 2: Use local business center ads to gain additional, localized ranking in the search engines. Setting up a Local Business Center (LBC) ad account in Google is free—all you need is a local address. LBC enables you to connect your local listings with your Google Adwords account. When

someone searches for your keyword in your local area, your listing will appear with an address and phone number under the standard ad text. Even better, LBC ads can be optimized. For example, if one of your local listings is titled "Fairfield Dentist," you could label it "Fairfield Dentist, Cosmetic Dentistry" and gain ranking for someone searching for cosmetic dentistry in Fairfield.

Tip 3: Get the right local domain for the right audience. Searchers definitely identify with localized keywords; however, typically they don't search down to the street-number or phone number level until they are looking for directions or a specific provider. Therefore, get a web site address that is local-keyword rich. A small change in your web address can make a very big change in your search engine *Findability*.

Yes, you can dominate your local market. Ideally, you want to be the only provider in town as far as the search engines are concerned. **SSE**

Heather Lutze is CEO of The Findability Group—a Search Engine Marketing firm. She is a speaker and author of The FindAbility Formula (Wiley). Visit www.FindabilityGroup.com.

ACTION: Dominate your local market.

Start Connecting

Stop trying to build rapport.



by Jeb Blount

RAPPORT IS A POPULAR CONCEPT in sales. A module on rapport is included in virtually every sales training course, book, and seminar. A search on Google on building rapport yields a million returns. Yet, rapport is still a misunderstood and misapplied concept.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines *rapport* as *relation marked by harmony, conformity, accord, or affinity*. According to Wikipedia, *rapport* is commonality of perspective: being in sync with, or being on the same wavelength as another person to the extent that *you influence their behavior*.

Rapport-building is designed to develop common ground with another person through mirroring and matching body language (posture, gesture), voice tone and speed, word patterns, eye movement, facial expressions, and breathing. When you have rapport with another, you can lead them and change their behavior patterns.

Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) embodies these techniques. It is espoused by many rapport experts as the key to relationships and influence. Yet these techniques are complicated—it is difficult to get in sync with someone enough to influence their behavior. Few people have the inclination to become experts in NLP. Learning to effectively and discretely mirror and match people based on their communication style—audio, visual or kinesthetic—sounds great, but it rarely succeeds in real-world situations.

Finding common ground is a good thing. The more you have in common with others, the easier it is for them to like you. If you find common ground, use it to connect with the other person. The dilemma is that the quest for common ground in the guise of rapport building is often awkward and manipulative. Most salespeople mistake small talk at the start of a sales call as rapport building. They'll make dumb comments about some object in their prospect's office as if that is enough to initiate a relationship. Many salespeople go through the motions to *build rapport* so they can start *selling*.

Buyers aren't fooled. They find lame attempts at rapport building gratu-

itous and insincere. Over time, they become numb to such efforts. To get people to buy from you, forget about rapport. Instead, focus on *connecting*.

Abraham Lincoln said, "If you'd win a man to your cause, first convince him that you are his sincere friend." Rapport is not designed to develop trusting relationships but rather to influence behavior. In its purest form, *rapport is manipulative*. People who feel manipulated will distrust your motive, and won't feel connected to you. Connecting is designed to win others over by focusing on their needs. To convince them that you are their friend, help them get what they want.

Our deepest craving is the desire to feel valued, appreciated, and important. The key to connecting and winning others over is to *make them feel important*. How? By *listening*. The

more you listen, the more connected others will feel to you. You make them feel important, respected, and heard.

Sadly, we rarely *really listen*. We'd rather think and talk about *ourselves*—our wants, needs, accomplishments, and problems. Most salespeople never *sincerely listen* since listening doesn't make them feel important. When they are not talking, they're thinking about what they'll say next.

When you listen as people talk about themselves, you make them feel important. Although *truly listening* requires self-discipline, selflessness, practice, and patience, it is not complicated. Connecting requires only that you *really listen* to people. **SSE**

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ACTION: Start connecting by really listening.

MARKETING/PUBLICITY

Recession-Proof

Publicity is the key.



by Pam Lontos

IF YOU'RE THINKING OF CUTTING your publicity, think again. Today, you need to get your company's name out there.

Even if you're working with a small budget and advertising isn't possible, you can get great results with some *well planned publicity*. Publicity helps you get that extra celebrity and credibility so you can stand out.

Here are *five tips* to keep your publicity efforts going:

1. Inform the media that you have something to offer by sending press releases. It's

also a good way to get your product or service reviewed. Watch the breaking news, and if something ties to your business, send a press release to the newspapers, radio, television shows, and magazines offering your take as an expert to interview.

2. When you see something in the news that you have a strong opinion about, write a short op-ed piece. Op-ed stands for *opposite editorial*, referring to the page facing the editorial page. Even if your view is controversial, put it out there. Controversy often sells.

3. Write articles. Getting published in a magazine, journal, or newspaper is an excellent way to keep the company's name circulating and enable you to be perceived as an expert. When



prospects and customers see that your leaders have an impressive list of published pieces, they'll consider you a leader and *want to do business with you*.

4. Become an expert source for newspaper and magazine writers. E-mail or call the editors to find out what stories they're working on. If you can provide information or insight on any of the topics, offer it freely. When you have an article or story idea, call appropriate media editors and present your topic.

5. Use social media marketing (SMM) to promote your business online. These days, SMM is a vital and inexpensive

part of a marketing campaign. SMM helps you get your business' name out to the masses quicker and easier. Create profiles for your business on sites like Facebook, Twitter and Plaxo and interact with potential clients.

Your business needs to be out there all the time to maintain top-of-mind awareness. Publicity is an inexpensive way to keep in front of clients. When competitors cut back on marketing, by staying strong you *stand out, as the competition thins out*.

You need to show *why you are the best in your field*. Credibility does that for you, and promoting your business with PR builds credibility. You never want people to think, "What ever happened to (your business)?" Maintaining your publicity prevents that fate and helps you win new business! **SSE**

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ACTION: Engage in well-planned publicity.

Navigate Service Quality

You need a clear road map for success.



by Jim Jubelirer

THE AMERICAN ECONOMY runs on service, and yet many managers struggle with defining and measuring service, and linking those measures back to the supervision of service employees.

I see four keys to quality service:

- **Align.** Align the organization's mission with senior leadership and strategy—what's the organization trying to achieve and how does it plan to meet its goals?
- **Assess.** Be realistic about current performance—it can be painful to get accurate feedback, but it is essential to know how your customers actually think, feel, and act towards the brand.
- **Measure.** Measure customer satisfaction and loyalty—that which gets measured gets done, and good data about loyalty can aid decision-making.
- **Recover.** Recover from mistakes—mistakes will happen and companies can actually improve goodwill and loyalty by handling mistakes effectively.

Leadership

Business management is fundamentally hierarchical. Even in *empowered* organizations, workers still look for direction and feedback from managers. Low engagement, job insecurity, and financial recession are causing more dysfunctional behavior and anxiety.

Who "leads" a company? In today's organizations, many people have a leadership role and responsibilities. Effective leaders set the vision and create the strategy—they play a role in the planning and implementation of the mission; empower others—determine the proper use of time, talent, and resources to achieve goals and tactics; and execute through others—make decisions and organize projects and people.

The first key to service quality is to *ensure the mission is aligned with management's intentions and strategy*—what are you trying to accomplish and how do you plan to meet goals? Many companies lose their way over time and need to revisit mission and vision in order to set clearer goals. GE is famous for the "Boca Meeting", a gathering of the top 600 leaders, held each January in Florida. Managers discuss strategic priorities and strengthen relationships. Decisions and agreements made there

set up positive momentum for business unit leaders to take back. GE is also famous for rigorous management development programs at Crotonville which reinforce the strategic alignment between the individual's goals, their business unit, and the company.

Understanding where you are is the first step on the path to improvement. By assessing your current state, you'll see *how you got to where you are* today in regards to service quality, *where you are* and *where you want to go*, and *how to focus improvement efforts*. Current state will include how your leadership support, roles and responsibilities, culture, and strategies are aligned.

Areas of assessment include:

Market structure. Do you operate in a B2B or B2C market or both? Do you tend to create deep relationships with



key customers or operate on a more transactional basis to a mass market? Do you derive more of your revenue from product or service?

Strategy. Do you have clear strategy and goals, or only vague aspirations and hopes? What is the analytical sophistication and rigor for your external metrics like customer satisfaction and market share, and internal metrics like quality, costs and operational execution?

Morale and engagement. How engaged is your workforce? Have you profiled your workers so you know how many from each generation (Traditionals, Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y) work at various levels and functions? And, what their needs are, and how they differ from the needs of other age cohorts?

Customer lifecycle. Individual customers may be at different points on the lifecycle of their relationship with you. Each point in the *Customer Lifecycle* requires a different focus, and different metrics to track progress.

- **Awareness:** How do prospects learn about our product or service solution?

- **Trial:** Why do prospects try us?
- **Choice:** Why do customers purchase?
- **Order:** How do customers actually acquire or purchase from us?
- **Install:** What must customers do to get work done after the sale?
- **Learn:** What does it take for our customers to become proficient with our product/service/solution?
- **Use:** How productive and effective are our customers once they know our product/service/solution?
- **Support:** How do our customers keep our product/service/solution up-to-date and running?
- **Disposal/Repurchase:** How do our customers upgrade and/or recycle our product/service/solution?

Measure Satisfaction and Loyalty

The result of delivering a product or service that meets customer needs and expectations is *Customer Satisfaction*. It is determined by how well the performance delivered matches customers' expectation. Measurement at various customer "touch points" provides valuable input. *Customer Loyalty* is indicated by repeat business and active customer marketing of your brand name and products. *Satisfaction* means "I may like it but I could easily switch for price, availability, color and other considerations." *Satisfaction* does not indicate reticence to try a new provider. *Loyalty* indicates a reluctance to switch.

Recover from Mistakes

Service recovery strategies are used to reduce or neutralize customer dissatisfaction. If handled appropriately, a situation that begins with *dissatisfaction* can result in *satisfaction* and *loyalty*.

Effective service recovery programs: take accountability for the error, respond quickly, make it right with the customer, and track recovery data.

The *service recovery strategy* needs to align with organizational goals. Tactics flow from there. Examples of *service recovery tactics* include: making follow-up calls, offering free services or coupons, offering service replacement, **taking the HEAT** (Hear them out, Empathize, Accept responsibility, Take action, and Follow up).

Timeliness is key in service recovery. It must be as close to the service failure as possible. Managing the quality of service is a never-ending, dynamic challenge. Wise managers know which quality tools to use at the right time in order to please more people. **SSE**

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ACTION: Map out your service quality strategy.

Ride the Coaster Calmly

Tips for presenting in meetings.



by Adele Landauer

NOBODY AT HIS COMPANY knows David, which is a shame since he is a smart guy with many good ideas. In fact, he's personable, has a good sense of humor, and is full of aspirations. David works for a software company that offers opportunity for advancement. And people actually do know who he is. They see him in the break room being lively. His team members know him as a capable worker who is constantly finding ways to improve their projects.

So why does David feel invisible and irrelevant? His company is very meeting-oriented, and the future projects David will work on are decided in these meetings. In them, he has the chance to show his good ideas, and yet he ends up working on other people's good ideas. He participates and tries to engage and show his enthusiasm, but everything comes out wrong. He is not believable. He doesn't appear authentic. He has no charisma.

He has a *Communication Wall* that is blocking his ability to express himself in an honest and real way. People hear him, but they do not listen to him. His content and argument are betrayed by his body language and voice. Going into a meeting for David is like going on a roller coaster. He wants to show that he is not afraid, but once the meeting starts, he is screaming and flailing about. For David, there is a discrepancy between who he is and how he acts.

Eventually David tore down his *Communication Wall*. It was a process of deep introspection coupled with finding a strong desire to change and following through every day. To help him fight against his old patterns, David learned *seven tips* that actors use to make a strong impression:

1. Decide how you want to come across and what first impression you'd like to make. From the moment you enter a room, walk on stage, or step up to the podium, use your body language to show yourself to be likable, competent, persuasive, and charismatic. How people perceive you and judge what you say starts before you utter a word.

2. Come across as in control and capable. When sitting, find a comfortable position—do not bob or fidget. When standing, maintain a strong posture.

Ensure that you are standing up straight and not resting on a hip.

3. Every motion has a beginning and end. When you walk during a presentation, take a few steps to approach a designated point, avoiding mindless movements and gestures. *Let your body speak in a relaxed manner.* Every gesture should come from your center and return there or be replaced by an appropriate, natural movement. When you allow each gesture a moment to have an impact, your body language is more confident and you appear more knowledgeable and convincing.

4. Breathe from your core. During inhalation, your abdominals, lower back, and sides are extended. Relax them completely during exhalation. Nervousness, stage fright, stress and excitement can be easily managed when you use abdominal breathing.

5. Inspire your audience with your presence and intensity. Speak from the power of your passion. Ensure that everyone in the room feels addressed and involved. Spread your attention and energy out into every corner of the room to ensure that no one feels left out.

6. Develop a sense of mission! Believe that you have something important to say. Everything that you give and send out, will come from your audience back around to you.

7. Smile! Not only will it relax you, but it will create a real, open, and honest connection with others.

Success is determined by the quality of your content or product *and* by how that content or product is presented. **SSE**

Adele Landauer is a coach on effective presentation skills and author of Experience Total Freedom. Visit www.adelelandauer.com.

ACTION: Tear down your communication wall.

MANAGEMENT/RETENTION

Retain Top Performers *And gain a market advantage.*



by Jeff Wolf

RETAINING HIGH-PERFORMERS is a major challenge. As the economy improves, top performers will think about leaving.

Great organizations view *employee retention* as a *competitive advantage* and work hard to retain their most talented people.

Retention starts with culture. To keep your top talent, create an inspiring and energizing culture wherein they can thrive. This means having an organization with shared values, openness, and honesty, thereby creating trust and allowing talented people to voice their opinions and share ideas.

You must empower and encourage people to aspire to do great things and be innovative, and then reward their successes. High performers want to be challenged, provided with interesting work, and have the ability to make a difference. Recognize that *everyone is motivated in different ways* and take time to find out what motivates each person. If you can pinpoint these motivators, you can work with your staff to *achieve extraordinary results*.

Continually praise and recognize individual achievements, and make people feel good about themselves and their accomplishments. Be accessible, listen to their suggestions and

ideas, and keep them informed of everything that affects them.

Be certain you place them in the right positions. All too often we place people in jobs for which they're not suited. A specific job may not be challenging enough or individuals may lack the required skill sets. We always want to make sure the fit is correct.

Every leader must be held accountable for retaining talented people. If you see a pattern of turnover under a specific leader, a red flag should go up. Talented people will not put up with ineffective leaders. Continually look

for signs of dissatisfaction. Asking questions and receiving feedback are great ways to find out if people's needs are being met. Ask your high performers: What can we do to make you happier here? If the organization could stop doing one thing, what would it be? What's challenging

about your work? What motivates you to work harder? What are the greatest obstacles to getting your work done? What resources do you need that you currently lack?

These questions open a constructive dialogue that allows you to discover talented people's needs. Once you gain awareness, work quickly to fulfill these needs. Provide continual education and training so leaders can grow and learn new ideas. Then provide a career path with opportunities for growth and advancement. **SSE**

Jeff Wolf is a speaker, coach, leadership consultant, and co-author of Roadmap to Success and The Essence of Effective Leadership. Email jeff@wolfmotivation.com.

ACTION: Retain your top performers.

Effective Email Marketing

Strategies for creating lifelong subscribers.



by Sally Lowery

YOUR SUBSCRIBER RELATIONSHIP is similar to any relationship. It starts with a date, doubts can occur, breakups may happen, or lifelong partnerships are made. As a marketer, these steps are all part of the lifecycle so you need to identify the phases and read the cues of your subscriber relationship.

A strategic email marketing program that takes the subscriber from introduction to a lifelong relationship.

You Meet Online

It starts with a visit to your site. Are you making it easy to be “introduced” and sign up. Whether it’s through your website or promoted through social media outlets, keep these rules in mind:

- **Think sex appeal.** Think about *appealing to your subscriber*. How does the term “Subscribe” compare to the term “Sign up”. It may be a small component of your registration process, but it’s the first call to action. Identify elements of your subscriber process that may be less than appealing or cause fallout.

- **Do a little self promotion.** Reinforcing the benefits of your email marketing program increases opt-ins and sets expectations. Whether you are promoting content or frequency, it gives subscribers a *clear idea of what to expect* and helps them make informed decisions.

- **Don’t come off too eager.** Many people subscribe in return for something that is valuable to them. You can consider different offers for signing up. But often a contact that has been incentivized through an offer is less likely to be retained. You’ll have to work harder at making it a lifelong relationship.

- **Think about how you make connections.** You need to be *where your possible subscribers are* to make a long-lasting connection. Try out various channels where your “would-be subscribers” are hanging out. Leverage social media to promote your opt-in. Include a permanent spot on your Facebook page or tweet about it. Don’t forget the more traditional paths such as SEO/SEM.

These are ways that you can raise your game in facilitating match-ups. Find ways to be creative, get yourself out there, and get those opt-ins.

The First Date

After you are introduced, you feel a connection. And then there’s a “how do we get to know one another better?” moment—and some magic (or a disconnect). This can also be true of your subscriber’s first experience with your email campaign. If expectations weren’t set or there wasn’t reinforcement of those expectations, it may end in your subscriber feeling as though you aren’t in tune with their needs. Subscribers should receive a *welcome message* immediately following their opt-in to your email marketing program.

A well-crafted *welcome message*

not only reinforces the benefits of subscribing, but it also puts content and frequency in the hands of the subscriber. To create compelling campaigns that speak to your subscriber and drive relevancy, let them tell you what piques their interest and use that data to create customized experiences unique to them.

It will definitely get them intrigued.



The Blind Date

A blind date is awkward. You have friends that match you up because they think you’d be *perfect* for each other, just to find out that you have nothing in common. You stumble through the evening, hoping that it will end soon.

Now let’s talk about buying a contact list. The reason I use “subscriber” is because someone who subscribes or opts-in to your email marketing program is much more likely to:

- **Achieve higher subscriber retention rates.** Opt-in lists retained 49 percent of their subscribers while those that didn’t utilize opt-in lists retained 28 percent of their subscribers.

- **Engage more valuable prospects and customers.** Those who opt-in to receive your messages will provide additional data, such as preferences, enabling you to create more relevant campaigns.

- **Be more profitable (higher conversion rates).** Someone who asks to receive content from you is more likely to open, read, and convert. Use the data that you collect to ensure that the message is timely and meets the needs of the

customer. Deliver what you promise.

- **Reinforce reputation.** The worst mistake we as marketers can make is to assume that *what we have to offer* is *what the subscriber really wants*. Making the assumption that a person wants to receive your message without their explicit opt-in can hurt your campaign performance as well as your brand reputation. Put the choice in the hands of the contact and you build a relationship that will last from opt-in to win-back.

“We’re Dating”

Once you are officially dating, once you start relating to your audience with relevant content that converts, you can create a real brand advocate. How? As in any relationship, it takes work.

- **Don’t treat every date the same.** A “one size fits all” message approach will not retain your subscriber. You need to segment and craft campaigns that are compelling. Begin to think of each subscriber as unique. Your subscribers will thank you, and the return will be well worth it.

- **Be responsive.** Nothing can be more relevant than an email campaign that responds to the lifecycle of your subscriber. Whether it’s a transactional message triggered from a purchase, or a win-back message trig-

gered after 60 days of inactivity, creating campaigns that respond to activity or inactivity are highly targeted and keep the subscriber engaged.

- **Allow communication to happen.** It’s easy to get into a push mode. Push campaign after campaign without eliciting a response from your subscriber. In today’s social environment, you must give your subscriber a voice. Whether it’s through user reviews, polls, or video, giving your subscriber a voice builds trust and brand loyalty.

We always seem surprised when our subscribers say “no more” or even mark our campaigns as SPAM. Over-sending can annoy your subscriber. Set frequency caps, and make certain that *every message that you send is relevant*.

Win-back campaigns are a must. Make every effort to win subscribers back before they disengage completely. Creating a lifelong subscriber should be a priority for your email marketing. Reducing churn and increasing loyalty positively impacts your bottom line and creates real brand advocates. **SSE**

Sally Lowery is Director of Online Marketing at Bronto Software. Visit www.bronto.com.

ACTION: Deliver the right message at the right time.

Networking

It's like dating—only better.



by Lucy Rosen

THERE ARE GOOD REASONS TO approach business networking much like you'd approach dating. In my 25 years of networking, I've seen how similar dating and networking are—in fact, simple “dating strategies” can be adapted for networking, with amazing results.

What makes networking so similar to dating? Everyone has felt nervous or apprehensive during dating, and many people feel those same “pre-date” jitters when venturing to a networking event. And, like dating, you never know when that one date—or networking event—will transform your life. In networking, as in dating, you've got to “try on” different people, and be willing to give a little. And, like dating, sometimes networking relationships don't take off either. As an adult, though, you won't simply discount the person who isn't a fit for you. Instead, you'll introduce him or her to another who is also part of the “dating pool.” Who knows? *That person may be the perfect fit for someone else.*

Whether it's a dating pool or a networking circle, *the key is to expand your contacts.* And that begins with a plan.

Tips for Setting Networking Goals

Successful networking starts with a plan. Those who plan and set networking goals find that they can broaden their circles. Takes these seven tips:

1. Be clear and specific in describing your goals. Saying that you want a new job, more clients, or to increase your business is not clear. But saying that you want a new job in a specific field, or a specific company, helps people know what to give you.

2. Set your goals in the short term (month), long term (year or two) and the future (two-to-five years from now). Short-term goals can be as simple as attending three networking groups and deciding which one to join and calling two or more people that you haven't spoken to in six months and inviting them for lunch, or a meeting. Long-term goals might be obtaining a seat on the board of the non-profit that you are active in, developing a workshop on your area of expertise, and pursuing speaking opportunities. Future

goals could include starting your own networking group, being further recognized as an expert in your industry, and anything else you want in your life and are willing to work towards.

3. Make sure your goals are realistically attainable within a designated time frame. Goals keep you focused, give you something to work toward, and motivate you. They can also be daunting, so keep them simple and attainable, and write a couple of action steps underneath each goal so that you see what it takes to reach that goal.

4. Set up a daily networking plan and set daily goals. Make sure to connect with someone each day that you can either help in some way, or who may be able to help you.

5. Make it one of your goals to have fun while networking. Treat each event you go to as just a fun party

with interesting guests!

6. Review your goals monthly and adjust them as necessary. Also, keep your goal sheet visible so that it reminds you to do one pro-active networking activity per day.

7. Be accountable to your goals. Get an accountability partner. Hire a coach or someone who can review your goals with you and keep you accountable in the action steps to reach your goals.

When dating, there are some dates that just “click” while others just don't. The same holds true for networking. But never get discouraged, and always look toward the next networking event (or date) as the one that may change your life (or career) forever! **SSE**

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ACTION: Improve your networking skills.

SERVICE/SATISFACTION

After the Sale

Keep customers happy.



by George Dennis

OFTEN I HEAR ABOUT ORGANIZATIONS that sell phenomenal products/services, but then fall short of providing a great customer service experience. This can hurt a company's reputation and leave patrons with a sour taste.

When you work to generate sales, you face two major hurdles: 1) convincing customers that they need the product in the first place, and 2) keeping the buyer satisfied *well after* the point of purchase. Companies largely grow from repeat business and referrals they receive from current patrons. If they don't do either, they won't last long.

Here are **five service tips** for keeping customers happy and ensuring that they know that they matter:

1. Listen, listen, listen. Give customers the time to express their frustrations or dismay without cutting them off or correcting them in mid sentence. They want to speak to someone who will listen to their problems and provide a solution. Allowing them to state their problem—no matter how annoyed they are at the service rep who had nothing directly to do with the issue—will reveal the right way to offer a long-lasting solution to their problem.

2. Uncover the whole story. Put

yourself in the customer's shoes. While they may be angry about something minor, other events might lead to their disappointment. For example, perhaps they traveled a great distance in order to purchase the product and returned home only to discover it's broken. Understanding all the reasons behind a buyer's frustration will help you appreciate their problem and resolve it.

3. Share experiences. Ensure that employees document each customer interaction so they can be shared with team members. This helps other service reps take care of similar situations more efficiently.

4. Act immediately. If a customer complains about your product or service, either directly or via a rant on Yelp or social network, contact the individual right away to resolve the problem. Chances are good the buyer will remove any negative comments and commend the company on its quick response and solution.

5. Make a good first, second and third impression. Be friendly and conversational with patrons *at every touch point*—and not just at the time of sale—in order to stand out. Make it a point to follow up with buyers—either by phone, email or snail mail—after they receive the product or service. They will remember that and possibly sing the company's praises through word-of-mouth referrals. Content customers lead to a successful business. **SSE**

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ACTION: Keep customers happy long after a sale.



Everybody Sells!

Turn service into revenue.



by Walt Zeglinski

EVEN AS THE ECONOMY HINTS at a rebound, markets are becoming more competitive, and products are rapidly commoditizing. As customers cautiously begin to spend more, companies are realizing that re-establishing their previous customer relationships isn't enough. The success of their growth strategy depends on increasing customer acquisition and loyalty.

Traditionally, sales organizations were charged with executing successful growth strategies. However, in today's upside-down economy, all employees are being asked to contribute to achieving revenue goals by upgrading their sales capabilities. Therein lies the **first dilemma**: *how to acquire new customers and increase the number of products and services purchased per customer, while maintaining the high level responsiveness customers have come to expect.* Despite the economic downturn, customers still demand high levels of service.

If you can identify ways to transform your employees' service best practices into *service-selling* behaviors, you can expect to increase your customer base and your bottom line. That's the **second dilemma**: *convincing your service employees to integrate selling practices into their customer interactions.* It means getting these employees to move beyond their current perception of what sales is, and learn how their use of ethical principles in selling can be a service to their customers.

Understanding Service-Selling

In a pure service culture, organizational and employee behavior is contingent on their knowledge and skill in responding to customer questions or concerns. However, in a service-selling culture, employees practice the attitudes, beliefs and skills to proactively seek to understand customers' wants and needs that will increase the value created in every customer experience. Service organizations that have not made this transition will find organic growth difficult. In fact, research has shown that a positive customer-service reputation does not guarantee you will be the first choice by consumers.

To achieve growth, everyone must enhance their commitment to identify the specific wants and needs of their customers and demonstrate how the organization's products and services can fulfill them. By helping your service-selling teams to develop the attitude, beliefs, and skills to provide more value to customers, they will build stronger emotional bonds in the relationship, a key prerequisite for customer receptivity and loyalty.

Overcoming Barriers to Change

Many organizations serve their markets and customers with a high level of personal *touch*. Even in today's troubled economy and despite more aggressive competition and little differentiation, most committed service organizations can maintain their reputation for providing a high level of customer focus. At a time when most consumers feel "like a number", this has great appeal.

But the successful transformation from a service culture to a service-selling culture can have many barriers—most having little to do with knowledge and skill. Many employees feel that embracing a sales philosophy may not be in the best interest of customers. As a result, they resist adopting a service-selling philosophy. To make matters worse, this negative view of selling creates cynicism. Although non-sales leaders may be committed to growth, they'll resist a strategy that may force superior service to take a back seat.

A successful transformation must engage the hearts and minds of employees and their leaders. To do this, they must learn to embrace the definition of *selling* and *service* as *two sides of the same coin*. Employees will change their perceptions if they discover that *selling, like service, is focused on identifying and fulfilling needs to create value for customers* (not pushing products). In fact, if *selling* can be redefined as *doing something for someone*, your team will give themselves permission to ask the extra question or provide the added benefit that increases value. You will then be on the path to transformation.



Bridge Service and Selling

Organizations that encourage their employees to practice ethical principles while selling and serving customers find their people willing to reach beyond their traditional roles and establish a foundation for deeper, more productive customer relationships.

Here are **10 ethical principles** that, if consistently applied, will assist your employees build their service-selling relationships with your customers:

- *Service* and *selling* are an exchange of value.
- Service and selling are not something you do to customers—it is something you do for and with them.
- Developing trust and rapport precedes any service or selling activity.
- Understanding a customer's wants or needs always precedes an attempt to offer a solution.
- Service and selling techniques must give way to values-driven principles.
- Truth, respect and honesty facilitate long-term success with customers.
- Service and selling pressure is never exerted by a service team. It's exerted only by customers when they want or need the solution being recommended.
- Dealing with customer concerns is never a manipulative process.
- It's a strategy to *overcome problems when customers want to overcome them*.
- Getting agreement to a solution is a victory for service team and customer.
- Ethics and values contribute more to sales and service success than techniques or strategies.

Service Selling: the Great Multiplier

Customer loyalty is a key to achieving profitable growth. If you define *loyalty* as *the willingness of a customer to repurchase or provide referrals*, then building high-value relationships is mission-critical. Unless everyone is contributing to your growth strategy, you won't achieve your revenue goals.

By engaging your people's buy-in to ethical service-selling behaviors, you'll increase your *sales per customer*, and retain the service culture your customers expect. Service-selling is a value multiplier, as it increases sales, retains your customers, and drives more referrals from your client base. **Dilemmas solved. SSE**

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ACTION: Bridge sales and service.

Lost Creative Spark?

Enjoy sustainable innovation.



by Robert Brands

DELIVERING SUSTAINABLE innovation is vital to long-term economic health.

We live in an innovation-driven world. We innovate, or we perish. Yet many innovation programs languish.

Following key *innovation imperatives* in time of recession is not only doable, but necessary for survival. When the going gets tough, cutting innovation erodes our competitive edge—and competing companies stand to benefit.

The keys to creating a successful innovation strategy are: Inspire; No risk, no innovation; New product development; Ownership; Value creation; Accountability; Training and coaching; Idea Management; Observe and measure; and Net result and reward.

These 10 rules are the cornerstone of programs that deliver profitable growth.

How inspired is your organization? From top to bottom, does your company encourage inspiration and welcome vision? Encourage the creative spark that ignites broader thinking and inspiration. Sustainable inspiration is vital to growth, but you must first identify its source and channel and nurture it.

Where does inspiration exist in your organization? We find that inspiration extends from the CEO to the customer service help desk, from the factory floor to the retail showroom, from the longest-tenured employee to the newest hire to the customer visiting your web site. No one deserves a pass from thinking creatively about how to improve the company, its products, or its processes.

Inspiration that Builds Innovation

While thoughtful leadership fuels innovation, inspiration remains the spark that drives the creative process. As you work toward profitable, sustainable, innovation, apply seven tips:

1. Make inspiration an imperative. Successful innovation is fueled by 10 imperatives: Leadership, ownership, accountability, risk and reward, and value creation, for example. But none is more important than inspiration. An inspired leader engages the team, and heightens the chance of success.

2. Identify and empower a Chief Innovation Officer. Inspiration and innovation need a champion, someone who helps develop ideas, fosters a culture

that encourages creativity, camaraderie and *esprit de corps*—and steers people toward greatness. The CIO is the inspiration quarterback who has the authority to drive projects through pipelines.

3. Set shared goals. Where do you want your team to go today—and tomorrow? The team must embrace the challenge as *a shared goal to be met together*.

4. Create the culture. Inspiration is bigger than the individual. It permeates the organization. Inspiration that fuels innovation transcends hierarchy and silos. It's not "just" the CIO's job. It's embraced by everyone.

5. And not just for the near-term. Life and business are littered with uncompleted tasks. Inspiration that leads to Innovation is on-going.

6. Observe, measure and know. Inspiration—like innovation—must be

measured to gauge performance. Each project team must have a leader. Create processes and milestones. Establish checkpoints to weigh accomplishments.

7. Never relent. Inspiration is a life-long calling. Herb Kohler, the inspired, ingenious chairman of the plumbing fixture company that bears his name, still heads monthly new product development meetings. At a time when his peers are kicking back, Kohler remains committed to his company's NPDP—and the inspiration behind it.

These rules must be *understood, implemented, maintained and protected*, in order for your program to succeed. **SSE**

Robert Brands is author with Martin Kleinman of *Robert's Rules of Innovation* (Wiley) and founder of *Brands & Company* (www.innovationcoach.com). Visit www.robertsrulesofinnovation.com.

ACTION: Encourage sustainable innovation.

SERVICE/CUSTOMERS

Stupid Is as Stupid Does

This shouldn't apply to customers.



by Lior Arussy

ORGANIZATIONS FALL INTO two categories: Some treat their customers respectfully, consider them to be smart and sophisticated, value the relationships, and engage them in a mutually beneficial ways. Others perceive their customers as stupid—no different than sheep that can easily be swayed into making the *correct decision*.

These organizations always dangle the carrot (timely discount or gimmick ad) for the sheep to follow.

While such companies rarely air this conviction publicly, they are easy to spot. Their executives display a casual contempt for the customers and view them as nothing more than a means to an end. They speak about them derogatorily and refuse to meet with them or engage them personally. These executives rarely make an appearance in the customer service department. For them, *customers represent the cheapest medium through which they can reach their financial goals and lifestyle targets*. These executives—and their companies—are *not* in the business of customer satisfaction. They are in the business of self-fulfillment through an existing customer base—satisfied or not.

How do you regard your customers?

Ask: *Are my customers smart or stupid?* Even if you've never raised the question, the answer is already guiding

your strategy and practices. To implement a customer-centric strategy, poll your employees. Find out what each thinks about the customers they serve. A response may involve language like *unsophisticated* or *vulnerable* or *uncertain*. Yes, many customers are uncertain, *unsophisticated* and *vulnerable*—often at the same time! But this doesn't make them *stupid*. It makes them *valuable*.

Enlightening the unsophisticated customer about a complex feature is a golden opportunity to gain the trust and confidence of customer who will likely reward your efforts with long-term loyalty. But if you disregard the

customer's need to know and instead tease them with discounts and jingles, your customers will either defect to the competition or demand compensation for past poor behavior on your part (bigger discounts, longer sales, increased customer service). Or, the board, shareholders and the wider public will become aware of these practices and punish your organization for it.

If you deal with unsophisticated customers, try turning *curious prospects* into a *loyal revenue source*. The empowered customer is more likely to tell their friends and neighbors about the unbelievable education they just received. By following the simple principle that *customers are not stupid but rather uninitiated*, you can turn the "Stupid is as stupid does" phrase on its ear and build relationships that stand the test of time. **SSE**

Lior Arussy is the president of *Strativity Group* and author of *Customer Experience Strategy*. Visit www.strativity.com or www.cstrategythebook.com.

ACTION: Consider how you regard customers.



Convert Leads to Customers

Ensure ROI from advertising and marketing.



by Dan Coen

HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU CONDUCTED direct marketing campaigns and received leads that respond? It feels great when qualified leads respond. Your advertising is working, and you have a chance to add new customers. It is exciting—and could be profitable!

For many organizations, advertising to generate response is the core of their business success. It is how they get new clients and drive revenue to grow the business. They are a slave to direct response. The key, though, rests not necessarily in the advertising, but in what is done *after the lead arrives*. Convert those leads into clients, and then, sell more, ongoing, to those clients.

How can you convert leads into clients and maximize the *Return on Advertising*? Most companies do very poorly at this. They spend money on advertising, with great thought put into how to attract leads, and in the message and placement of the ads—then fail to aggressively work the leads that come in the door, stunting the return on their advertising investment. This is common, your company is not the only one—much time and money is spent on the front-end, but too little thought is put into what will happen after-media.

And, many organizations have terminated their advertising consultants because they are not gaining enough customers from the ad campaigns. Silly, since the ad campaigns may be perfectly fine. *It is what happens after the lead contacts the organization that pales.*

Often, it's not the advertising consultants fault. And, it is not about the lack of response. Instead, it's about converting those leads into customers—and doing a better job at it.

So, with that said, let's go into it.

Lesson 1: To convert leads into customers, observe two simple premises:

First, you need a package of methods to compel their interest and drive memorability. Leads need to feel involved with your company. Otherwise, trust us, they will go elsewhere until they feel a nourishing involvement. Leads have no love for your company, the initial interaction is a first-date, there is no responsibility. So, you have to create that involvement by cre-

ating a plan. This is the science of developing strategies to get that lead, behaviorally, interested in your organization. The plan, the roadmap and the infrastructure, they need to be ascertained before you begin the process. Deciding you're going to close each lead on the first call—or let the lead disappear—is *not* a strategy.

Second, you need to touch your leads, repetitively. You can't abandon the lead. The lead contacted you and asked for information—or showed an interest. You must touch them, nurture them, consistently, to drive recall and branding. If they are going to buy on the sixth touch, you can not, like so many companies today, stop on the second or third touch. You need to give your advertising dollar every opportu-



nity of being successful. Do not neglect or abandon the lead. Touch the future customer—a valuable piece of data your organization paid to acquire—through a multitude of different methods, the repetition is critical. Otherwise, you simply entice the lead with information about your company, but abandon them before they decide what their final decision is going to be.

Lesson 2: Create The Program.

Converting leads into clients is based on multiple touches using multiple channels in a coordinated approach to drive revenue and profits. It is the methodology to build and drive the vision and tactics of your inside sales business unit. Who, what, where, when, how, why. Reach your audience by delivering compelling messages:

- **Build a program** (sell a product or target a group): find groups of leads that need to be touched and say hello!
- **Target your customers with multiple touches to drive retention:** how often do you want to nurture their interest?
- **Use different channels to communicate:**

what channels (all priced affordably) work for you?—email, direct mail, telephone, text messaging?

- **Develop creative tools:** brochures, letters, scripts, postcards, etc.
- **Build an action/offer program** that motivates action: buy their behavior by enticing their interest.

- **Outline the campaign duration:** how long does each campaign run?

- **Follow up:** who will ensure that your lead is touched enough times to determine whether it is a *buying lead* or just an *inquiring lead*?

Lesson 3: Create a detailed spec for each category in your program:

- **Product definition**—how and why it shines: features and benefits; value proposition for each product; why the product provides success to clients.

- **Offer definition**—compelling and easy and x-sells correlate: tied to their circumstances; compelling—“Low price for value”; easy—“We'll do all the work”.

- **Script scalability and flexibility**—the roadmap for the calls: have multiple pathways for the customer; include a lot of open and closed questions; do not be afraid to trial close for direction.

- **Rep training**—consistency through repetition, ongoing and forever: full scale sales training; mini-one minute training sessions; ongoing sales training modules on key skills; ongoing product development modules on key products.

- **Customer recognition factors**—(empathy / WIFM): verbal nods; are you talking their talk?; next step agreements.

- **The story of your brand**—establish the right choice, provide a spark: find one or two elements the customer 100 percent relates to—the narrative of *why your company is the one to do business with*.

- **Database mining/CRM:** your data is everything; your CRM is your *engine control panel* and provides analytics and opportunities for your reps and your customers; recognize different buckets and the programs for each bucket.

Much goes into creating the right package to convert *leads* into *clients*.

Leads needs to be nurtured to convert into customers. Don't waste your front-end advertising dollars to attract qualified leads if you're not ready to manage the leads, compel them to a decision, and convert them to customers.

Attracting 1,000 leads each month, selling 10 percent, and wasting 900 leads from your advertising dollars is a path you don't want to take. **SSE**

Dan Coen is author of *Ring Up Phone Sales and president of Call Center Today*. Call 888-835-5326 or visit www.CallCenterToday.com, or email MyCallCenter@CallCenterToday.com.

ACTION: Convert more leads to customers.

Influence Results

Get things done correctly on time.



by Sara
LaForest and
Tony Kubica

CAN YOU ACHIEVE RESULTS WITHOUT authority? Yes, but how? Failure to properly motivate your team is one way that you can sabotage your business.

Each of us has limited authority.

The *positional authority* that comes with our title enables us to have some influence, but far less than what is required to get the work done on time and with highest quality so you can meet the expectations of customers and colleagues. You need the right kind of influence.

Influence is the ability to achieve your objective (to get work done) when you do not have complete control or enough authority to accomplish your objective. It is not manipulation. Done well and done right, influence is also not: a demonstration of power, a method to gain greater control, a way to promote your personal agenda, a way to look good to others, or a means of self-promotion. Influence is about mutuality.

Overcome 10 Barriers

While influence is a power tool for getting work done, barriers that stand in your way can cause you to rely on positional authority to get things done.

1. Fear. Fear stops you from using influence to get work done. Fear appears in many forms. It can be the fear of failure, of being rejected, of appearing foolish, of not being good enough. Fear stops you dead in your tracks. You don't succeed, you don't exert influence because you convince yourself *before you even start* that you may not succeed.

2. Inability to develop real relationships. People work with, buy from and support people they like. It is impossible to exert influence on someone with whom you have not developed a real and positive relationship.

3. Poor responsiveness. The quicker you respond, the more responsive you appear. And if response is important to the person you want to influence, you make a positive impression on them, and add value by a giving them something they are interested in.

4. Overselling. Overselling is annoying and communicates uncertainty in your position. When a person says *yes*, and you keep trying to convince them,

what are you communicating?

5. Quitting at No. Nobody likes rejection. Yet *no* is often the response you get when *the timing is wrong* ("no, not now" or "no, I need more information"). Often, *an objection is not a rejection*. It's a request for more information and for further discussion.

6. Perfectionism. You may believe that unless a project or proposal is perfectly framed, it can't move forward. This is wrong. Perfectionism sends the message of you being indecisive and creates immobilization. While you may believe you are striving for perfection, others wonder *what's taking you so long*.

7. Over-expressing personal beliefs. If you can't keep your opinions to yourself and express personal, political or social beliefs or criticize your clients or colleagues with statements such as *they just don't get it*, you irritate others.

SALES/DECISIONS

Close More Sales

And get prompt buying decisions.



by Landy Chase

YOU MAY TELL YOUR BOSS "I don't have a commitment, but a decision is pending," but in my mind, *pending* usually means *dead on arrival*. What you really mean is, *I haven't got a clue when, or if, we will get the business?*

Your buyer has the right to think it over. In fact, I'd argue that a buyer who makes decisions on the spot is using poor judgment by acting too hastily. I hope that doesn't offend you.

But once a decision-maker has all your information, there is no reason for a long delay in a decision, favorable or unfavorable. In fact, they owe you a prompt decision as a courtesy to you.

Prompt does not necessarily mean *today*—it means *in a reasonable time frame*. However, with the right approach you can get prompt decisions consistently on all of your pending sales opportunities. First, you need to accurately identify what you are doing incorrectly.

You run into delays in getting decisions from buyers for three reasons:

1. No decision maker involved. This mistake has the most negative impact. In your initial meeting, ask your contact what their decision process would be in the event that they decide to buy from you. If this person is not the decision maker, *do not commit on pricing.*

8. Lack of focus. It's difficult to get work done or to garner much respect if you go from one project to another and finish nothing. People will just give up, quit listening, or no longer support you.

9. Poor impression management. This is not just about *looking the part*. It's about *being the part*. It's about managing your image thoughtfully. Tired, overweight, out of shape, sloppy people present a poor, unconvincing image.

10. Ingratitude. People like to be recognized, appreciated, and noticed in a positive way. If you don't do this, your influence on them will be minimal.

Is one of these barriers holding you back? If you don't address them, you won't exert the influence necessary to *get work done on time the right way.* **SSE**

Sara Laforest and Tony Kubica are performance improvement consultants. kubicalaforestconsulting.com

ACTION: Boost the influence you have on others.

(How can you give pricing to someone who cannot buy what you are selling?) Now you have the decision process identified. Explain that *you are not yet in a position to provide pricing, because you have not yet obtained input from the other people involved in the business decision*. This shows good business judgment on your part, not pushiness. Ask this person to assist you in arranging brief meetings with these other people.

2. No negative consequence. If there is no negative consequence to not making a prompt decision, the buyer has no motivation to act quickly. Impose a

negative consequence for waffling. Say, "*in order for us to guarantee shipping by ____, we will need your commitment no later than ____*". Or, "*We have dates available this month for initiating this project; however, if we do not get your go-ahead by ____, I can't guarantee availability of our staff.*"

3. No deadline set. Never leave a presentation without setting a date for the decision to be made. Say, "*How much time do you need to make your decision—a week?*" In most cases, the buyer will say "yes, a week is fine." Follow up immediately with a thank-you note, thanking them for the courtesy of their time and adding: "*Thank you for your commitment to make a prompt decision next week.*" You'll make only one follow-up call—in seven days.

Examine each of these strategic errors and correct them. **SSE**

Landy Chase is a speaker on professional selling and sales management and author of Competitive Selling. Visit www.landychase.com or call 1-800-370-8026.

ACTION: Close sales by getting prompt decisions.

Get Through to Anyone

Discover the secret: just listen.



by Mark Goulston

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN your modem is overloaded and can't conduct data between your computer and the Internet? Disconnect it, power it down, rest it, reconnect it, boot it up? *What if most of your people are like overloaded modems? What if they have no available bandwidth to implement much less even hear what you're telling them?*

If it's your people and you see the futility of pushing any more information at them, you might give them a day off or on their own they might take a long weekend, go exercise, catch a movie, or take a break in some fashion. That can certainly help. But what if what's overloading them is being talked at, demanded of and dictated to by you, their managers, their spouses, their teenagers, their aging parents?

That means that when they come back from their break, the pressure on them will quickly build up, and they may have to deal with what has built up during the time they were away. If that's the case, maybe they need more than a physical break from having to listen to everyone who is demanding something from them.

Here is an example of how *the power of listening* to someone can open other people's minds to you.

Once I spent months trying to schedule a meeting with a CEO, George, only to find him distracted and cold when we finally got together. Frustrated, I finally blurted out, "How much time do you have to meet me?"

He looked at me with a look that said, "I don't know, but it's just about over now!" I thought he'd throw me out at that point, but he fumbled with his appointment book in an offended manner and replied, "Twenty minutes."

I took a deep breath. "Look," I said, "what I have to say is worth your undivided attention which you can't give me because there is something on your mind that is much more important than meeting with me. So, let's stop now at minute three and reschedule our meeting when you can give me all of your attention. But you take the remaining 17 minutes and make a call to take care of whatever is weighing on

your mind, because it's not fair to your people, people outside like me, and even yourself to not be able to listen."

There was a pregnant pause, and then he looked right at me—totally engaged now—and then his eyes started to water. He said, "You've known me for three minutes and because I'm a very private person about personal matters, there are several people within 20 yards of where we are sitting who have known me for 10 years and don't know what you know. There is something that is bothering me. My wife is having a biopsy, and it doesn't look good. She's stronger than me and told me that I'd be better off going to work. So I'm here, but I'm not really here."

I replied, "I'm sorry to hear that. And maybe you shouldn't be here."

George continued: "Nope. I'm not as strong as my wife, but I am strong. Served two tours of duty in Vietnam. I'm better off being here, taking care of business. You've got my undivided attention, and your full 20 minutes."

What happened to cause George to not only stop being preoccupied, irritated with me, give me his full attention, and then give me more of his most precious resource, his time? George was feeling overwhelmed with pressures from work but more importantly with worries about his wife. When I pointed out to him that he was too preoccupied to listen to me, and then suggested he take my time with him to take care of what was on his mind, he felt I was putting his needs ahead of mine. In essence he felt cared about. When that happened, he not only vented, he exhaled emotionally (his eyes tearing up), calmed down, relaxed and felt grateful to me for my listening and understanding him.

I achieved that by not only picking up that George was preoccupied, but that there was something troubling him. I got into *his listening*—what he was listening to in his head—and suggested in a caring way that he take care of it.

How can you get the most and best from your people in difficult economic

times, when you can't reassure them of future job security. You don't have to be an intuitive genius to know that they're thinking, "I'm afraid of losing my job." And you've probably read enough articles about how to talk to them about being honest about what is going on, what steps the company is taking, and how it will affect them.

What if you were to get into their thinking, what's really on their mind that they will not tell you. What if it's along the line of: "If I get laid off, I don't know where I can find another job" or for older employees "If I get laid off, I don't even know if I'm hireable" or "How do I tell my spouse and kids that

we have to cut back and cut back considerably?" or "I'm starting to drink too much to deal with this" or "I don't know what I'm going to do if I get laid off." And what if thinking all these things privately is causing them to imagine the worst?

If you put yourself in their shoes and in their thoughts, you might discover that what they need to know or be reassured of is: a) they will make it through this; b) they have what it takes to get hired in the event they are laid off.

If that is so, you might think: "I know they've all been through tough times in their life. What if I sat them down individually or as a team and had them talk about tough times that they successfully made it through. And what if I asked them to explain what helped them to do it then? Wow, that would help them feel less alone, help them to realize they have made it through tough times before, and help them come up with solutions."

"Or if they worried that they can't get hired anywhere else, what if someone in HR sat down with them and helped them identify what they are extraordinary at that helps our company, and get them to focus on that area of supreme competence, even excellence."

Getting through to someone is usually less a matter of what you say than what you hear and address. As Warren Bennis says, "If you deeply listen and get where people are coming from—and care about them when you're there—they're more likely to let you take them where you'd like them to go. **SSE**

Mark Goulston, M.D., is author of Just Listen: Discover the Secret to Getting Through to Absolutely Anyone (AMACOM). Visit www.markgoulston.com.

ACTION: Get through in your communications.



No Free Rides

Don't do self-sacrifice.



by Randy Gage

IMAGINE AN OWNER KEEPING a terrible employee because he feels sorry for her. He hasn't the heart to fire her because her life is a wreck, her mother is an alcoholic, her husband's in jail—and so he enables her self-destructive behavior and lifestyle by keeping her on.

In keeping this employee, against his better judgment, his other employees must take up her slack. They feel resentful and angry. Performance suffers. Even hardworking, dedicated employees start to slack, because they see that they're not rewarded in respect to the effort they contribute. Customer service declines, and sales start going down, threatening everyone's job.

Now, suppose that the owner had acted *somewhat selfishly*, for the betterment of himself and his company—he calls the errant worker into his office and after explaining why, he lets her go. This could be the wake-up call she needs to re-evaluate her life. She looks for a job better suited to her skills and can do well. Or she repeats that same performance, and hopefully gets fired again, so she has another chance to learn the lesson she needs to learn. And, our boss has a company that isn't in jeopardy and a happy crew.

In a free society, where the needs of the individual come first, people are liberated from guilt and anxiety. Self-sacrifice is more than the root of low self-esteem—it is anti-free enterprise and anti-humanity. When the living energy of productive people is sucked from them by the parasitic herd, what incentive is there to remain productive? Every man and woman of integrity should earn their own living in the free trade of value for value with others. This means *no free rides*. There is no pride in receiving the unearned.

Today you have everyone telling you to be *selfless*, and *take care of others*. If you buy into this craziness in business, you are doomed to a life of lack, misery, frustration, of unrealized dreams, and mediocrity. Adopting self-sacrifice as a virtue enables others to take complete advantage of you and, practiced long enough, selfless behavior ultimately destroys you. You have no purpose in life, other than placating

others and *seeking their approval*, which you can only earn by giving up your happiness. This is sick, twisted and dysfunctional, but it's what social forces try to program you to do.

True happiness, success and prosperity begin with your core values—the things that are the most important to you. These drive the actions you take, and spring from your central purpose.

If you define yourself by your roles and view your purpose through the eyes of *servicing others, contributing to the greater good, or looking after the people around you*—then you have no personal identity, only a *low self-esteem*.

People who worry solely about the needs of others are not noble, benevolent, and spiritual. They are just crazy.

And because they don't look after

their own needs first, they can't help others in a healthy way. They can console them, participate in their drama, or enable their co-dependence, but they can't offer them real, meaningful help.

Your highest moral purpose must be your happiness. This is the only healthy, sane way to live—and the only honorable way to conduct any relationship!

You must not sacrifice yourself to others. That is depravity. It is a certain state of moral corruption and mental illness.

You shouldn't ask others to sacrifice for you, for that is no less sick and depraved. It doesn't serve anyone to degrade yourself or to degrade others. **SSE**

Randy Gage is the author of *Why You're DUMB, SICK, & BROKE ... And How To Get SMART, HEALTHY & RICH!* Visit www.RandyGage.com.

ACTION: Don't self-sacrifice for others.

MANAGEMENT/LESSONS

Fierce Competitors

Five lessons you can learn.



by Jeff Fox

FIERCE COMPETITORS RELENTLESSLY do whatever they legally can to pursue and capture every profitable customer. They never stop innovating, selling, reaching out, communicating, training, and executing. They never stop ripping out waste and bad costs. They play to win. They compete for every inch of shelf space, every customer purchase, every first look and last look. They want every good customer, every sale.

Here are *five lessons* you can learn from them:

1. Great leaders exhibit levels of confidence that exceed levels of certainty. They lead with confidence, even when they may be uncertain. They are sometimes fearful, but always fearless. Great leaders may be overwhelmed, but never daunted, always willing. They set *winning examples* for employees to emulate. They don't push salespeople—they push themselves, and pull all others. *Leadership* is not *pushership*—it is *pullership*.

2. Leaders can tolerate ambiguity. Leaders can deal with ambiguity, can deal with not having all the facts or all the data. Leaders make decisions without certainty of the outcome. In crisis, when thinking and reflection are most needed, fast decisions are required. But in crisis, the most needed facts and information are not available. Leaders respond and act. They may be wrong,

but they don't dither, dawdle, delay. They decide. They always ask: "How much time do we have before we must decide? During tough times when the need for guiding information is high but it's not available, and when there is no time to dwell, leaders pull the trigger."

3. Leaders are ever fearful. They watch what customers are doing, what the competitors are doing, what regulators and governments are plotting, and how best practices companies are improving. They are fearful they won't be prepared when trouble happens. Ever fearful, but never flinching from reality. Leaders are ever alert, on guard, at the watchtower. Ever wary, ever alert, is ever successful.

4. Leaders show fearlessness. Leaders face the fearsome and the facts. They're tough-minded realists. Leaders let the employees know the situation, the dimensions of the challenge. They do not parse words and spin. They tell the truth as they know it. They stay calm, resolute. *Fearlessness is infectious.* If the leader stands in the front lines, facing angry customers and merciless competitors, so too will the rest of the company.

5. Leaders have a "kitchen cabinet." Leaders are surrounded by people who have personal agendas. They need people they can trust—people who deliver the unvarnished truth, scuttlebutt, reactions, solutions, suggestions. Often such advisors are outside the company and come in through the *kitchen door*. If you have a great *kitchen cabinet*, it won't matter how hot it gets in the kitchen. **SSE**

Jeffrey J. Fox is author of *How To Be A Fierce Competitor* (Jossey-Bass/Wiley) and founder of Fox & Co, a marketing consulting firm. Visit www.foxandcompany.com.

ACTION: Learn from fierce competitors.

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Ken Shelton, editor



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