

# Sales and Service Excellence

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MANAGEMENT/STRATEGY

## Game Changing

*Create lifelong customers.*



by Chris Zane

I STARTED IN BUSINESS WHEN I was quite young—by anyone’s standards. I got my first tax number when I was 12-years-old and spending my spare time repairing bikes. When my Dad told me that I could buy parts wholesale if I had a tax identification number, I went out and got one. It meant that my tinkering hobby started putting a few hundred dollars a week in my pocket, which is quite a bit for a preteen. At the ripe old age of 16, I convinced my grandfather to lend me the money to buy a local bike shop in Branford, Connecticut and Zane’s Cycles was born.

Now, 30 years later, I am still at it. Today, the company has annual revenue of around \$15 million and an annual growth rate of 24 percent. Not bad for a kid with a dream. Of course, the path wasn’t always smooth and the tactics aren’t always pretty. In fact, a few years after I bought the store, heady with my own success, I decided that I could open a second location and expand into selling outdoor gear—sleeping bags, tents and camping equipment. I came to that decision all on my own, without asking customers of the bike

store if they might want to buy outdoor gear at Zane’s. It wasn’t long before I found myself with a pile of inventory, big bills to pay and what looked like the end of my own shop. But what could have been a disaster for my entrepreneurial dreams was actually the start of what I call game-changing tactics. The kind of plays that drive the competition crazy as they try to figure out what you



might do next and what that next move might do to their business.

To bail myself out of the dire situation, I held a tent sale to rid myself of the inventory. It turned out to be a huge success, and at the end of the day. When all was said and done, the revenue paid off all my vendors, and I had enough to start the process all over again. So I

plunked it down and Zane’s Cycles got a second life. I still hold the annual Big Wheel sale every spring that draws an enormous number of Zane’s customers. In fact, we do 15 percent of our annual sales during that single weekend.

**Game changing tactics are crucial** for an entrepreneur, and I admit that the part of my job that I love most is thinking up new ways to put pressure on our competition. Whether I am implementing new marketing programs or coming up with creative ways to change the rules of the game, I love pushing the envelope. Here are seven game-changing tactics that we’ve used at Zane’s over the past 30 years that keep our competitors scrambling to keep up with us.

**1. Offer a customer service experience that they simply couldn’t get anywhere else.** I realized early on that in order to distinguish Zane’s Cycles from the 17 other bike shops in the area, including the big box retailers, I had to offer a unique customer service experience. A bike is a commodity. But buying a bike at Zane’s transforms a mere transaction to an experience. I set my sights on creating a customer experience unlike any other of my competitors. And it served me well, earning me lifetime customers that are worth

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\$12,500 each to my retail operation.

I started by offering service plans that no one else in town was able or willing to match. I offered a one-year free service guarantee that eventually turned into a lifetime guarantee on any bike purchased at Zane's. Today, we attract customers from all over the country that value our services more than the next guy offering the lowest price and, perhaps more importantly, more than the bike shop around the corner from their home. By embracing the idea of offering superior customer service, we haven't just leveled the playing field, we tipped it in our favor. Today, Zane's offers not only that lifetime guarantee, but also gives away any part that costs a dollar or less, fixes flats for nothing, offers parents full trade-in value on kid's bikes when it's time for a bigger size, and we even installed a full size coffee bar so bikers can watch our mechanics at work or simply share a story or two about their most recent ride. Compete on price? That's Wal-Mart territory. But I'll compete on customer service every time.

**2. Drive your competitors nuts.** I cop to getting a charge out of turning conventional wisdom on its head and *driving my competitors nuts* while doing it. Here are a couple of ways we've done it, and they're not just mean-spirited moves. The primary purpose of these programs is actually to better serve not only Zane's customers, but also potential customers. When Connecticut passed a helmet law, I watched my competitors stock up on them. Instead, I started a program for Connecticut kids, offer helmets at cost of (course emblazoned with Zane's stickers) through the local PTAs. When the nearby Yale University students begin their annual migration back to campus, I watch the other shops haul in boxes of new locks while I send out our staff with a thousand locks, again emblazoned with our logo, to give away free to arriving students. The goal is to keep changing the game on our competitors so they're always trying to keep up. I never want to give them a chance to catch their breath—or move ahead of me.

**3. Drive up the price tag on talent.** Recruiting and retaining talent is an endless headache for almost every business owner. Good people are hard to find, and it's endlessly frustrating to lose a well trained employee you've invested in. So I do everything I can to make Zane's a great place to work. From time to time, I've also engaged in making it tough for my competitors to hang onto their employees, particularly when I found a bit of a smear campaign by managers at competing stores who were telling their customers that Zane's was rip-

ping them off. Rather than react with outrage, I picked up the phone and called on particularly offensive manager. What did I say? I offered him a job. After determining that he was making \$15 an hour, I offered him \$17.50. A week later, he called back to say his boss offered to match my offer, so I upped it to \$20 an hour. After another week of consideration, he called saying he decided to stay at his current job, because his boss matched my offer and the store was closer to his house. Fully expecting this, I told him I understood and then let him know that courtesy of me, he was now making \$800 a month more. In exchange for getting him a fatter paycheck, I asked him if he would end the negative comments about Zane's. To his credit, he did. Better yet, I just raised my competitor's overhead by \$800 a month.

**4. Keep the pressure on.** The point in keeping the pressure on your competitors is to get them thinking about what you're doing, focusing on catching up rather than focusing on innovating and improving their own businesses. My tactics here have ranged from paying the landlord of a storefront, where a competing shop moved out in the middle of the night, \$200 a month to post our store name and address (the old shop not only shorted the landlord, they forgot to direct customers to their new location) to taking out a huge half page add in the

yellow pages, dwarfing their postage stamp sized one. It's like jumping into a boxing match where I'm not just trying to keep from getting hit, but I'm trying to make my opponent think about what I might do next rather than about what his next move should be.

**5. Tactics of the future.** As times change so too must our tactics. After studying the impact of superior retailing and customer services, Texas A&M and ASU concluded that businesses consider expenditures on customer service more as sunk costs than as profit drivers. Understand that paying superior attention to your customers is a game-changing tactic that no one can afford to ignore. Even during tough times, a company shows its values when it retains its staff. I, personally, would cut computers, inventory and even the size of my store before I cut back on the number of people who create the kind of customer experiences that have made Zane's what it is today.

Whether you're revamping an existing business or starting a new one, game-changing tactics can be your best friends. I favor them over a blueprint approach every time. **SSE**

*Chris Zane is founder and owner of Zane's Cycles in Branford, Connecticut and author of Reinventing the Wheel: The Science of Creating Lifetime Customers (BenBella Books).*

**ACTION: Try some game-changing tactics.**

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# Build a Dream Team

*They will help you get where you want to go.*



by Joelle K. Jay

JEFF WAS A JUNIOR VP AT AN investment firm. He aspired to be the president of one of the company's regional properties. Even though Jeff was pegged to be a senior leader, he wanted to be sure he was prepared. So he brainstormed a list of leaders he hoped could help him. He then sat down with each person, one at a time, and asked them a few questions that would help him grow as a leader. By doing this, Jeff had created a "dream team" and was taking the lead in his career. You can do the same.

*A dream team is a collection of advisors who help you get where you want to be.* You turn to them because you know that on your path to success, they are further along than you. Your dream team might include: leaders you admire, leaders who have the positions you want to hold, leaders who have the skills you need, leaders who have achieved what you seek. Meet with these people one by one to ask questions, seek their guidance, and learn from their experience.

Unlike a mastermind group, you never assemble your dream team. Yet every member is hand-selected because together, they represent the best of everything you need to be the leader you aspire to be. Once you know who's on the team, you can draw on them one by one to support you in your success.

## Take Five Steps

Here are the *five steps* to help you assemble the best dream team:

**1. Choose the game.** Get clear on *why* you want a dream team. What do you want to learn from meeting with your dream team members? The answer should be tied to your vision. Perhaps you want to: *Learn how to generate passive income, Learn how to enjoy life more without giving up your career, Learn how to smoothly conduct mergers and acquisitions for business growth, Learn how to triple my profits, Learn how to be the kind of leader that balances respect for people and the results of the business.* Notice that in each game, the focus is on *learning*. On your dream team, you're the rookie in this one area of your life.

**2. Pick the players.** Be strategic about who gets on the team. This is not the

time to hang out with good buddies and old friends; it's time to build new relationships with people from whom you can learn. It is helpful to have:

- **Advocates.** Advocates champion you, encourage you, and contribute directly to your success, perhaps by introducing you to influential people or making you a part of their team.
- **Experts.** Experts have *information and knowledge* you need to be successful. Instead of learning it all the hard way, experts help you jump to new levels of awareness by sharing their experience.
- **Inspirations.** Inspirations are people whose accomplishments make you want to be better yourself. As you watch a person who inspires you—

whether that person is your most courageous colleague, a person who has risen to the top of her field, or just someone whose approach to life you admire—you are moved to a higher level of contribution and achievement.

These roles often cross. In fact, people who can play more than one role are often your strongest supporters.

**Now notice who is not on this list:**

- **Friends.** Friendship is not requisite. You will likely see your members as friends, and your friends may become members of your team. But you can also learn from people you hardly know and may not even enjoy.
- **Yes-Men and -Women.** Do not put people on your dream team who will only tell you what you want to hear. You already have your own opinions. Your dream team is meant to supplement (not rubber-stamp) them.
- **Your Boss.** Just because bosses manage your position doesn't mean they can help develop your gifts. They may. They may not. You decide.

Go for diversity. *Cover as many bases as you can in terms of gender, age, race, and station in life.* Your eyes will be opened

to new perspectives. Look for diversity of gifts. People who are powerful, political, compassionate, intelligent, international, local, aggressive, spiritual, and reassuring can all add special value. So long as there's chemistry, the more wildly diverse combination of traits you can cover in your dream team, the better. You can't get all of that in one person—that's why it's a team.

**3. Set the rules—how you want to play.** If you don't set up the process in a way you'll enjoy it, you'll be less likely to see it through. For example, you might seek informal conversation *when the time is right*. Or you might prefer a formal introduction with a letter and a follow-up phone call. Or you might arrange meetings according to each member's choice (e.g. 5 minutes in the office of one, a 15-minute phone call with another, a lunch meeting with a third). Decide how you want the process to play out so you put your best foot forward and feel comfortable.

**4. Define a win.** What is *the best-case scenario* for this dream team? What will define a *win*? Are you hoping to develop long-term relationships? Do you just want information fast? Are willing to talk to as many people as it takes? This step respects the time of the leaders whose advice you're seeking while also meeting the goals that matter most to you. If you want advice on how to set up a sole proprietorship, you can get it in short, one-shot interviews. But if you seek quality leadership, develop deeper, more substantial relationships with the people whose work you admire.

**5. Get in the game!** Approach the people you admire to be on your team—asking them to meet with you, talking to them, and applying what you learn as you work toward your vision. If a meeting with one of your dream team members is beneficial, ask them for a second meeting. Some conversations will be a waste of time; others will turn into mentorships that last a lifetime. These are genuine, respectful conversations (not manipulation) with people you admire to request the support you'd give someone who asked it of you.

Over time, meeting with inspirational leaders and role models becomes part of your personal development. You can achieve more, and faster, when supported by a strong, experienced team. With their help, you'll create the personal and professional life of *your dreams*. **SSE**

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**ACTION: Build your dream team.**

# Social Tribes

More potent than social networks.



by Bob Deutsch

**I**N OUR SOCIALLY-MEDIATED world, you must see your audience as *people*, not simply *consumers*. Simply *satisfying* consumers' immediate wants or needs creates a *commodity*, not a *brand*. You need to impress a *brand footprint* across all media channels, platforms, and touch-points.

To build a social brand, you should not waste time asking what consumers like, need or want; you should discover who these people really *are*. This requires research that elicits *stories* about how people feel about their world. The subtext of stories define people's *identities*—not their *interests*.

This modification in perspective will help you in sculpting the changes that are *shifting the ground* under your feet:

- From *person-as-viewer* to *person-as-participant*, to *person-as-creator-of-content*.
- From *brand-to-person* communication to *person-to-person* conversation.
- From *information-gathering* to *experience-gathering*.
- From *brands* to *"me-as-brand."*

Given these changes, you'd benefit by creating one additional change:

- **From social networks to social tribes.** Social networks are free-forming and require no face-to-face mediation. Hence, social networks allow for the expression of current mindsets, but are not good at moving that mindset into the field of concerted action. If you could help gird the formation of tribes, you would gain a larger ROI.

## Five Requirements

To form a tribe, meet 5 requirements:

**1. Unique revelation.** An ideology that rejects the mainstream and is symbolic of an uncompromising idealism and certainty that is expressed with romantic passion and cold logic.

**2. A belief system.** A mythology about how the world works and how tribe members and the tribe can maximize "self" in relation to that world.

**3. Ritual.** The creation of recurrent, exaggerated, stylized and condensed behavioral routines that represent the tribe's ideology and belief system; this helps create *institutional memory* and a sense of *post-icipation* (a feeling that you were *there* even before you were there).

**4. Distinctive Lexicon.** A lingo and

emblems that display membership.

**5. In-group/out-group accentuation.** A pseudo-speciation that defines tribal boundaries. The *other* is *not like me*.

The motivation for membership is: *I am becoming myself*. Belonging gives you a *sense of power* to *expand yourself*.

**From a tribe-forming perspective, marketing strategy should have three aims:** 1) designing a brand *persona* that is relevant to the public *mind* and *mood*; 2) articulating a brand history exemplifying its complexities and evolution, thus buttressing its relevance to the current communal mindset; and 3) portraying *current contingencies* as consonant with its history and persona.

In this way, a *metaphorical connection* is made possible between a person's *self-story* and the *tribe*, with each *symbolically reflecting the other*. This entails three cognitive aspects of belonging

that lead to feelings of membership: 1) *familiarity*—the tribe is like me; 2) *participation and trust*—the tribe likes me; and 3) *power*—the tribe is more than me and can help me become more of me.

By satisfying longings at the *individual* and *societal* levels, marketers can create a brand idea and *tribal-like belonging* to that idea. The result is *loyalty to tribe-as-brand* is experienced as *loyalty to self*.

**Today we long for tribal connections** that engage us with *passion and purpose*. As a member, we feel safer, more empowered. If you remember that brands should have a mission that arouse people's *tribal fervor*, your brands will gain higher repeat purchases, greater loyalty, and stronger brand advocacy. **SSE**

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**ACTION: Create a social tribe.**

## SALES/PROSPECTING

# Prospecting Facts

Communicate your solution.



by Bryan Flanagan

**Y**OU ARE NOT ALWAYS SELLING, but you are always prospecting. Prospecting is identifying the organizations and individuals who have a potential need for your products, service, or solutions.

We tend to make prospecting more difficult than it is. **Here's the simple version of prospecting:** You understand your products and services. You believe you have something to offer the prospect. You have a firm conviction your solution is better than what is being used at the present time. You believe your advantages are valuable to the prospect. You want to share these advantages with prospects.

**That's really all that prospecting is.** Don't complicate it—keep it simple! It is as simple as this: you believe that you have a solution to a problem and you want to communicate that solution to a person you've never met.

**Here are facts about prospecting:**

- *New salespeople build a prospect list.*
- *New salespeople rarely receive a list of the best qualified prospects.* You must learn to "self-generate" leads. That is, create the prospect list yourself.

- *Most new salespeople don't enjoy prospecting* (most veteran salespeople don't enjoy it either! You don't have to enjoy it, but you do have to do it!

- You must maintain the proper attitude to be effective when prospecting.
- *Prospecting is necessary* for your success. It is NOT a necessary evil, but it is a requirement for success.
- *You are always prospecting.* You are not always selling, but you are always prospecting. Always be proactive in building your prospect list.
- *Pressure selling is caused by a lack of prospects.* The more you can add to your list of potential prospects, the less pressure you place on yourself.
- *Develop a system to identify potential buyers and a process for contacting them.*

In fact, you may have to develop several processes for contacting your prospects.

- *Contacts lead to contracts;* so, discipline yourself to make contacts with potential clients. You should network early, late, and consistently.

- *Again, you must have the proper attitude* to be effective!

- *If you believe your solution will enhance the prospect's situation, then you have every right—and responsibility—to share it with him or her.*

- *You'll discover dozens of ways to contact your prospects. Find ones that work for you and implement them.*

**Prospecting should be fun and enjoyable.** You have seen salespeople contact potential customers in creative ways. You can do this also. Use your imagination to prospect, close sales, and help your customers. Turn on your creativity and *have fun as you prospect!* **SSE**

*Bryan Flanagan is the premiere sales trainer for Ziglar, Inc. and author of So, You Are New to Sales. This article is adapted from the book. [www.flanagantraining.com](http://www.flanagantraining.com)*

**ACTION: Excel at sales prospecting.**

# Team Sales

*Play to your strengths.*



by **Tony Rutigliano**  
and **Brian Brim**

**T**RADITIONALLY, SALES HAS BEEN THOUGHT of as a *single-player game*, and it may continue to be in your company. But some customers expect more attention and know-how from their suppliers than a single rep can handle.

In response, many companies have found success by creating *teams of experts* to support their clients. Different decision makers also have different needs and styles, and individual salespeople cannot possibly be a fit with all the buyers they encounter.

*This is the situation that Pfizer Oncology (PO) encountered*, and they found a solution in *team selling*. PO believed that deep product expertise on Pfizer's expanded product portfolio was too much for any one rep. So they divided the portfolio between two reps working in the same territory. Both salespeople, each offering specialized knowledge, called on the same doctors. The approach worked so well that four years later, PO adopted a *dyad model*, in which a pair of seasoned sales reps share the exact same goals and variable-comp plans. Most of the reps were promoted into this role in one of the most elite sales organizations at Pfizer.

We conducted a focus group with Mike Scouvar's Mid-Atlantic sales region to find out why the team selling approach worked so well. The first thing we noticed was *the emphasis that the account executives put on talents and strengths*. They're aware that each member of the dyad has different talents and how those talents work together.

"Often we complement one another," said one rep. "We have different ideas, look at things differently, and connect to different people. When we come together, we strengthen our ideas and focus."

It took a while to get to that point, however. When team member talents aren't identified, cultivated, understood, or applied properly, teams aren't as effective. What's more, it can take some time to calibrate talents, as Pfizer Oncology's team members discovered.

"We had some rough days at first, because my partner and I are very dif-

ferent people," said one rep. "We think differently. We process things differently. We do have the same work ethic, which is what holds us together. But we did not respect each other the way that we needed to make our relationship work. And we had conversations on the phone after work that were just knock-down, drag-out fights."

Pfizer Oncology is a strengths-based organization, however, so the pairs did not pit their talents against each other for long. With some insights and help from a Gallup strengths performance coach, salespeople learned how to apply the best of themselves in tandem.

"We've come to know one another's strengths very well," one account exec-

utive said. "This awareness has helped us build an incredible trust, and because of that and playing to our individual strengths, we know we can work out whatever is put in front of us."

The reps benefited from a *strengths-savvy team approach*, and so did their customers. Sales styles differ, but so do buying styles. In oncology, the needs of physicians and their patients can be extraordinarily different. A well-designed team can offer *more talents*, which makes meshing with clients and meeting their needs smoother and more efficient.

## Precision Design

Team-based selling can be exceptionally effective—but it can also drive people crazy. It depends on how the teams are formed. In their book *Power of 2*, Rodd Wagner and Gale Muller examined what makes good partnerships work. They discovered that the most successful and effective partnerships are characterized by complementary strengths, a common mission, fairness (consider pay carefully), trust, acceptance, forgiveness, communicating, and unselfishness. Managers can

help ensure team sales success by partnering people with these key attributes in mind, then supporting them.

The *Clifton StrengthsFinder* is a good resource for pairing team members with complementary strengths. Two people with strong *Competition* might butt heads, for example, but if they also lead with *Communication and Harmony*, they can work around conflicts. Having two people who lead with *Analytical* on a team is great for finding solutions, but *Analytical plus Discipline plus Empathy* plays to different parts of the sales process and helps a team stay focused on information, attentive to details, and understanding differing viewpoints.

"We're relying on each other here," said Dana Fiser, VP of corporate operations at Jenny Craig. "We have to trust each other in a team because we're vested in working with each other."

A mix of talents and strengths can help meet the customer's needs too. A high-octane client may initially respond well to a sales team with strong *Command, Competition, or Self-Assurance* talents. But sooner or later, a contract will need to be negotiated. A team that also brings *Harmony, Relator, or Connectedness* talents can use finesse when it's needed.

And we can't overemphasize the value of communication, as Wagner and Muller noted in their book. *Team members need to talk—constantly*. They must openly own their talents and their limitations and discuss where each can contribute the most and where each might need help. They need to communicate what each team member likes and dislikes about working with the other. Disagreements are often due to *differences in their talents*, but differences can be a source of high performance. Constant communication is vital.

The *Pfizer dyads* communicate about their clients, strengths, demands, and victories as often as four times daily, one rep told us. They talk in person, on the phone, via text messaging and e-mail.

"Success depends on *mutual respect*," said one Pfizer rep. "People have differences, and if they don't respect them, they won't take advantage of them. What we've done is *leverage the strengths* of two very different people. We recognize that, we'll be the first to tell you. But we're a team that has been able to take the best of both of us and respect that and make the most of it." **SSE**

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**ACTION: Play to your team's strengths.**

# Favoritism

*It's a huge problem.*



by Robert Whipple

**P**LAYING FAVORITES IS ONE OF the most damaging problems in any group. Leaders who practice favoritism have no chance to build a culture of trust. The antidote for playing favorites is *not to treat everyone the same way*. This is a trap that can cause problems because it ignores the simple fact that all people are different.

When Tony Robbins asked John Wooden, the great UCLA basketball coach, how he dealt with *treating some players differently*, John said, “*Treating everyone the same is the surest way to show favoritism.*”

The statement caught me off guard. I was always taught to *treat everyone the same way* to avoid being biased toward one person over another. John suggested the opposite. How could this be? To answer this question, let's consider the nature of favoritism and its implications.

**First, we need to recognize that we all have favorite people in our lives.** You can't have *exactly the same feelings* about different individuals. On some level, you'll like being with or working with one person more than another. To deny any favoritism within you for other people is to deny your humanity.

**Does having favorites mean that you play favorites?** I think so because you slant conditions to spend more time with people you like, less time with people you do not like. Then you begin to worry that you aren't treating people equally and perhaps over-compensate to give preference to people you do not like in order to not appear biased. Soon it becomes impossible to tell if you are being fair or hopelessly partial.

**If you treat everyone the same way, you are being biased because each individual is unique.** The needs of different people require you to treat them differently. You must consider individual needs and do your best to treat everyone the right way, not the same way.

**Here are seven ideas that can help:**

**1. Be aware of favoritism,** and use the word when a decision might be misperceived. Say, “I'm asking George to revise this budget again. Since I've done this in the past, I don't want to be perceived as playing favorites. George has the accounting background to do this. If you'd like to work on the budget, let me know; I'll get some training.”

**2. Operate outside your normal pattern some of the time.** This enables you to show you are not always picking a certain person for assignments. You can mitigate the risk in doing this by *selecting the application to change assignments*.

**3. Create a culture where cross-training is routine.** In doing so, you develop bench strength, and demonstrate less tendencies toward favoritism.

**4. Be inclusive with your language when you address groups.** Your choice of words will give away your feelings toward others, so always seek to use language that reflects a broad rather than narrow range of people.

**5. Be alert to your body language.** We communicate more through *body language* than words. Be aware of your facial expressions and posture when interfacing with people to not project a bias. If you pat people on the back,

do that for everyone who deserves it.

**6. Test for your biases.** Most managers are unaware of their tendency to play favorites, so they can't see the damage to trust when it happens. Seek a trusted person who will tell you if your actions are being perceived as slanted (*don't select one of your favorite people to do this or you defeat the purpose*).

**7. Build Trust**—with high trust, people sense the intent of actions better and can interpret complex interpersonal issues between people. If trust is low, people instinctively assume the worst intent rather than the best intent.

Even though you have favorite people, you can operate with fairness and integrity if you *do not try to treat all individuals the same way* in every instance. **SSE**

*Bob Whipple is CEO of Leadergrow, dedicated to growing leaders. bwhipple@leadergrow.com 585-392-7763.*

**ACTION: Beware of favoritism.**

## MANAGEMENT/LANGUAGE

### Power of Words

*Use aspiration language.*



by Sheila Murray Bethel

**A**S A MANAGER OR LEADER of people and teams, your words either inspire or discourage, hurt or help, divide or connect, cause fear or give hope.

As you lead others daily, your language will be like a still pond into which you throw a pebble—the concentric circles will go out and out. You never know whom you will touch with your words. *You never know the impact you have on others.*

**When you speak in aspirational language, you have a positive impact on people.**

When you speak in aspirational language, you lift minds and hearts. When you speak in clear, honest language, tasks get completed in good order. When your followers hear and see your skill at communicating, you set an example for them to follow.

**Ask yourself three questions as part of a Leadership Language Quiz:**

1. Am I working to become a more inspirational leader—using my words to motivate, inspire and give hope?
2. Am I using language to *build bridges of communication*—not erect walls?
3. Do I continually communicate the three vital message that build strong long-term viable teams—our mission, our objectives and our values?

As a leader your artful use of lan-

guage is about connecting with others, building strong relationships and inclusive communities. As John Ralston Saul wrote in *Reflection of a Siamese Twin*, “All the lessons of psychiatry, psychology, social work, and indeed culture, have taught us over the last 100 years that it is the acceptance of differences, not the search for similarities that enables people to relate to each other.”

The culture you create is a direct reflection of the stories you tell that support the mission and purpose of the people who work so hard to make it a reality. *Your language is the tie that binds.*

**What words do your followers hear, and what actions do they see?** There is no such thing as *perfect language*. It is vital that you strive to perfect your communication skills. As a leader you must clear away extraneous issues and get to core ideas. And then, you must walk your talk—your

actions must reinforce your works.

Chrysler Chairman Lee Iacocca wrote, “Leadership is forged in times of crisis. You need to communicate in a way that helps people understand their emotions and the power of the crisis.”

Team members are held together by the words they hear and the actions they see. When you reinforce goals, values, ideas and ideals in the minds and spirit of followers, your communication becomes an art form. You serve people best when your mission is articulated by *what you say* and by *what you do*. **SSE**

*Sheila Murray Bethel, PhD, is CEO Bethel Leadership Institute, speaker, and author of A New Breed of Leader. Email Sheila@bethelinstitute.com; call 925-935-5258.*

**ACTION: Use aspirational language.**

# Recognition

*Cash isn't the best driver.*



by Paula Godar

CONSUMERS HAVE MANY choices. Whether it's deciding on the hotel chain for a family vacation or the source for morning coffee, the options are endless. Often, the choice is made based on a *positive past experience*. For your next caffeine fix, are you going to the corner coffee house, where the barista spilled a latte on your laptop? Or will you choose the extra whip and a warm smile at the java joint down the street?

As one of the largest hospitality and entertainment corporations, Caesars Entertainment knows how easy it is for customers to switch to a competitor. They also know the key to creating loyal customers, and it's rooted inside the organization itself. Each positive experience at one of Caesars' properties leads to more frequent visits and the increased likelihood customers will spend more money with each visit.

Providing *exceptional customer service* is at the core of Caesars' business plan. CEO Gary Loveman believes that *keeping front-line employees motivated and engaged* is critical to *retaining customers* and better yet, encouraging them to visit again and again. This prompted Caesars to look closely at how it recognized employees for excellent customer service and other key behaviors. Loveman is committed to sharing operational success with employees.

## Cash vs. Non-Cash

For a decade, Caesars' employee recognition program focused on a cash-based reward system. Over time, *rewards* were getting confused with *regular compensation*, and employees were seeing the cash program as more of an entitlement, less of a reward. The connection to *employee performance*—and ultimately, *customer service*—was fading.

A Maritz study validates that while cash is the *most offered reward*, people receive more *encouragement*—from managers, coworkers, family and friends—to earn rewards like group travel, experiences and award points. *Experiential rewards* are more memorable than cash.

They also said they were *less likely* to share their success with others, by talking about their rewards, if they

earned cash. They tend to use cash rewards for bills or other necessities, like gas and groceries. The cash becomes an add-on to existing salary for living needs, instead of providing a memorable, rewarding experience.

Teaming with Maritz, Caesars restructured its recognition program and switched to a *non-cash* reward system. The new *Total Return* program *empowers and motivates employees* to perform. While employees work to improve the customer experience, they earn credits in a several ways, including customer service surveys, safety, customer compliments, and community service. *Total Return* engages 60,000 employees across Caesars' 40 properties, wrapping up corporate goals, property goals and employee desires into one unified rewards program.

The program *saves dollars* and contributes to the key business goal: *excellent customer service*. Service rankings are up four percent in the first year of the *Total Return* program, a testament to its merits.

Instead of using cash incentives to pay a credit card bill or buy groceries, employees use their *Total Return* points to purchase items more meaningful to them and others. Some employees discovered ways to involve their family, friends, and coworkers.

For example, a Caesars cashier at Horseshoe Southern Indiana used her credits to purchase a *cancer awareness watch* for her teammate, who had just returned to work after battling cancer.

Another Caesars employee, a valet attendant (and single mom) at Harrah's Joliet, used her rewards to buy a bike for her four-year-old son.

Why is the Caesars *employee recognition program* such a success? It's hitting on *key human motivators*.

## Driving Performance

Caesars' new recognition program enables managers to recognize desired behaviors that align with and support *excellent customer service*. Service rankings continue to trend upward. The level of employee engagement in the *Total Return* program and resulting behaviors reflect *four drivers* that influence human behavior. In their book, *Driven*, Paul Lawrence and Nitin Nohria of Harvard Business School, write about these drives.

Knowing the key to happy customers is *engaged employees*, Maritz worked with Caesars to incorporate the *four*

*drive theory* into Caesars' *Total Return* program:

**1. The drive to acquire stuff and status.** Caesars employees are amassing reward credits at record rates and acquiring personal and luxury items they wouldn't typically buy, including trips, iPhones, cameras and handbags. By sharing rewards with family and friends, they boost their status in the eyes of their peers. And, as a tiered system (levels include *diamond, platinum* and *gold*), teams work together and aspire to reach the next tier and status.

**2. The drive to bond.** The program is revealing a front-line team that is hardworking and generous as they use their rewards to make someone

else's life brighter. Caesars employees are reaching out to help others. "The *Total Return* program has connected our team in ways we never imagined.

Employees are discovering all sorts of ways to enjoy the fruits of their labors," said Terry Byrnes, VP of Total Service.

**3. The drive to create.**

Caesars' *Total Return* program connects *achievement with individual passions and pursuits*. People desire to creatively contribute to something bigger than themselves. By creating a recognition program more meaningful for employees, it satisfies the desire for purpose and meaning.

**4. The drive to defend.** The program is *standardized*, making it a *fair and equitable* motivator of behavior. The earning rules are clear; employees cooperate with one another to achieve larger customer service goals, which builds loyal relationships and fosters teamwork.

Caesars had the flexibility to customize the program for employees, and localize content, programs and awards appealing to its global employee base. Today, *quarterly customer service surveys* enable everyone at each property to be rewarded with a baseline amount of credits for achieving team goals, and with *individual, performance recognition*. In one year, all of Caesars' US locations qualified for *at least* one quarterly reward.

Caesars' vision was to create a new way to connect *achievement at work* with each person's passions and pursuits. By doing this, Caesars can focus on its key goal: *excellent customer service*. It's what keeps customers coming back. SSE

Paula Godar is Director, Brand Strategy for Maritz Loyalty & Motivation. Visit [www.maritz.com](http://www.maritz.com).

**ACTION: Try using non-cash incentives.**

# Keep Promises

## Build your reputation.



by Tim Sanders

**P**PROMISE MADE, PROMISE kept—that is a principle I hold dear. This was taught to me early in life by my grandmother, who raised me. She believed that we should keep our promises for ourselves (self-image) as well as for others (politeness, reputation). In her day, it was a basic measure of integrity, whether you are keeping a promise as an individual, team, or organization.

When it comes to being on time or on schedule, we live in a nation of tardies. This is profoundly true in the technology and creative community. When I worked at Yahoo, the parking garage was almost empty until around 9:30, then it gradually filled up—and stayed full, well past 6 p.m. Meetings never started on time, as most participants filed in fashionably late. When seasoned execs joined the company (after the dotcom bust), they were horrified by this cultural practice. They wondered how people could get-stuff-done in such a slack environment.

Worse, the advent of the mobile phone has enabled anyone to run late, so long as they call (or text) to say they are “stuck in traffic” or “in a meeting.” In the old days, you didn’t like to be late because of the stress, but now that your manager can say, “It’s okay, take your time,” then why run on time?

This mentality has bled into enterprise tardiness: Product launches and project implementations that run late or are re-scheduled at the first sign of complication. The trend has culminated into a *late-running nation* of people who can’t be depended on to be on time or keep their promise.

But that’s coming to a screeching halt in the frugal *performance economy* where *excellence is the admission price* to being gainfully employed or patronized by customers. Being *late* now signals a lack of commitment or maturity that’s *unacceptable* when many dependable options are available. So, I’ve made it a new policy to *be a little early for everything*—turning my book, dialing in for a conference call, or showing up for a sound-check or keynote.

Why? First, it gives me an internal sense of integrity that I can be counted on. *Internal integrity is the sealer* for

your confidence. Second, *early* often delights others who depend on you—and finding a delightful-surprise is always good when the customer experience counts. *Being early* (instead of *late* or *barely on-time*) is a great way to increase the *positive emotional experience* of *everyone* who contacts you.

To start *being early*, don’t try to fake yourself out with fast-running clocks or set artificial deadlines. Try these three things that I’ve been doing:

**1. Personal: Have redundancy when it comes to alarm clocks.** I use three: My iPhone, a battery-operated travel clock and wake-up call. Never depend on a hotel clock. Always double estimate traffic times. Leave a meeting that’s running late, if it’s causing you to be late for the next one. Announce your full-stop time if you are meeting to meeting, and don’t let anyone talk

you into being late. Leave a staff meeting early to be on time for a client call.

**2. Enterprise: Create a soft-launch, launch eve, and scheduled launch based schedule.** Make the *soft-launch* comfortably in front of the *scheduled launch*, and let your most demanding stakeholders in on the preview. On the *launch’s eve*, be prepared to pull an all nighter to finish; never accept the *delay announcement* as an option. If you miss the *soft-launch*, that’s a great time to reset expectations (key to the customer experience.)

**3. If you do run late, pay the price.** Over compensate those you let down to the point of pain on your part. This will raise the stakes, forcing you to be on time the next time. **SSE**

Tim Sanders is author of *Today We Are Rich*. Call 877-307-7403 or visit [www.timsanders.com](http://www.timsanders.com).

**ACTION: Keep your promises, and arrive early.**

## SALES/FOLLOW-UP

# Your Fortune?

It’s all in your follow-up.



by Joanne Black

**Y**OUR MOTHER WAS RIGHT: When you make a promise, follow up to keep it. When others follow up with you to keep a promise, thank them. Writing *thank-you notes* can boost your sales—*thanks* for a referral, *thanks* for new business, *thanks* for the meeting, *thanks* for keeping your word.

S note or card, make a call, or send an email as a *thank-you* for a referral. *You can never thank someone enough.*

Regardless of your handwriting, write the thank-you note.

- **Your referral sources want to know** that they made a perfect referral. Once they know what you need, they will send you even more referrals.

- **Your new clients want to know** that you value their business. Thank them. They are your premier source of referrals to others just like themselves.

- **Your prospects want to know** that you value the relationship, even if you don’t write business with them now. Continue to stay in touch, and connect them with your referral network.

**Writing thank-you notes is not old fashioned.** Writing a thank-you note shows that you *care enough* to take the time and energy and focus to thank someone for *their* time. Our world is fast-paced. It’s connected, electronic,

wireless, character-limited, and immediate. It has made person-to-person communication easy. But with that ease—the off-the-cuff email or text—comes a casualness that doesn’t communicate, “You are worth my real time.” Take the time. Follow up. Write a note.

**Here are five ways to stay in touch:**

- **Mine your database.** Use your database to record relevant contact information and provide a tickler for next steps.
- **Engage in social media.** If you’re not active in social media, you’re not in business. Pose and answer questions. *Social media is not a place to sell*, but to communicate valuable information.

- **Write a blog.** Keep posts short and post *at least* weekly. Link blog directly to LinkedIn; your connections see your blog when you post it.

- **Send articles.** Write your own articles or get an author’s permission to use their articles (with attribution); stay in

touch by sending *relevant and interesting content* to your network.

- **Write newsletters.** Stay in touch with *news people can use*. The newsletter is not about *you*—it’s about *your readers*. What insights can you share? Lessons learned? Client profiles? Good stories? Add photos of you and your team. People do business with *people*, not *technology*, so make it personal.

**Timing is everything.** You never know when people are ready or how something you say resonates at just the right time. So stay in touch. Your fortune is in *your* follow up! **SSE**

Joanne Black is CEO of *No More Cold Calling*. Call 415-461-8763.

**ACTION: Follow up to create your fortune.**

# Consumer.ology

*The psychology of shopping.*



by Philip Graves

**F**REQUENTLY, IN THEIR BID TO be better at what they do, organizations look for feedback or insights from their consumers. Such market research is common. Indeed, it's so common that we rarely question the assumptions that drive it or its value; but we should.

The problem is that we like to tell ourselves that *we know what we think*. Suggesting the opposite, that someone doesn't know their own thoughts, is verging on the offensive. From here, the notion that *other people know what they think* follows naturally. But let's consider this from another angle: *have you ever felt or been made to feel self-conscious?* The experience of being hyper-aware of your own actions is far from comfortable; fortunately for most of us it happens extremely rarely. Similarly, think back to the last time you visited your local supermarket: how long did you shop for? How much of the experience can you actually recall?

After years of listening to what customers say in market research and trying to reconcile that information with what was actually happening in a business, I became convinced that *most information from questionnaires and focus groups was, at best, unreliable*. When I started to use observation in my work, and watched people before interviewing them, it soon became apparent that *people don't realize many of the things that they do as consumers*.

This isn't news to psychologists. Most of our actions are shaped by processes that take place in the *unconscious mind*; we have no direct access to these processes at a conscious level. This *mind gap* explains some fascinating aspects of consumer and human behavior: playing music can cause people to spend up to three times as much on a bottle of wine; changing the packaging material can transform someone's perception of taste; smells too feint to be detected at a conscious level can influence people's perceptions. In short, *all manner of what we might consider apparently peripheral factors can influence reactions without consumers having the slightest notion that they are doing so*.

The problem of the way our brains

work doesn't end there. First, our lack of awareness of these unconscious processes doesn't stop us from offering a post-rationalized view of what we think we think; so if you ask a question in market research you have a good chance of getting an answer. Secondly, the process of getting that answer introduces a variety of influences that shape our responses: just as happens with consumer behavior, we aren't aware that these influences are affecting what we say we think.

When I use the word *influence*, people think of relatively subtle changes, but the outcome can be dramatic. I discovered a survey conducted for the BBC by one polling organization that was conducted simultaneously by another polling company for the UK Government (it's rare for the same issue to be researched independently and to have such a comparison): *their conclusions were 60 percentage points apart!*

Frequently companies use questionnaires to measure the way that their service is perceived, often asking detailed questions about the experience they've delivered. Leaving aside for now the potential irritation this can cause customers, an ironic consequence of such research, I believe companies are unwise to trust such data. Firstly, it is common for a halo effect to mask individual issues: in one project I conducted customers visiting an in-store service desk reported feeling satisfied with their experience. However, *the service they had received was shockingly poor*. I knew this because I'd been observing each transaction, listening to what was said and observing the body language of both parties. People said they were *satisfied* because they had arrived with *low expectations* and had an *acceptable outcome*: that might be sufficient for some organizations, but most are looking to deliver *something more positive* from their service.

When it comes to *gauging customer service*, it is a misguided shortcut to use surveys rather than observation. The same principles of statistical sampling can be applied to the monitoring of

call center conversations or observing customer interactions; when the person doing so has a clear sense of the service experience that the organization wants to deliver, all but the most empathetically bereft can gauge reasonably well how a customer feels at the end of their interaction. While there are benefits in such observation being conducted by someone who is not directly responsible for the service, and by those with a grasp of consumer psychology, *even without this, the approach is more valid than the questionnaires most companies use*.

Understanding *consumer and human psychology* also helps those interested in *service excellence* appreciate why *service recovery*—in terms of putting things right when something has gone awry—is so critical. When service is delivered well it is often inconspicuous. If any story does emerge from such an experience, it's likely to focus on the *product* rather than the *process* of acquiring it.

*However, when something goes wrong in the buying process, the situation is different*. Often we have all the ingredients for one of those stories we like to tell: a setting, a hero (*the customer*), a villain (*the company providing the service*) and a turning point—perhaps the customer venting their anger or winning recompense

against the company's initial wishes. Such stories are told and re-told. A bad experience is recounted many more times than a good one—not because of some malice on the part of customers, it's simply that bad service experiences provide for a story. In this context, knowing that *95 percent of your customers are satisfied* may well be irrelevant. What matters is *what happened to the other 5 percent and what story they tell other people about their experience*.

The opportunity to deliver better service comes, in part, from *closely analyzing what customers actually do* and in part from *developing and refining service in a way that is sympathetic to basic human psychology*. **Asking consumers questions is no substitute for good service design**. When it comes to taking service to the next level, customers are no better equipped to inform you of what they will appreciate and respond positively to in the future, than they are to say what product they want you to invent for them next. **SSE**

Philip Graves is author of CONSUMER.OLGY: The Market Research Myth, The Truth about Consumers and The Psychology of Shopping. [www.philipgraves.net](http://www.philipgraves.net).

**ACTION: Become a student of consumer.ology.**

# Go Beyond Denial

*Courage, conviction, commitment.*



by Zig Ziglar

**M**OST PEOPLE ARE IN DENIAL. For example, 90 percent of alcoholics don't recognize that they have the problem, and most will become incensed if someone suggests they do. Denial is the hallmark of alcoholism. *Denying a problem never solves that problem.* No snow flake blames itself for the blizzard, nor does a rain-drop blame itself for the flood, and yet each plays a part in the problems.

*Each of us contributes to the culture in our family, workplace, community, and nation.* One person, one word, one thought can make a difference in the lives, thoughts, actions and performance of other people. *Little things can make a big difference.* If you're going to do big things in life, you must begin with the little things you do every day. An encouraging word, a smile, a greeting, a courteous action, a helpful gesture can make a difference in another individual's attitude or performance that day.

If my watch is four hours wrong, I know that it is wrong. However, if it's four minutes wrong, I likely won't notice it. And if I desperately need to make a deposit in the bank before it closes, four minutes can make a difference. If my flight is scheduled to leave at 9 a.m., and I arrive at 9:04, I will miss the flight.

## Courage, Conviction, Commitment

To go beyond denial and do those little things that make a big difference, you need to exercise *courage, conviction, and commitment.*

Those words describe *Truett Cathy* and the success of his *Chick-fil-A* restaurant chain. It took Truett 21 years from the time he opened his first Dwarf House Restaurant and perfected his Chick-fil-A sandwich to open his first Chick-fil-A restaurant *in a shopping mall.*

It was difficult for Truett Cathy to arrange his first shopping mall lease. Cathy, a man of strong religious convictions, was determined never to open his restaurants on Sunday. Most shopping malls would not make that agreement. Finally, one did and Chick-fil-A was an immediate hit. As of February, 2011, the chain has 1,539 locations. In 2010 sales were \$3.5 billion.

It took *considerable courage*, backed

by convictions, to refuse to open his restaurants on Sunday. Cathy's faith, however, was such that he never considered the issue. He was determined to open six days a week and *serve the best product he could possibly produce.* He resolved to give good service and a genuine business opportunity to the people with whom he worked.

Sticking to his principles has benefited Truett Cathy, and many others. He has awarded his college student employees over \$26 million in scholarships. WinShape Foundation was founded more than 20 years ago by Jeannette and Truett Cathy. Under the WinShape Foundation are several programs, including WinShape Homes, which operates 11 foster care homes in Georgia, Tennessee and Alabama. The WinShape College Program at Berry College in Rome, Georgia, is a co-op

## SALES/STRATEGY

# Boost Your Sales

*Try a back-to-basics strategy.*



by Leslie Groene

**T**HERE ARE TWO WAYS TO grow your business:

**1. Find new customers.** Now, *more than ever*, you need to prospect and find new business opportunities. As current customers cut back spending or consolidate vendors, there are simply fewer revenue dollars to go around.

**2. Sell your current customers additional solutions.** You need to maximize your relationships with current customers and use effective selling strategies to maintain or grow your market share, which can include *new solutions.*

The technology continues to evolve, but you need to stick to *sales fundamentals.* There is always *great buzz* about new applications. But when you offer new technology, be sure your team understands the benefits to the client. Survey current clients to see what solutions they are buying now and may consider using in the future. This can be done *informally in person* with clients or in a *structured way* with an online survey resource. That way you can add *relevant solutions* for which you can acquire business. This will also ensure the salespeople are confident, knowing they're offering their clients *resources they already use or want to use* in the future.

Don't add new features to product

program offering joint four-year scholarship funding to incoming freshmen of up to \$32,000. WinShape Camps offer boys and girls summer programs at the college, which will be attended by more than 13,000 campers in 2011.

Be inspired by Truett Cathy's story. Search your heart for something you can do for those who can't do for themselves! The real opportunity for success lies *within the person* and not in the job.

***You can't solve a problem until you acknowledge that you have one and accept responsibility for solving it.*** Give up your denial; take responsibility for the culture you help to create. Be interested in *doing the little things well*, and someday you'll be doing big things! **SSE**

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**ACTION: Exercise courage to go beyond denial.**

offerings and assume good salespeople will pick up those new products or services and run with them. It is *tricky* to ask customers to simply *trust you* when it involves a new product or service.

## How to Help Salespeople

Here are *five ways* to help your salespeople embrace the new technology and feel confident in selling it:

- **Provide training specific to the new offerings** to help your salespeople and production staff with terms, value propositions, and relevant customer applications. This will *reduce their resistance* to selling new solutions and *provide them tools* to strengthen client relationships.
- **Make sure your support staff understands the challenges** of the new technology so they can *support sales reps.*
- **Have goals in place that pertain to the solution** so everyone is on board.

- **Provide salespeople with tools to use with the clients.** These tools might include case studies, printed samples, and product materials.

- **Discuss ideas for overcoming customer objections:** "I don't perceive you as qualified for that solution." "I'm happy with my provider. "I do not want to have too many eggs in *your* basket."

Having new solutions to sell gives salespeople reasons to meet with clients and prospects and increases your presence in the marketplace. **SSE**

*Leslie Groene is a speaker, consultant, coach, CEO of Groene Consulting, and author of Picture Yourself and the Life You Want. Visit [www.GroeneConsulting.com](http://www.GroeneConsulting.com).*

**ACTION: Boost sales to grow your business.**

# Social CRM

*Customers have influence.*



by Andrew B. Schultz

CONTRARY TO WHAT YOU might think, Social CRM is not simply an attempt to replace CRM software applications with social media tools. It is, however, related to social media and the changes in the world that have resulted from the introduction of this *disruptive technology*.

If you don't think social media is important, you might ask former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak or Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. The use of social media tools like Facebook played a vital role in the citizen uprisings against these leaders by *giving voice to previously disenfranchised citizenry*.

Similarly, in the company-customer relationship, *the social web has created a forum where customers speak much more loudly than the companies with whom they do business*.

Paul Greenberg, a thought leader in the CRM intellectual space, defines Social CRM as "a *philosophy and a business strategy*, supported by a technology platform, business rules, processes, and social characteristics, designed to engage the customer in a collaborative conversation in order to provide mutually beneficial value in a trusted and transparent business environment. It's the company's response to the customer's ownership of the conversation." Note the last sentence, about the *increased influence* of the customers.

**Traditional CRM.** CRM, an acronym for *Customer Relationship Management*, is an attempt to provide a positive and consistent customer experience through the strategic use of database tools that make information about customers and their interactions with the company available across multiple departments. These interactions were usually represented by the type of things you can track in Microsoft Office Outlook—appointments, emails, and tasks.

**Social CRM (SCRM).** In Paul Greenberg's definition of SCRM, the word *ownership* refers to the balance of power in the company-customer relationship, which has shifted to the customers. Everyone has heard stories of individuals using social media to publicize bad experiences with large, impersonal organizations, with the result being

profoundly bad sentiment toward the organization. These instances have changed the way companies interact with customers, forever.

Such a thing was never possible before. Leaders of large, impersonal organizations were dumbfounded. "How can one person have such a negative impact on our multi-billion dollar company?" they asked. Can you imagine 20 years ago having a bad experience on an airplane and letting a million people know how dissatisfied you were with your airline? Now that it's a reality, the power in the company-customer relationship is

in the hands of customers. It's not always fair and equitable, but neither was the old setup, where a customer had no leverage in the relationship.

SCRM, then, is the attempt to respond to this power shift in positive ways—to use the social web to cater to the needs of newly empowered customers on their own turf.

Traditionally, CRM has been a strategy for engaging with customers that started in the 90s (most would say) and is supported by a multitude of CRM applications. CRM has its strengths and its weaknesses. Its greatest challenges are 1) user adoption (not just of the application, but of the CRM strategy) and 2) lack of valuable insight within the collected data. Both of these challenges often stem from a common root malady—the lack of a CRM strategy, or a soft and poorly defined one. Many companies assume that the CRM application is the strategy, or that it somehow embodies a strategy. Not so, impetuous one. Strategy must come first.

While there are many differences between *Social CRM* and *traditional CRM*, we should not over-differentiate the two models of customer engagement. *Social CRM* has much in common with the old CRM. Here are just some of these similarities:

- Social CRM has the same goals as traditional CRM: customer relationships that are strong, loyal, and deliver value to both parties.

- Both are enabled by technological advances that made it possible to execute a strategy that was hitherto impossible, and yet both, to be successful, must refute the irresistible assumption in the minds of would-be participants that the technology is the "CRM." For example, "Salesforce.com = CRM" and "Facebook = Social CRM". Neither of these statements are true, although they both refer to a particular instantiation of technology that could be used in the respective strategy.

- Both face similar challenges of adoption in the business/enterprise, and that is getting the people in the company on-board with the strategy. This may be a similarity that's often overlooked, because of the incredible popularity of social media. But a person who loves Facebook or Twitter at home isn't necessarily sold on the idea that it's going to help him/her accomplish more at work, individually or at

the group level. Strong leadership is necessary inside of the organization to develop and implement a strategy, and inherent in the effort is the risk of failure due to pushback from the people whose cooperation is required for success. Furthermore, much of what has gone on in terms of relating to customers will

continue. For example, salespeople will still be selling and will need to keep track of a list of leads, accounts, and opportunities. They will still need to schedule phone calls and meetings and (management, at least) will want those activities to become a part of the customer record. I don't foresee a day anytime soon when a salesperson will spend 100 percent of his time on Facebook. Thus, any Social CRM strategy will need to not only focus on what's different, but what will stay the same, and how those strategies, processes, and the applications that support them will be integrated.

However, I do not want to give the impression that a traditional CRM strategy is a prerequisite for practicing SCRM. Don't put new wine in old bottles—if you haven't been practicing traditional CRM, then design your strategy using all of the tools available today and with a clear understanding of the power the customer wields in the marketplace. **SSE**

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**ACTION: Engage in social CRM.**

# Virtual Teams

## Improve communication.



by Bradley Ann Morgan

**I**N THE PAST TWO DECADES, technologies have enabled us to take advantage of subject matter expertise regardless of employee location by utilizing *virtual teams* that interact weekly, monthly, or daily by means such as, VPNs, digital switching, or Skype video conferencing. **There are several advantages:**

- Team members can work at home.
- Travel costs can be eliminated.
- Telecommunications costs are minimal for phone/video team meetings.
- Team members can work in their own time zone in *round-the-clock shifts*.
- Firms that merge or acquire other companies can retain personnel without having to relocate or release them.

**While most companies have reported certain successes with virtual teams, challenges continue to delay project or product delivery. Complaints include:**

- Team members missing the call-in or video conference meeting due to *unclear dates* or *matching time zone hours*.
- Team leader fails to join the conference; so team members assume it is cancelled and fail to conduct business.
- The agenda is not clearly stated, turning the conference call into a fruitless *gripe session*, frustrating team members.
- Team members become *divided* over the ownership of tasks, polarizing them into camps of blame when individuals didn't meet specific deadlines.

**In leading a virtual team, follow these four guidelines:**

- If possible, *conduct the first meeting in person*. Choose a *central location* and use this meeting to build trust. *Constant scrutiny* is impossible in virtual teams.
- *Set rules of engagement for each meeting*, audio or video based. Be clear on the agenda format, call-in protocol, date recurrences, behaviors, deadlines, timelines for response; performance standards, and rewards.
- *Have a course of action for conflict resolution*. You might schedule another meeting for just the members involved.
- *Don't use email to solve critical issues*. Endless emails between team members waste time. Make a rule: *more than two answers or comments are grounds for calling the leader to discuss possible resolutions*.

**To improve the communication and performance of your virtual team, ask:**

- How can you design clear protocols for team behavior and culture? Have *all* members reviewed and agreed to them?
- What would team members say if you try to micro-manage them? How can you clarify your expectations to achieve better results with them?
- How can you *engage* your team members so that they produce their *best work* in the hours they work best? Is there a schedule or project worksheet for recording their actions and informing all the team members?
- What are the procedures for dealing with team absences and vacations, to cover the person's workload and their meeting attendance?
- What are the guidelines for recognizing and rewarding performance? Do team members know how they'll be

measured, recognized and rewarded?

- If your meetings are only audio, how the team see that their communications can be also *non-verbal*?
- What training will team members receive in the tone, timber, and emotion of conversation delivery and its impact?
- Have you created a *succession plan* for possible departures and team re-assignments? Do members expect to be *promoted* based on *performance*, not *longevity*?
- How will you design in personal meetings to maintain the team's glue, reinforce culture, and celebrate success? How often do these gatherings occur? **SSE**

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**ACTION: Improve communication in virtual teams.**

## SALES/MANAGEMENT

# Eight Mistakes

## These can kill growth.



by Randy Schwantz

**P**EOPLE LIKE TO BLAME THE economy for their lack of growth. It makes sense. The economy is difficult; but if you look closely, you'll find that *that's not really it*.

My focus for the past 20 years is on successful growth, and in my experience, I find that these are the *eight most common mistakes that sales leaders*

*make*. Are you making any of these false assumptions?

- *Thinking you can create worthwhile differentiation without working on it and having a strategy*. Many firms spend millions looking for the Holy Grail of competitive advantage. They copy cat each other all day long.

Competitive Advantage is something you can buy, but it's only temporary. If you're not committed to differentiation and continually innovating, then you will fall behind or never catch up.

- *Thinking that anything else in your firm is more important than driving growth*. It is the top driver of profit and the top driver of value, therefore the top driver of Wealth. Prioritizing anything above growth is a mistake.

- *Thinking you can create a growth culture without selling out to it*. Every firm is a mirror image of their leaders. If you're not sold out to growth, people will see it, smell it, taste it and *figure you out*. They will test your resolve. If you are not committed, they'll throw more

obstacles at you than you can manage.

- *Thinking that top producers will improve without training, structure and accountability*. Producers are no more professional than athletes, students, managers or teachers. Learning can be learned, skills can be obtained, and it all takes work. Everyone is capable.

- *Thinking that everyone has their own selling methods and style and you should leave them alone*. What they *really have* is their comfort zones. Not challenging that, not growing their skills, not challenging their knowledge is a mistake that costs you and them much money.

- *Thinking that corporate goals are more important than a producer's personal goals*. Most corporations assign new business goals to their salespeople.

Producers accept them with a ho-hum attitude, and do only what it takes to get by in most situations.

- *Thinking that producers don't want accountability and boundaries*. Contrary to

what you think, they won't leave your firm when you turn it up, set higher standards and expect *quantitative results*.

- *Thinking that your producers are not motivated by pride, ego, recognition, money, and material things*. Not connecting pride, ego, recognition, money and material things to day-to-day activities and doing a once-a-year, off-site, goal-setting process, with no follow-up and no accountability is a big mistake.

**Do you make any of these mistakes?** If not, congratulations! You are one of a very small minority. **SSE**

Randy Schwantz is CEO of The Wedge Group and author of *The Wedge and Red Hot Introductions*.

**ACTION: Avoid these eight mistakes.**

# Face to Face

*It has become a lost art.*



by Stacey Hanke

**P**EOPLE ARE IN DANGER OF losing the ability to communicate meaningfully *person to person*. While technology has created more ways to communicate rapidly over distances, many people are now so well insulated and protected by these devices that we are losing the skills and abilities to communicate in the most influential way—face to face.

The over-use of technology-driven communications poses a real danger to meaningful communications and personal and professional relationships. If you become overly dependent on email or text messages, you focus on the *object*, but not the *person*.

Tweets, text messages, emails and Facebook posts all transmit words over distances so they can be received without presence of the sender. The human element and context is absent. It's a one-sided blast—take that! Click! You can't communicate meaningfully with 140 spaces! All you can say is "Wassup!"

These messages are typically short, sequential, controlled and directed. There's no instantaneous interaction or connection that allows the other person to understand the tone, inflection or emotion that is carried with the words. The sender cannot express or effectively project the elements of trust, confidence, credibility, warmth, empathy, and concern that are crucial to developing and building a personal relationship. The recipient cannot perceive these elements either. That failure to convey the feelings that accompany the words so people build trust, credibility, and understanding can have a phenomenal impact on business and success.

Meaningful communications that carry these powerful characteristics can *only* be achieved in face-to-face interactions. Communicating with impact and achieving influence with people is not only about what you say—it's also how you say it. You have influence on others because you see their face, observe and experience their emotion, and actively listen and engage their interest and support and build relationships.

You know it's time for a face-to-face when: You no longer really understand

what is important to your listener. You think they have become bored or are losing interest in you or your message. You feel they are no longer listening and do not understand you.

In *certain topics of conversation*, face-to-face communication will be the best way to achieve clarity and understanding for mutual success and beneficial action. These include: negotiating salaries, vacations, termination; resolving a dispute, a challenge or a conflict between two or more people or organizations; and seeking clarification after written communications has failed.

Face-to-face communication is a *vital* skill. It requires you to focus. You have to be comfortable in the presence of other people for more than a few minutes. Communicating with impact and influence face-to-face also requires discipline, determination, and self-control.

## Take Eight Recommendations

Here are eight recommendations:

### 1. Make moments together count.

Everyone has the right to speak. Listen before you speak. Earn the right to be heard. *Think about what you want to say before you say it.* Make every communication moment worth you and your listener's time. Every word counts. Think before you speak. Tailor what you say to meet your listener's needs.

**2. Pay attention by listening for the unspoken emotions.** Concentrate on the speaker closely. Focus intently on their face. Do not let your eyes dart away and drift off, since that signals you are no longer paying attention. Do not interrupt. Wait to speak only when the person has finished what they want to say. Hear their words and read their face so that you gain maximum understanding of the why behind their words.

**3. Honor the other person's space and time.** Prepare ahead of time. Match the message to the opportunity. Get to the point quickly. Don't frustrate your listener by taking too long to get the key message across. Don't ramble and clutter your message with unnecessary points. Ask for the right action. Be clear and be specific. Watch the time. Don't take 20 minutes when you asked for

10. Show respect for the other person.

**4. Prepare for a face-to-face meeting ahead of time.** **KNOW** your listener. **K**—what does your listener *know* about your topic? **N**—what does your listener *need* to know to take the action you want them to take in the time frame you have for this conversation? **O**—what is your listener's *opinion* about your topic? **W**—*who* is your listener? What information do you need to know about your listener to customize your message for them? Tailor your agenda and message to achieve *the understanding* you need and to influence your listener to act on what you have to say.

**5. Watch your body language.** Avoid non-verbal abuse. Every movement you make counts. Control facial expressions. Don't smile, snicker, whistle, roll your eyes, or grimace, look sideways, wink, or send the evil eye. Your behavior and non-verbal cues are as important as the words you say. Don't fidget, act nervous, express fear, or allow your posture to convey uncertainty, insincerity, lack of caring, arrogance, overconfidence, dismay or criticism.

**6. Be Sincere and authentic.** Speak in your authentic voice. Be sincere, be genuine and allow others to see *the real you*.

**7. Maintain the power of the floor.** Be interesting. If you see the signs that you are no longer the center of attention: Your listener begins working on their Blackberry, iPad, iPhone; your listener starts nodding off; your listener begins to have side conversations; your listener interrupts you. Stop. Break the flow. Earn their attention. Get back on track.

**8. Ask for feedback.** Face-to-face communications is a two way street. Balanced feedback allows people to be relaxed and comfortable. However, when people start feeling comfortable they also may become lazy and lose their professionalism. Don't forget *who you are* and *what you are doing*. Maintain your self-control. Ask for specific feedback . . . about the points you raised, the manner in which you presented, the way you responded. Ask for balanced feedback about how to improve and *immediately* begin applying this feedback.

Technology-driven communication improves when you focus first on better face-to-face communication. Eliminate the static that plagues your one-on-one, person-to-person communication—then everything else you do will dramatically improve as well. **SSE**

*Stacey Hanke is owner of 1st Impression Consulting, speaker, and co-author with Mary Steinberg of Yes You Can! Visit [www.1stimpressionconsulting.com](http://www.1stimpressionconsulting.com).*

**ACTION: Seek face-to-face communication.**

## Focus on Progress

Don't worry about perfection.



by Marti MacGibbon

**H**EAATHER, A NEW MANAGER, prides herself on her high standards, even jokingly referring to herself as a *perfectionist*, but she rarely meets deadlines. During brainstorming sessions, Heather yearns to unearth new discoveries, but dreads making mistakes, putting a damper on creativity. She tends to take on *familiar challenges* in order to *guarantee* that she will excel. Recently, she noticed she has difficulty relating to her subordinates. She longs to *inspire* them, but she sees only flaws in their work. Since Heather is also self-critical, she is tense when starting projects, cramping productivity.

Tyler works near Heather; and she's noticed how he and his staff *consistently come up with innovative new concepts and complete projects before deadlines*. When a new endeavor is discussed, Tyler volunteers to take it on. His confidence is remarkable. In meetings, Tyler's subordinates demonstrate self-assurance and an easy rapport with him. When Tyler's staff turn in reports, the mood is upbeat. People leave his office looking focused, empowered, and energized. She wonders how Tyler can be so relaxed and still be so productive.

**Tyler focuses on progress, not perfection.** Striving for perfection and rejecting anything less can impede innovation, creativity, and satisfaction in pursuing tasks and goals. Focusing on progress highlights that tasks and goals are *baby steps* toward achieving the highest standards and deeds. When focusing on progress we learn to enjoy the journey as well as the destination. As Voltaire said, *Perfection is attained by slow degrees, it requires the hand of time.*

### Six Progress Strategies

Try these *progress-oriented strategies*:

**1. There's no such thing as perfection in life.** Perfection is not an oasis—it's a mirage! You'll never arrive, because *it simply isn't there*. Once you realize that everything is flawed, you can focus on *improvement*, or *progress*. As your confidence builds, your *freedom of thought* enables you to take on new challenges.

**2. Practice intelligent goal-setting.** Determine *your ultimate goal*. Then set do-able, measurable goals, along the way. At each interval, you can measure

progress and make adjustments. Don't slip into a self-defeating pattern by setting inappropriate goals and standards. If you tell yourself you can only accept *perfection* in all you do, you rob yourself of the joy that comes from celebrating *each small accomplishment*.

**3. At the end of each day, list all you've achieved, and celebrate it.** Progress is not exclusively linear. Include upbeat attitude, positive thoughts, kind words, generous actions, and gains in character strengths or leadership skills. Recognize *all achievements and insights* and gain greater resolve from them.

**4. Enjoy the journey and accept your work without judging it.** Perfectionism often creates a *cycle of procrastination*—the standard is so high that you feel *overwhelmed* and *paralyzed* at the outset. Exercise a non-judgmental attitude toward others, regarding *everything* and

*everyone* around you as a *work in progress*.

**5. Give yourself permission to grow, and to embrace missteps.** Many discoveries result from blunders, or are learned by trial and error. If you stop *making mistakes*, you stop *progressing* and *learning*. Loosen up—value the process to boost *creativity, productivity, happiness*.

**6. Never underplay achievement.** Banish self-talk such as, "Anybody could've done that." Such thinking, *discounting the positive*, leads to less joy and satisfaction. See small tasks as part of *the ultimate goal*. Muster enthusiasm by visualizing the final result.

Put these strategies into play, and you will exceed expectations. *Perfectionism is a deal breaker. Progress is a star maker.* **SSE**

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**ACTION: Focus on and reward progress.**

## MANAGEMENT/FAMILY

### Working With Family

It's not personal—it's just business.



by Rhonda R. Savage

**I**F YOU'VE EVER BEEN IN BUSINESS with a family member, you know there are advantages, but also tension, stress, and conflict. Can you separate your family history, emotions, and knowledge of a person and still have a great working relationship? If you work with family members, avoid these four practices:

**1. Loyalty leading to micromanagement.** Often, family members are more dedicated to *the success of their business* than others, and yet *too much caring* can cause conflict. One owner employed his mother. He set his vision and goals, but he had trouble developing a fair style of leadership. His mother openly voiced her concerns. She became a micromanager, driving morale down.

**2. Taking work home.** One owner enjoys working with his wife. His wife, however, is concerned that team members aren't held accountable for their work. The owner avoids conflict, team meetings, coaching, and performance reviews. His wife voices her feelings, which causes him discomfort and creates tension. You need to separate your work life and personal life. Bringing personal issues into the workplace (and visa versa) can create an uncomfortable environment for *all employees*.

### 3. Hiring someone you can't fire.

Owners can be hesitant to talk to a family member about a problem at the office because of how it might impact them at home. They may be worried how family members might respond. Family members need to know their roles. No matter how hard they work, others may look at them differently. *Family employees need to hold themselves at the same or even higher level of accountability* than other employees.

**4. Unfair pay.** Some owners try to help their family by paying them more. It is *unfair* to give *special treatment* to family members. You will see *resentment*, and *when morale goes down, productivity goes down*. Pay, gender and age differences that impact your relationships may intensify with family employees.

**How can you avoid these issues?** Be early, be dependable, attend to work responsibilities, be *accountable*, follow through, be friendly, have fun, use the words *absolutely* and *certainly*, be a mentor, learn the business, be excited about your work, speak positively in and out of the office, offer advice when asked, or ask first before discussing a concern. If family employees and others can't get along, you *must* resolve the issue—or tension will build, morale will drop, and the business will suffer. When people don't get along, ask: *Is whatever is happening in the best interest of the customer and the business?* **SSE**

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**ACTION: Work smart with family members.**

# Customer Loyalty

Techniques for B2B marketing.



by Mark Johnson

**D**RAWING UPON BEHAVIORAL and statistical insight to deliver marketing value to the C-suite is now a *strategic imperative*. From multi-channel communications to loyalty and retention initiatives—gaining first-hand insight into how companies are aligning marketing programs to their customer lifecycles and voice of customer (VOC) programs is the information marketers need to secure *competitive advantage* and forge *lasting customer relationships* to drive the bottom line. Using *data-driven insight* to develop tailored marketing communication, loyalty, and engagement programs is key to creating sustainable behavioral change within the company and customers.

SAS in partnership with Loyalty 360—The Loyalty Marketer's Association—set out to uncover the keys to building and delivering successful customer experiences. In an online survey, 250 customer loyalty and retention executives shared their insights and experiences. Their candid responses enabled us to answer *two critical questions*: 1) How are B2B companies succeeding in customer loyalty and retention campaigns? 2) How are they aligning their marketing programs to customer lifecycles and VOC programs?

Customer retention and loyalty are key strategic issues—nearly half of the respondents reported that *at least 60 percent of new sales come from existing customers*. Yes, it is much more cost effective to listen, engage and retain a current customer than it is to prospect for a new one. Drawing upon data to make effective marketing decisions on a customer's preferences and interests is a major benefit of loyalty programs.

Many organizations are moving from a *mass acquisition marketing approach* to effective *data-driven loyalty/engagement marketing programs* that drive more focused customer recruitment and acquisition efforts. The data gleaned from current customers provides *insight* into lifestyle/demographic groupings, revealing the tendencies of your most desired, engaged and profitable current customers. This arms you with the analytics you need to effectively target, engage and acquire new customers.

Taking a *strategic approach* to customer commitment and advocacy ensures these programs not only have senior leader backing, funding, and commitment, but also create more engaged customers/brand participants.

*In years past, customer loyalty was a sales and account management function* guided by a belief that *any program* implemented would drive incremental sales growth and retention. Recently, we've seen a surge of marketing support for *customer retention efforts*. Since the insights derived from loyalty programs impact the C-Suite, you need to be aware of the needs of these *stakeholders*. Data, integrity, insight, and constant monitoring of these programs are needed for continued success.

To see what this shift means, we set out to assess customer loyalty within B2B organizations.

*Most companies have a department whose primary focus is on customer retention and loyalty*, with senior VP support. It takes time for *loyalty programs* to create a baseline behavioral database and generate insight. *Launching* a loyalty program is only the beginning. *Continuous* upkeep, support and tweaking are needed to ensure all phases of the program are working optimally.

*Loyalty is a journey, not a destination*. And with technologies, processes and ideas on loyalty changing rapidly, the ability to assimilate them effectively into current initiatives is critical. Having a direct link from the customer loyalty team to the C-suite helps.

*Lifecycle/VOC Program*: About half of responding companies have a formal customer lifecycle or VOC program upon which they base their marketing programs. Most align *retention* marketing programs to a *customer lifecycle*. This is an area where insight gleaned from effective loyalty programs and CRM databases can improve retention. The challenge lies in assimilating data from disparate databases (warranty cards, loyalty programs, call centers, social media initiatives, purchase, returns, purchase feedback), rate them, and use or develop scorecards/dashboards that

are tuned into the specifics of the firm.

The challenge is not as much about where in the sales process the VOC program starts, but rather the effective use of social media to glean optimal data that is more impactful and actionable. The earlier you can gather data, ascribe it to an individual, and build on it with transactional, attitudinal and lifestyle informational overlays, the more predictive it will be. And, the more modeling done on the back side will generate more detailed predictors of early behavior that should be *looked for and encouraged* and, therefore, more profitable.

*Measuring retention success*: Various metrics are used to assess the success of

retention programs. Retaining *the right customer* is imperative and *satisfaction* is still important, but *customer engagement, advocacy* and *loyalty* using an active VOC approach are keys to short- and long-term success. But, this requires strategic vision and commitment from leaders to integrate what can be separate entities.

As more resources are dedicated to *retention, B2B*

marketers are using more sophisticated tools to evaluate the customer relationship and generate actionable insight.

*Channels to listen and respond to customers*: Listening to customers is often done via surveys; *responding* to them is most often done through call centers. Social media, word-of-mouth marketing, interactive forums, and blogs are great sources of rich behavior, customer centric data. This data combined with the right process and model can provide invaluable insight to marketers.

We're often asked if we should listen to and respond to *all customers*, or only a *select few*. How do we *identity* and *weight* them? The key is to start the VOC program early, and to evaluate the depth, breadth, and frequency of interactions and purchase behavior to identify the *true stakeholders and influencers*. Effective models enable brands to make actionable insights from this disparate data.

The willingness to embrace new technologies is tempered by the need to ensure they create measureable behavior change and ROI. B2Bs are taking a more strategic look at *customer loyalty initiatives*—looking not only to *retain customers* but also to *build advocacy*. SSE

Mark Johnson is CEO of Loyalty 360—The Loyalty Marketers' Association, a market driven VOC-focused think-tank. Visit [www.loyalty360.org](http://www.loyalty360.org).

**ACTION: Retain more of the right customers.**

# Disengagement

What you can do about it.



by Bob Kelleher

**W**E ARE ALL WATCHING THE struggle in the private sector as more city and state governments are asking employees to assume a share of healthcare costs and reduce pension and retiree benefits. Such changes are perceived as *big take-aways*.

Many public employees have put in years with the idea that their *employment deal* consisted of lower salaries, but richer benefits. Now, the average salary for a public employee is *greater*.

*Employee engagement is not about money, benefits, or things.* You can't motivate or engage people long term by *buying* their commitment. *Engagement is a mutual commitment between and employer and employee where the employer helps to grow and develop its employees and employees help the enterprise succeed.* This commitment is built through a culture of trust, open communication, shared vision and goals, and a deep sense that "we're in this together."

*Money, benefits, and things impact the engagement equation*—if employees feel their employer is not being fair regarding money or benefits, this perception will foster disengagement.

Many public sector employees will retire between the ages 58 and 65 with lucrative pensions and retiree benefits, whereas their counterparts in the private sector will work well into their 70s. The impact will increase bitterness.

To engage employees during these challenging times, I suggest 10 ideas:

**1. Link your efforts around performance:** *Employee engagement is not about employee satisfaction.* Some in the public sector believe their employer should make them *satisfied*. Remind them that all great teams work together for a common goal, and this requires the *mutual commitment* of administrators and employees. The last thing you want is a workplace of *satisfied* but *underperforming* employees.

**2. Employee engagement starts at the top:** A key employee engagement driver is the actions of senior leaders. Leaders must demonstrate support for an engaged company culture by personally living their company's values.

**3. Engage first-line leaders:** The old adage, *employees join great companies, but quit bad bosses* is true. Are you devel-

oping your front-line people leaders?

**4. Focus on communication:** Recognize the power of *robust communication*, built on clarity, consistency, and transparency. People *can* handle the truth.

**5. Individualize your engagement:** Although often difficult with collective bargaining, do all you can to get to know your employees, individualize engagement, and treat employees as people with different needs (especially with the vastly different motivational drivers with Gen Ys, Xs, and Boomers).

**6. Create a motivational culture:** You can't motivate people long-term; you must create *motivational cultures* with an *engaged workforce* where employees can flourish and motivate each other.

**7. Create feedback mechanisms:** Ask employees *what they think*; use employ-

*ee engagement surveys* to assess the pulse.

**8. Reinforce and reward the right behaviors:** People are more motivated by *achievement*, than *money*. But if they perceive unfairness, money issues can disengage. Recognize achievement.

**9. Track and communicate progress:** People want to work for a *winner*. So, tell them where they're going, how they are performing, and where they fit in.

**10. Hire and promote the right behaviors and traits for your culture:** Although we emphasize education, background and skills, people succeed or fail because of their behaviors and traits (yes, soft skills do count). **SSE**

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**ACTION: Apply these tips to boost engagement.**

## SALES/BEST PRACTICES

### Six Best Practices

Develop these in your people.



by Richard Ruff and Janet Spirer

**S**ELLING INVOLVES MANY ACTIVITIES. Some are customer-facing (making a presentation). Others are background activities (researching customers). In that array of activities, many qualities make for a top performer. Some skills, like being on time or good written and verbal communication, are entry requirements. Soft skills—such as a strong work ethic or a high energy—are hiring criteria.

**Top sales performers use six best practices.**

**1. Understand customer needs.** Identify *problem areas* the customer is experiencing. Ask questions that cause them to think about problem areas and *listen* to what they say. Discriminate between *general problems* and *urgent needs* that the customer must resolve.

**2. Understand customer's business.** Develop a *comprehensive understanding* of the customer's business: What trends impact your customers' market, industry, and strategic direction? Who are the key players? Who are the customer's competitors and how do they threaten the customer? Ask customers to gain these insights *and* research it yourself. Then leverage this knowledge. For instance, seeing the financial impact a procedure might have on a customer's

business can help you frame discussions about how a new solution creates a *competitive advantage* for the customer.

**3. Develop trust in the customer relationship.** Work to build and maintain trust with your customers. Trusted sellers: tell the truth; they are candid; they are concerned about the customer; they respond to complaints, problems, and needs of the customer; they return calls in a timely manner; they do what they say they'll do, when they say they'll do it; they know what their organization and its products and services can do; they do not try to do what they cannot do; they *under-promise* and *over-deliver*.

**4. Leverage resources.** Know your capabilities, products, and services, and use the *right resources* to address customer needs. Be an expert *resource broker*. Know how your capabilities help the customer drive results. Draw on internal and external resources.

**5. Manages the sales cycle.** Having one good sales call

does not win the game. Success involves stringing together a *series of successful interactions* with customers. So, look to the next step. In each customer interaction, *move the sale forward*.

**6. Manages the competitive threat.** Be aware of your competitors. Use tools (SWOT analyses or value matrices) to understand the competitive situation. Know your competition and how to manage them. Then put this knowledge into practice when you are face-to-face with the customer. Keep your eye on the ball—the customer. **SSE**

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**ACTION: Develop these six best practices.**