SALES AND SERVICE

Excellence

THE MAGAZINE OF TEAM LEADERSHIP

OCTOBER 2009

Cultural Needs

Owning Up

Service Excellence

Theo Gilbert-Jamison
Consultant

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Sales and Service
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MARKETING/MANAGEMENT

Owning Up

Think like an owner.

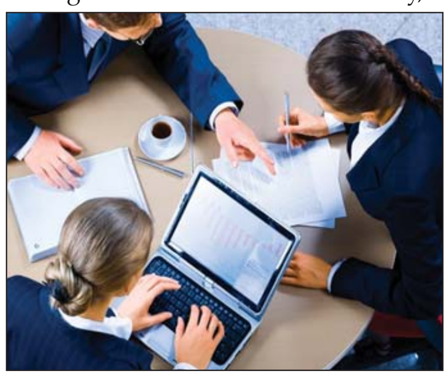
by Pamela Bilbrey and Brian Jones

AS THE RECESSION CONTINUES, MORE owners and managers are desperately looking for ways to cut costs and raise profits. If you're fresh out of ideas—racking your brain for innovative ways jump-start sales or improve service—we have some simple advice: ask your employees!

When it comes to problem-solving, your employees should be your most valuable asset: after all, those who are closest to the work are the most likely to see innovative solutions to improve customer service, reduce costs, and increase efficiency. And by helping your employees feel like owners of your company, you tap into that important source of solutions and innovative ideas—right when you need it most.

Would your employees act differently if they actually owned your company, and if it was their money being spent? They probably would. So, make your employees feel that they have a stake in what's going on at the company. When you get them to view the organization as if they own it, your employees are more likely to voice ideas for improvement, and be more passionate about putting them into action.

Creating a sense of ownership in people doesn't mean handing over the keys and taking a vacation. It means asking your employees what they would do if they were in your shoes, what they would change to help ensure that the organization runs more efficiently,



less expensively, more profitably.

Your survival depends on whether or not your people remain engaged and invested and contribute their best ideas. Creating a sense of ownership increases the energy, enthusiasm, and commitment of your people and drives results.

To get the ideas and cash flowing and to get people feeling like owners, ask these five questions:

Question 1: What would make this a better place to work? One key aspect of any well-run business is employee retention. If your employees are happy and satisfied, they stick around, meaning less time and money spent recruiting and training new employees. Happy employees are also more productive and do better work. If they like where they work and feel that their needs and concerns are being addressed, they are more likely to want to do what is in the company's best interest.

Managers often shy away from asking this question for fear of what the answer might be. And most of the time, they're surprised by the answers they receive. It's often the little things that matter most to employees, and the changes are usually minor and cost effective. It may be something as simple as making sure that the water cooler stays stocked in the break room, or keeping the temperature in the office regulated. The answers you get to this question will most likely not be outrageous requests, and your employees will appreciate being heard.

Question 2: How can we enhance customer service? As your business grows and you have more details to manage, you can easily forget what it was like working with clients every

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day. And since you managed customer service on your own, things have likely changed. Just because something worked well 10 or 20 years ago, doesn't mean it's still the best, or the only, way to do things. Ask your staff how they would improve customer service. What do the customers complain about most? What do they like? You may be surprised by what you hear!

Great customer service can make your business. So, stay connected to the people who live and breathe it every day. They know your customers. For example, at one organization, the staff kept receiving complaints from clients about their business hours being inconvenient. Had the owner not asked the staff what they were hearing from clients, he never would have known that his store hours were hurting sales. Simply opening one hour earlier increased customer satisfaction *and* sales!

Question 3: What would you do away with? The fact that a policy or process exists doesn't mean that it's necessary. As a business grows and evolves, its needs change. The rules and regulations that were once vital may now be antiquated and futile, only causing extra work and headaches for your employees. The best way to weed out these tasks is to ask your employees: If they could do away with any one thing—be it a policy, paperwork, regular morning meeting—what would it be and why? Again, because many of them are doing these tasks every day, it's easier for them to see when a process is ineffective or unnecessary. Hearing them out may save you time and money in the long run.

Too often we get caught up in the things we think we should be doing rather than taking a look at what works and what doesn't. Not only does your business constantly change, but so does your clientele. The ability to streamline your business by ridding yourself of tired and outdated tasks and procedures will make both you and your employees happier in the long run, and it help all of you run a better business.

Question 4: What would you do if you were footing the bill? Ask anybody whose money they prefer to spend, and the answer is sure to be the same: someone else's. As a business owner, this can be a scary thought: while spending an extra $50 a month on paper products may not seem like much to an employee, to the business owner footing the bill, it looks like an extra $600 per year that could be drawing interest in the bank. We are all much more conservative when spending our own hard-earned money, and helping your employees look at the company's money as their own could save you big bucks in the long run.

Invite your people to look at the money that is spent in each department, and ask them to imagine that money coming out of their own pockets (or paychecks!). Then brainstorm ways to cut costs and eliminate unnecessary expenses. If they were paying for the coffee cups in the break room, would they be more likely to re-use their cups for refills? Suggest that they look for coupons that could cut some costs. By giving people a sense of ownership over the way the money is spent, you open yourself up to finding new ways to cut costs and boost sales.

Question 5: What is working well, and how can we make it even better? We often focus only on what *isn't* working, and forget to consider the things that are going well. So, look also at what does work, and figure out why. You can find ways to improve upon those systems, and then use them as a guide for success in other areas of the business.

Ask your employees what they think is working well in your company. Have them make a list of the things that make their job easier or help make them more successful, and why they think that is. Then be sure to ask if there are ways that you can improve upon those things. How could they be even better? What will help systems to be successful? By focusing on the positive, you will find that even more solutions can be born than when you simply concentrate on what doesn't work.

The Gallery Walk Exercise. The Gallery Walk is a fun way to get employee input. Here's how it works: Workplace scenarios are posted on flip charts in a hallway or meeting room. As participants read through each scenario, they jot down their solutions. After everyone has responded to each scenario, small groups get together and discuss the posted solutions. This is a great way to get your creative juices flowing and get people thinking like owners. You'll likely gain several viable solutions; and once employees break into groups, they can fine-tune the solutions. After one exercise, you'll have an impressive list of great ideas to implement.

Employee ownership is the magic element that can propel success. Every team member should have a vested interest in the success of the company. You don't have to go it alone. You hired the people who work for you because of their talent and skills—so start putting all of that talent to use in new and innovative ways. **SSE**

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ACTION: Try asking these five questions.

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Executive Excellence Publishing

Frontline Profit Machine

Transform contact center performance.

by Ziad Khoury

YOU MAY FEEL THAT SELLING in a contact center does not require a complex presentation—and you are right. The critical disconnect here is in the difference between the *simplicity of the sales transaction* and the difficulty of getting the frontline team to perform consistently and with outstanding customer care. Often, positioning an organization to reach peak performance requires a transformation. Such a transformation requires a strategic planning process, and you must be prepared to make your case.

Making the Case

Making the case for transforming your contact center into a *Frontline Profit Machine* and improving your business performance begins by understanding the tremendous impact each individual team member has on your revenue and profit. In a contact center, like most businesses with direct consumer interface, as much as 90 percent of your revenue flows through your frontline. To make a solid case, you must also identify peak potential and put a number to it. Perform this simple exercise: Compare the performance of your average salesperson to your top 10 percent; in many cases you will find the disparity in sales production is 30 to 60 percent or higher. Defining your profit potential positions you to regulate and increase that revenue flow!

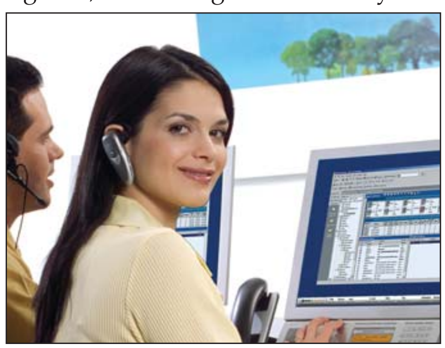
Control What You Can

As in most businesses, in a contact center you have very little control over your competitors, their pricing, and their sometimes perplexing strategies. You have no control over the economy, or the litany of outside influences that affect the health of your business.

You do have control over the environment you help create, the people you invite into this environment, and the performance of the team you lead. You need a plan, not just a vision, of what you want, or where you want your business to be, and the relentless tenacity to work, live, and breathe that vision into fruition.

What you need is a complete performance management system—a plan to show you how to create the right environment, find the right frontline people for that environment, and provide the proper motivations for your frontline to take efficient and effective action. You need a *blueprint* that results in getting maximum value from each customer at each contact point.

The Khoury Performance Equation (KPE) *is* just such a blueprint. The KPE is a business blueprint designed to optimize sales and service performance through three primary areas of actionable focus: the right environment, the right fit, and the right action. They are



interdependent and feed and build upon each other. Only by addressing all three components—environment, fit, and action—will your organization reach its full performance potential.

Here is a real-world example that demonstrates the dynamic effect of the KPE on frontline-generated profit.

Case Study—the Contact Center

Consider this: The contact center industry is one of the largest employers in North America. It is also booming in emerging economies worldwide. For the most part, contact center performance is measured in terms of cost, *not improved revenue*. Measuring revenue growth in this industry can be very challenging, especially when it comes to clearly determining the actual catalysts for improvement.

This challenge surfaces consistently because when numbers improve, questions invariably arise. For example, did sales improve because: your competition raised prices? You lowered prices? Your competition is having challenges? Your marketing department spent more on advertising or because they came up with a brilliant campaign?

It's often very difficult to put your finger on the answers. As a result, contact center managers frequently find themselves in a no-win situation: They get very little credit when the numbers go up, but they are blamed or are conveniently made "scapegoats" when numbers are stagnant or go down.

Answer the challenge: Apply the logic of sales production differential as described as *the gap in performance* between your top, average, and bottom producers who have similar sales opportunities. This, along with full deployment of the KPE, will produce results that are substantial enough to dismiss any meaningful credit commonly attributed elsewhere for smaller sales increases.

No single actionable initiative can produce more with less downside risk than the crafting of a high-performance service-based sales culture. When you calculate the impact of a motivated producer in a contact center (following the KPE), you will find the numbers can be mind-blowing. For example, just one more booking per day per salesperson might double revenue! The realistic potential might be 50 percent increase in sales, resulting in a huge *bottom-line impact!*

And you'll have happier employees (due to better income); happier customers (due to better fulfillment of needs and wants); happier management (due to greater security, lower turnover and lower stress); and happier stockholders (due to higher profits and ROI)!

Case Closed!

Once you identify your true potential influence, you'll find the frontline revenue opportunities within your grasp are inspiring. It then becomes critical that you share this financial epiphany with *all* managers to secure total buy-in. If you don't make sure it happens with a personal and visible commitment, you will mute the enthusiasm and subsequent motivation needed to bring all of this to realization.

Depending on your current financial situation, this impact can improve profits, double them, or even be the *only* profit! So, make your case. Make the right choices, and you will create a team with the ability of caring for your customers and the power to generate unprecedented company profit. SSE

Ziad Khoury is founder of the Frontline Performance Group and author of Frontline Profit Machine *(Select Books). Visit www.FrontlinePerformanceGroup.com, or email info@frontlinepg.com.*

ACTION: Make the case for transformation.

Defensive to Offensive

Start changing your strategy.

by JoAnn M. Laing

THE MOST PROFITABLE COMpanies best understand and adapt to their environment. They know when to adjust to outside factors in the sales process. The past three sales cycles have featured steep declines in purchasing, driven by a lack of credit and economic slowdown.

Predicting when the down trend stops and a reversal in fortunes begins is an art, not a science. *Buyers have pent-up demand that should reflect itself in more business this fall. Sales leaders need to move from the defensive to the offensive.*

For the sales leader, switching from a defensive sales strategy to one of more aggressive efforts is a tough call. In past recessionary cycles, many companies found themselves in the position of playing catch-up when the economy revives, and they were not in a position to take advantage of this sea change. As the Bible says, “There is a time to sow and a time to reap.” Now is a time to *sow efforts* and *reap rewards*.

For the past five years, our company, Information Strategies (ISI) has studied how sales leaders manage their efforts. ISI also surveys buyers about their habits and needs. During the past three sales cycles, when recessionary winds blew, the emphasis of most sales efforts have been on maintaining current clients/customers and sales. This has created a defensive mentality. Travel budgets are cut. Support staff is reduced. Incentive programs are refocused on sales retention rather than new business. There is a *circle the wagons* approach in sales.

In this latest recession, many buyers were forced by the lack of credit to delay or cancel many purchases. Among sales leaders, there is a growing feeling that they have been too defensive in their efforts and may have cut bone as well as fat from their sales teams. They cite the loss of trained support personnel, the group that maintains day-to-day relationships with clients.

At the same time, many managers report that they sense a sort of “siege mentality” affecting the sales group. One manager said: “My guys don’t get out there with the customers with the same vigor they had two years ago. One reason is we don’t encourage the personal visit, for financial reasons.” Another said, “Even when I loosened the reins, my sales staff isn’t prospecting as much as they did in the past.”

The Internet has changed the marketing mix; however, you still need to get out and meet customers—as the recession has created pent-up demand that will be manifest in the last quarter of this year.

Sales leaders should remember that small-business buyers react more quickly than larger organizations. Should the economy continue to rebound, small-business buyers will be out this fall purchasing.

What, then, should sales leaders be doing this fall? Almost all sales managers who had weathered other recessions responded to our surveys by saying that they missed a window at the beginning of upturns where they could have made major market-share increases if they had moved more quickly. In a focus group, some managers made these recommendations:

- Create an atmosphere of aggressive new sales efforts this fall.
- Foster additional personal contacts with new and existing clients.
- Offer incentives for new business.
- Encourage attendance at trade shows and other gatherings.
- Step up promotional mailings.
- Build an aggressive 2010 sales plan.
- Rehire/replace vacant positions.

It is an ill wind that blows no good, and sales leaders now have the opportunity to take advantage of a changing environment to drive sales. SSE

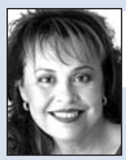
JoAnn M. Laing is chairperson of ISI and author of The Janus Principle: Focusing Your Company on Selling to Small Business. *Visit www.thejanusprinciple.com.*

ACTION: Prepare an aggressive sales strategy.

MARKETING/MISTAKE

Marketing Mistake

Missing a positioning statement.



by Lenann McGookey Gardner

QUICK EXPERIMENT: ASK SIX people in your company, *What is the most powerful, provocative, short message we can hope to deliver to our prospects?* My prediction: you’ll get about as many different answers to that question as the number of people you ask.

Why is this important? Because in a world in which everybody is exposed to over 1,000 marketing messages daily, you need to carefully hone a powerful, provocative message about what you have to offer, and then deliver that powerful message, and deliver it, and deliver it, to have any hope of your prospects becoming aware of you!

Al Ries and Jack Trout, originators of the *Positioning* concept, wrote, “Since so little about you is ever going to get into the minds of the people you wish to reach, your job is not a ‘communication’ project. It’s a selection project. You have to select the material that has the best chance of getting through.”

This is still true, and yet most firms are missing a *Positioning Statement*! The price of this error is high. When you have no message—or many different messages—nothing sticks.

Think of it this way: your prospects don’t know you and they don’t care—so don’t try to attract them with a complicated message because it’s too hard to sort out the meaning.

So what’s the answer? Coming up with powerful, provocative messages—your *Positioning*—doesn’t begin with the message but with prospects. Who are they? What do they care and worry about? What other messages are they receiving? And what might you say that will differentiate you and create some interest?

It’s good to work with a professional on this. They’ll be more objective about the strengths you have that can be conveyed in a short message that will grab people. This is not the time for laundry lists of capabilities or complex explanations—remember, the target audience has no interest now, so they probably won’t invest much time deciphering a long description.

By *provocative* I mean that the message must provoke *interest and inquiry*—you can later deliver a more complex, nuanced version of what you can do. But initially, you have to get them interested. And yes, you’ll probably need a *Positioning Statement* for the enterprise, and then for individual products or service lines. Work hard on honing your most powerful, provocative messages, and then invest in getting them out. You’ll then have the best chance of catching interest and sales.

Without a powerful, short message, your sales are likely to be anemic. SSE

Lenann McGookey Gardner is a sales trainer and author of Got Sales? *Visit www.YouCanSell.com.*

ACTION: Create a positioning statement.

Follow Up

Overcome your fear.

by Judy Garmaise

MOST SALESPEOPLE DON'T take follow up seriously. After talking with a prospect, they leave one follow-up voicemail or send one e-mail—that's it. A few will call or e-mail one more time, but few follow up three, four, five, six, or even seven times.

However, that's how many times you must follow up to get someone's attention—seven follow-ups! How many follow-ups do you usually make?

The excuses why salespeople don't follow up are plentiful: "I'm too busy," "I need to spend my time in front of new prospects, not chasing down possibilities," "I left the person a voicemail; now it's their turn to call me." Those excuses are nonsense! The real reason people don't follow up is because they're terrified of rejection.

People have a fear of getting hung up on. They're afraid the prospect is going to tell them, "Go away! Stop bothering me!" When it comes time to follow up, their internal dialogue is saying, "I don't want to bother her. I asked for the sale once and she said no. If I ask again, she'll yell at me."

If you're ready to follow up and close more sales, try three suggestions:

1. Quit taking it personally (QTIP). They are not rejecting you; they're rejecting your product or service. Here's proof: Imagine that a wizard waved his wand and said to you, "For the next 12 hours any phone call you make, any person you meet, and any encounter you have you will get a 'yes' answer." How many follow up phone calls would you make that day? An infinite number? If you're making phone call after phone call that entire day, isn't that proof that the reason you're not making the phone calls is fear of rejection? You would have absolutely no fear of picking up that phone if you knew there were a "yes" on the line.

But then what happens? You're talking with someone and you get a "no." At that point, remember that it takes a certain number of negative responses before you get the positive one. That exact number will vary depending on your product and industry. However, every time you get a "no," say, "Great! Now I'm one phone call closer to my 'yes.'"

Finally, consider this: Does the person on the other end of the line—the one who is saying "no"—really know you? Does he know what you look like, what your life is like, what your dreams and aspirations are, what you do in your spare time, and who you are at your core? Of course not! Only your friends and family know that. Therefore, if this person doesn't really know you, how can he be rejecting you? He's rejecting your product, not you. Stop taking it personally, pick up the phone, and have FUN (*Follow Up Now*).

2. Never Assume. Despite having great products and being intelligent, most salespeople fear they're going to annoy prospects if they follow up. That's why after they leave one voicemail and get no reply, *they* assume that the prospect is not interested. The word *assume* can be broken down into "ass-u-me." When we *assume*, we're making an *ass* out of *you* and *me*. When you don't follow up because of your assumptions, that's what you're doing.

Here's why: The reason people are not getting back to you—even after four or five e-mails—is not because they aren't interested: it's simply that they are busy. So, following up is not about *nagging*—it's about *reminding*. People today are bombarded with information. Their minds are going in 50 different directions all at once. It's only natural that they need a bit of reminding about your products.

A person's short-term memory is between 5 and 60 seconds long. So, when someone listens to five voicemails, she won't remember your call. This is why you need to remind people that you contacted them.

Also, stuff happens. People lose their cell phones; they get sick; technology glitches happen and voicemails or e-mails disappear; and sometimes, people just forget. When you assume that someone isn't interested or assume that you're bothering them or assume they don't have the money or make other assumptions, you sabotage yourself and your company.

Besides, if you believe you have a product or service that your client needs to know about it, following up should not be an issue. After all, you're doing them a favor by reminding them of your offering. Most prospects will even thank you for your follow up. And ultimately, if someone is supposed to give you money for a transaction, then it's your obligation to get them on the phone. They never owe you a call if they're paying you. Stop making assumptions and follow up until you get what you want.

3. It's never no; it's just not yet. Often a prospect will say "no" repeatedly—sometimes for years—and then suddenly one day says "yes." That's because no matter what their words are, it's never really "no"; it's just *not yet*. The prospect is just saying "no" to the product *at that moment in time*—not forever. You never know when he or she will be ready for your product, which is why you have to follow up.

The reason it's never "no" and just "not yet" is because *shift happens*. No one lives in a stagnant world. *Everything* is changing. People and circumstances change, sometimes in seconds.

It's not up to you to determine who is qualified for your product or service and who isn't. Just stay in touch with people because at any moment any person's circumstance can change.

Knowing that "shift happens" and acknowledging that "it's never no and just not yet," your success rate in closing the sale will increase.

Success is in the follow-up. Since few salespeople follow up with prospects, you will truly stand out when you do. Even if your prospect does not immediately return your call or e-mail, he or she will remember your efforts. And the more follow up you do, the more permanently you'll cement yourself in his or her mind. That way when the person is ready to make the buying decision, your name will be the first one your prospect thinks of. Pick up that phone and do some follow up today. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. **SSE**

Judy Garmaise, CSW, is a consultant, trainer, speaker in sales and service, and author of The Power of Follow Up. *E-mail judy@judygarmaise.com or call 561-445-9955.*

ACTION: Follow up more to close more sales.

SERVICE/PERCEPTION

Consumer Perception

It's key to survival and to success.

by Bob Prosen

IN TOUGH ECONOMIC TIMES, you need to maintain *quality customer experiences* and get the right message across to your customers. Yes, you also need to aggressively manage costs, but your business will be doomed the moment you sacrifice your customer's buying experience. In fact, service and product quality should be elevated during a recession to build customer loyalty. Knowing where to cut costs and improve service will enhance your success.

To build and maintain your revenue streams, you need to keep current customers, sell more to them, and have them refer you to others. No one survives on price alone; when times are tough, those who try to survive on price will go out of business. However, if you keep costs low in good times, you'll reap higher margins and build reserves that can be used to gain a competitive advantage in tough times.

Keep your word. Keep your doors open, and stay true to your promises to ensure customer trust and loyalty. The quality of the customer experience is key. Continue providing customers quality products and top service. Look for innovative ways to provide more value on things that don't cost much. For example, include low-book-valued items from inventory at no charge or offer discounts on future purchases. Create value-added transactions and involve the entire company in bundling products and services. Customers get more for less, and you generate more revenue and profit.

Whatever you do, don't cancel your traditional sales deals. This will drive loyal customers away. Raising your level of communication can help increase customer loyalty: Inform customers when products ship; provide advance notice of delays; communicate return and refund information; follow up to ensure satisfaction; or send a heartfelt thank-you. Staying in tune with your customers' needs will build loyalty and capture market share.

Don't compromise your customer's shopping experience. Put your client first. Don't skimp on things that could sour their buying experience. Quality of goods and services must remain high, so don't switch suppliers just because someone else can do it cheaper. You usually get what you pay for, and your customers will notice. Talk to your suppliers and see what they can do to help on price. Chances are, they don't want to lose your business either, and they'll work with you to offer better pricing, terms, or upgrades.

Experience matters! Don't fire your higher-paid employees just to replace them with cheaper, untrained labor. Customers expect a quality shopping experience, impeccable service, and enthusiastic, knowledgeable salespeople. When you maintain quality, customers respect you and *stay loyal*.

Empathize with customers. Show them that you understand what they're going through and want to be there for them now, and when good times return. We admire companies that take proactive steps so they can be there for us tomorrow. That said, don't throw caution to the wind. Some customers will ask for special pricing and terms; if possible, accommodate their needs. But also consider asking for longer-term agreements. When requests outweigh the value, it's time to say "no." It's critical to cut costs; however, finding ways to cut *non-essential* expenses is the key.

Get the message out. Get to the customer base with *the right message*. This is your chance to show your humanity and develop a closeness with your customer. Let them know that you understand their hardship. Your image will keep you in business. SSE

Bob Prosen is CEO of The Prosen Center for Business Advancement and author of Kiss Theory Good Bye. *Visit www.bobprosen.com or call 972-899-2180.*

ACTION: Create quality customer experiences.

SALES/EMPATHY

It Got You Here

But it won't get you there.

by Don Brown and Bill Hawkins

WHILE SUCCESS IN SALES HAPPENS *because of* certain behaviors, it also happens *in spite of* other behaviors. As Peter Drucker noted, "We sometimes need to learn not *what to do*, but what to *stop doing* in order to grow."

This is timely advice for those in sales because of soaring customer expectations and crashing baseline service offerings. Myriad organizations now charge for what they once included free. Customers want more, and organizations provide less just to survive.

The remedy seems to be high-tech/no-touch. Most organizations have responded to the challenge *by trying to engineer the human being out of the equation,* trying to manage the customer interface with *technology*, rather than *biology*! Instead of providing you interaction with a person, many now entice you (or *force* you) to print your own documentation, check in at automated kiosks, transfer funds electronically, "send away" for credits, and spend an eternity in *phone hell*—all in the name of allegedly "serving" you better. Organizations are betting that if they can remove *human unpredictability* from customer interactions, we'll all be much happier and healthier.

What's wrong with this picture? When people chart the satisfying moments they experience as customers, they say that the main factor is the *person* they interact with! The person (*you*) makes or breaks the experience.

In a tense marketplace, high-tech/no-touch doesn't work—the human interface is still the differentiator. So, what can you do? Here are five tips:

1. Understand that *what got you here won't get you there*—the stock answers of yesteryear won't apply!

2. Accept that the human interface *still* matters—you can't completely replace people with technology.

3. Enter the era of *empathy*—the *connection* of understanding, being aware of or sensitive to, and even vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of others. *This is what will get you there in sales and service.*

4. Explore the possibility that people get in their own way as often as not. The shortest route to more effective relationships lies not in the steps to establishing the empathic connection, but in simply *not breaking the connection* that exists!

5. Assess your interpersonal habits—what should *you* learn to stop when interacting with your customers? SSE

Marshall Goldsmith, Don Brown, and Bill Hawkins are coauthors of What Got You Here Won't Get You There . . . for Salespeople! *Contact marshall@marshallgoldsmithlibrary.com, dbrown@situational.net and bhawk4257@aol.com.*

ACTION: Create empathy for customer needs.

Social Media Marketing

Try avoiding these top five mistakes.


by Pam Lontos and Maurice Ramirez

YOU ALREADY KNOW THE IMPORTANCE OF utilizing traditional PR—print, radio and TV exposure—to keep your name circulating. Now, you need to be familiar with Social Media Marketing (SMM). When combined with your traditional PR efforts, SMM can help you penetrate the marketplace with your message quicker and easier.

SMM is utilizing the various social networking sites to enforce your brand and market your business. A social networking site is simply an online meeting place. Think of it like an eHarmony or Match.com for business people. On such sites, people can post a profile with the hopes of meeting other like-minded professionals.

Social networks and blogs have moved ahead of personal e-mail among the most popular online activities people engage in. Additionally, the time spent on these sites is growing three times faster than the overall Internet rate. More than two-thirds of the world's online population now visits social networking and blogging sites.

If you aren't yet engaged in Social Media Marketing, the time to start is now. But before you do, you need to be aware of the top mistakes businesses make with this PR outlet so you can avoid them and get the biggest return for your marketing investment.

Mistake 1: Having more than one face on the Internet. When you engage in SMM, you build your image from the ground up. The goal is to virally spread *parts* of your image across the Internet. Basically, you're starting with a holographic image of yourself in the virtual world. You then need to break that hologram apart and find the appropriate sites on the Internet where you can frame certain pieces of that hologram.

When someone looks at all the pieces at the various sites, they should be able to put them together—they should not see multiple images of who you are. That would ruin your credibility. So, if you have multiple Facebook accounts, for example, your personal one has to be hidden and by invitation only. You don't want that other image out there confusing people and possibly diminishing your reputation.

Mistake 2: Collecting friends. SMM is how you create instant buzz on the Internet by getting the same message out over and over. It's spreading your message and getting yourself branded so you can get more business. Social networking is about making friends. For example, you've likely seen someone on LinkedIn who has 25,000+ contacts. That's great, but what do you do with them? Remember, just because you have a phone book doesn't mean you can open it at random, pick a name, and call them for business.

When you collect a contact, you're supposed to be opening the door to exchange information and build a relationship. Think of it as relationship marketing in the 21st century, and the same rules apply. The only difference is that you're building the relationship online rather than over coffee.

Mistake 3: Putting out the wrong messages. You've likely seen people put posts on Twitter or Facebook that say something like, "John Smith is watching a great movie and eating popcorn." Such messages may be fine for personal networks, but for business networks you need to put out messages that are useful to your readers. Don't talk about yourself. You want to give valuable tips and advice so that the people who read your posts want to repost them to their own sites. That's how your message spreads virally.

The key is to keep your messages consistent. People are subscribing to various feeds in order to get your information. They are saying that your message has value. That's why you can't do a series of sales tips and then post a couple of your favorite omelet recipes. You have to stay on message, and your message has to be for your readers. With that said, it is okay to occasionally have a press release type message that says something like, "John Smith is speaking at ABC Convention on employee productivity today." Such a message does two things: 1) It tells people they might not get a tip today or tomorrow because you're busy, and 2) It shows that other big-wigs out there think your message is important. It's a positive reinforcement that boosts your credibility, so long as you don't do it too frequently.

Mistake 4: Posting inappropriate information. Don't allow yourself or anyone on your site to post anything online that you don't want your most conservative client to see. You never know where something will end up. Never post anything on any site that you wouldn't personally show your own grandmother.

Mistake 5: Assuming that it is better to have your message in only one place on the Internet. In the "old days" of the Internet, people believed they had to keep all their content on their own Web site. The theory was that spreading it out ruined your credibility and diminished your reputation. Not so today. In fact, with SMM, the more places you can get your message to appear simultaneously, the more effective your message will be. Think of it as constructing a funnel. You want to lay several trails of information, all of which lead to your main site. No matter how someone stumbles upon you, as long as they "follow the trail," they'll eventually find you. That's what you're doing with Twitters and other SMM messages. You're creating an environment where people see your message everywhere. As a result, you now have their attention—and a chance to sell your product, services, or whatever you're selling at that point of distribution. Funneling your message can be powerful.

Get noticed with SMM. Today your name has to be everywhere—in print, on radio, on TV, and on social networking sites. The more you can get your name and message circulating in various mediums, the higher your chances of clients seeing your information and hiring you. Thanks to SMM, you can get your message out to thousands of people in an instant, resulting in greater credibility, more exposure, higher sales, and a better bottom line. **SSE**

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ACTION: Get your message out with SMM.

SALES/SCENARIOS

Think Like Customers

Try selling with usage scenarios.

by Mike Bosworth

TO THINK LIKE CUSTOMERS, you need to talk less about product features and more about real life situations.

We call this a *usage scenario*. These work when selling any product or service—even when the offering is just one in a crowded field of entries. In fact, in situations where the offering is perceived as a commodity, *the most powerful differentiator is the buyer's conversation with the salesperson.*

Many salespeople lead with their product and push hard on what they perceive to be the distinguishing characteristics. This approach is fraught with peril. It often fails, for example, to establish a salesperson's competence. It short-circuits discussion of the buyer's needs. It may lead to premature price discussions, cause sticker shock, and result in no sale at all. Only the product attributes that buyers agree they want or need are what is relevant. Part of the problem is the salesperson's familiarity with the product or service. Salespeople usually learn about the products by being sent to *product training* early on the job. This is *not* sales training. If you emphasize your product in training, your salespeople will share that vast knowledge with prospects. Is that what you want?

During sales calls, should salespeople focus on what the product can do for prospects or on how prospects can use the product to achieve a goal or solve a problem? Salespeople and their buyers should be focused on product usage, *not* product features.

A feature is an attribute of a product or service. Features include things like size, weight, color, material used, modules, and specifications. Many marketing people take artistic license with these facts—adding adjectives like robust, seamless or integrated—to heighten the feature's presumed sex appeal to make it more irresistible.

When you lead with features, you count on buyers knowing whether or not the feature is useful and relevant. Yes, you might get good results—if buyers already understand how to use the product or service, understand the value of using it, trust the seller and trust the seller's company.

In my sales training, I was taught to talk about benefits. "Because of Feature X, dear buyer, you can expect to get Benefit Y!" We weren't encouraged to find out what the buyer wanted to achieve before we made our benefit statement. In our sales culture, the alleged benefit of a feature mainly existed in the mind of the seller.

Suppose a salesperson is set to make a call on an executive to convince him to spend $500,000 on a CRM system that he does not fully understand. Nor can he see how this software can help him to achieve his goals. How should the salesperson relate to this buyer?

Suppose your salesperson asks: "What if you heard that one of your top salespeople was leaving to work for the competition? Would it be useful for you to go into your CRM system and suspend that salesperson's access to your prospect and buyer data—from any location?"

When debriefing sales calls, salespeople need to discuss the prospect's goals, what prevents the prospect from achieving the goals, and with which usage scenarios the prospect best relates; then the salesperson should document these elements so the prospect can validate the usage scenarios.

Usage scenarios enable you to lead prospects to a vision of how they could use the product features to their benefit. When you use usage scenarios to help buyers visualize how they can use the product to solve problems, achieve goals, make money or save money, you will win more business! SSE

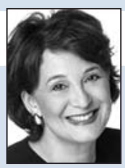
Mike Bosworth is co-founder and co-author of CustomerCentric Selling®. Visit www.customer-centric.com.

ACTION: Use usage scenarios in your sales.

SALES/CONFLICT

Conflict Resolution

Take these five steps.



by Joyce Weiss

IN ANY COMPANY, CONFLICTS happen. When people work together, communication differences, style preferences, and conflicting opinions are inevitable.

Whenever interpersonal conflict arises in your dealings with others, put these five steps to conflict resolution to work.

1. Identify the situation. Think in specifics. Simply saying, "The marketing department drives me crazy with their pie-in-the-sky thinking," will not help you resolve the issue. You need to precisely pinpoint who is causing the conflict as well as what he or she is doing to upset you.

2. Make an appointment to discuss the conflict. Once you figure out the specifics, you need to meet with the person. Go to his or her office and say, "I need to talk to you about our working relationship. Would you meet me for lunch on Thursday?" Whatever you do, don't barge into the person's office and start accusing him or her of things. You want to meet the person on neutral ground in a public area so the conversation stays civil.

3. Craft your "I" message. The first few words you say to the person will set the tone for the rest of the meeting. Therefore, make sure you don't accuse the person or put him or her on the defensive by using "you" statements, as in, "You're always late for work and you're making my job hard." Instead, follow this formula: I feel (your responsibility) when I (non-judgmental) because (how it affects you). For example, "I feel frustrated when I have to lead the morning meetings every day because everyone agreed to be here on time for the meetings but not everyone is." This approach takes the attention away from the person and focuses it on the behavior that is causing conflict.

4. Set your goal. Plan what you think the other person will say and what you will say in response. Additionally, plan the desired changes you would like to see the other person implement. And don't forget that no conflict is one-sided. You have to look at the other person's side of things and find out what you can do to make work easier for him or her too.

5. Get closure. Before leaving the meeting, detail the agreements both parties have made. Shake hands, and choose a date and time that you'll meet again to evaluate overall progress.

Conflicts don't have to be ugly situations that cause grief and pain. You can resolve conflicts by being *Direct with Respect* and by keeping an open mind. The more you work toward conflict resolution, the more successful you'll be in business and in life. SSE

Joyce Weiss, author of Full Speed Ahead *and* Take the Ride of Your Life!, *is a speaker, coach, and facilitator on employee performance and group dynamics. Visit www.JoyceWeiss.com or call 800-713-1926.*

ACTION: Takes these steps to resolve conflicts.

Service Excellence

Practice six principles.

by Theo Gilbert-Jamison

CREATING A CULTURE OF SERvice, performance, and operational excellence does *not* happen by chance. It takes a systematic process to create *sustainable* change.

During my 17-year career with The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, I saw firsthand how creating a clear and simple service culture and holding everyone accountable for embracing it could create global, long-term recognition and success. After I left The Ritz-Carlton, I studied other world-class organizations and found that many of them also enjoyed sustainable success and recognition for driving excellence through employee engagement, customer loyalty, and profit dominance.

During benchmarking and research, I found that top organizations share *Six Principles of Service Excellence*.

Principle 1: Vision and mission. World-class organizations that create and sustain a culture of service excellence have a sound vision and mission that is known, owned, and energized by every employee. In such cases, their vision statements clarify what they aspire to be in the future; while their mission statements articulate their purpose, what they stand for.

Principle 2: Goals and priorities. World-class organizations that create and sustain a culture of service excellence have clear, simple, quantifiable organizational goals and objectives that every employee is aware of. They don't confuse employees with a multitude of objectives, but select three or four that employees not only know, but also understand how the work they do contributes to the successful achievement of them. Along with objectives that focus on growth and profitability, they also have service-oriented objectives that focus on customer loyalty, employee engagement, and quality improvement.

Principle 3: Service standards. The purpose of service standards is to clarify for employees exactly what actions and behaviors are expected of them in driving excellence every day, and creating customer loyalty. World-class organizations that are able to create and sustain a culture of service excellence create and regularly communicate the standards of excellence (*key touch points*) that are necessary in bringing their vision, mission, and business objectives to life. They do not leave this to chance.

Principle 4: Intervention and learning strategy. Beyond having a sound strategy in place to ensure financial success, world-class organizations have systems and processes in place to ensure their service philosophy (*vision, mission, business objectives, and service standards*) is interwoven into every aspect of the culture. When it comes to employee recruitment and selection, new employee orientation, training and development, performance management, reward and recognition, incentive programs—the service philosophy is integrated each step of the way.

Principle 5: Organizational alignment. World-class organizations that create and sustain a culture of service excellence use every communication resource within their sphere of influence to constantly reinforce their service philosophy. They hold leaders accountable for regularly discussing the organizational vision, mission, business objectives, and service standards during daily pre-shift meetings, as well as, monthly or quarterly departmental meetings (*which are required, not optional*). Other communication resources used to align staff include posters, tent cards, and wallet cards that display the service philosophy. Also, they reinforce this information through employee newsletters, bulletin boards, and email taglines. Senior executives are also accountable for discussing the relevance of the service philosophy every opportunity they get to interact with employees.

Principle 6: Measurement and leadership accountability. *What gets measured gets done*. Organizations that drive excellence use *simple scorecards* to help employees keep track of the success or failure in driving excellence. Measurement helps establish credibility in the process, by helping senior leaders determine strengths and weaknesses in the system, and effectively hold mid-management accountable for driving excellence every day.

To measure your degree of *service excellence*, use a scorecard. My *Service Excellence Scorecard* enables you to measure such things as customer comment cards and letters, profit increase, sales/revenue increase, leadership turnover, internal promotions, employee turnover, employee satisfaction, problem resolution satisfaction, percent of customer defects, customer loyalty, and customer satisfaction.

You might also conduct a *Culture Mini-Assessment* of your use of the *Six Principles of Service Excellence* by answering six questions: 1) Our ***vision and mission*** are clearly understood by the people in my department. Our leaders clearly communicate and consistently reinforce the vision and mission. 2) Our leaders discuss company ***goals***, and our departmental goals are aligned with the company goals and priorities. People in my department understand and support the department's goals and priorities. 3) Our leaders discuss our ***service standards***, service measurements, and performance. 4) Our leaders have a sound ***strategy***, systems, and processes in place to weave the service standards into the culture. 5) Our leaders create ***alignment*** and sustain a culture of service excellence using every communication resource within their influence to constantly reinforce their service philosophy. 6) Our leaders are held accountable for discussing the relevance of the service philosophy each time they interact with employees. People in my area understand our service measurements and performance. We have an effective process for measuring service deficiencies and customer satisfaction and for resolving deficiencies and improving satisfaction.

Creating a culture of service excellence is a journey, not a destination. There is no shortcut or quick fix. To achieve it leadership must be 100 percent committed to applying a comprehensive approach and stay with it for the long-term to ensure sustainability.

These Six Principles can help you create and sustain *service excellence*. SSE

Theo Gilbert-Jamison is CEO of Performance Solutions by Design, a performance consulting firm, and author of The Six Principles of Service Excellence, *and* The Leadership Book of Numbers. *Visit www.psbydesign.com or email tjamison@psbydesign.com.*

ACTION: Achieve service excellence.

MANAGEMENT/HIRING

Leader's Top Job

Pick people to deliver results.

by Randy Street

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORtant job of a leader? Is it setting vision, defining strategy, driving execution, or something else? We asked 80 leaders this question; according to them, 52 percent of success comes from picking the right management team, 20 percent from execution, 17 percent from strategy, and the balance came from external factors, such as market conditions.

Over half of the equation for business success comes from picking the right people! People drive execution; people come up with new strategies and navigate the markets. People matter more than any other factor. As Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great,* said, "The most important decisions are not *what* decision, but *who* decisions." The *who* decisions are people decisions.

Nick Chabraja, CEO of General Dynamics, once had a business unit with a large operational backlog. So he put in place a capable person who was an innovative business developer. In fact, he was so good at this that he put more orders in the backlog without fixing the operations to deliver the orders! Nick realized he had made a mistake and replaced him with one of the best operational executives who did a fabulous job of fixing the business. Nick said, "Success comes from having the right person in the right job at the right time with the right skill set for the business problem that exists."

Many leaders fail to learn this lesson. As Peter Drucker said, *50 percent of all hiring decisions are mistakes*. We find this to be true, along with half of all promotion decisions. A coin toss would yield the same results! And hiring mistakes are costly. If you mis-hire a $100,000 per year employee, it will cost you $1.5 million. The wrong people won't execute your strategy or drive the results you seek.

Nate Thompson, CEO of Spectra Logic, went through five VPs of sales in three years before finding the right person. He estimates that these mistakes cost his business $100 million. Worse, the wrong hires prevented him from going on vacations because he was constantly dealing with the problems they created at the office.

Four-Step Process

You can avoid these costly mistakes by picking the right *who*, using a simple, practical, four-step process:

1. Build a scorecard—a document that articulates the outcomes you want the person to achieve. Not all talented people are talented in the way you need them to be. The scorecard helps you define the business problem so you can get the right talent on board.

2. Source candidates by tapping your professional networks. You can still use recruiters, of course, but 77 percent of the 80 successful business leaders we interviewed said that their best people came through referrals.

3. Select your candidate using a series of structured interviews, culminating with the *Topgrading Interview*—a chronological interview that walks through a person's career using five questions for each job: 1) What were you hired to do? 2) What accomplishments are you most proud of? 3) What were the biggest low points? 4) With whom did you work? 5) Why did you leave? You'll see clear patterns that define the person's successes and failures and match those patterns to the scorecard to make good hiring and promotion decisions.

4. Sell your candidate on joining your team by focusing on factors that matter most to them. Most people are concerned with fit, family, freedom, fun, and fortune. Help them see how their contribution will address their concerns.

Pick the right *who* to deliver the results you seek. SSE

Randy Street is the co-author of Who: The A Method for Hiring *and partner with ghSMART, a leadership advisory firm. Visit www.ghsmart.com.*

ACTION: Improve your hiring decisions.

MARKETING/NURTURING

Curious Buyers

They require some nurturing.

by John Holland

MOST BUYERS STILL PERCEIVE traditional selling as attempts to convince, persuade, and manipulate them. Few vendors have changed their view of selling to that of *facilitating* the buying process.

While CRM hasn't moved the needle, technology has empowered buyers, enabling them to minimize a salesperson's influence on their buying decisions. Search engines, Websites, Webinars, and social networking enable buyers to avoid interacting with salespeople early in buying cycles. Today, many buyers develop needs on their own.

These new buying behaviors have profound implications in challenging sales teams to change how they align with these buyers. Vendors that adjust to the new reality can provide a superior buying experience and enjoy a sustainable competitive advantage. As you'd expect, more than lip service is necessary to achieve that objective.

More initial interactions with potential buyers are electronic. Vendors with an average four-month sales cycle find it takes some buyers two years to make a purchase. Instead of using two categories of buyers *looking/not looking* to change, I propose a third: *curious*.

Curious buyers want to start learning about vendors, offerings, trends. They have no compelling event requiring action in the short term. Curious buyers don't want to be qualified. They respond better to vendors that nurture them and allow them to self-qualify when they are ready to buy.

There are differences in the make-up of sales versus marketing staff. Sellers have the pressure of trying to make quota this year. Marketing looks at a longer horizon. That said, many Websites are too anxious to qualify visitors and scare or put off curious visitors. This behavior is likely influenced by the underlying objective of *delivering leads* for salespeople. Does your Website allow buyers to be curious and learn at their pace? Curious buyers are looking for: trends, newsletters, useful information, what other people are doing with your offerings, guest speakers who provide views during Webinars, Blogs, articles, and white papers.

In the same way a salesperson must establish rapport and competence, the same approach can differentiate your company's Website. By nurturing curious buyers, you can provide information that allows them to form opinions in defining their requirements. If and when they are serious about buying, they contact your company. The ability to nurture builds healthy pipelines and improves early buying experiences. SSE

John Holland is co-founder and co-author of CustomerCentric Selling. Visit www.customer-centric.com.

ACTION: Nurture your curious buyers.

Hypersensitive Customers

Tips to enhance your customer care.


by Marilyn Suttle and Lori Jo Vest

As if businesses weren't struggling enough, we now see the emergence of hypersensitive customers—consumers who have less cash, more information, and less tolerance for poor service than ever before. One study, conducted by BDO Stoy Hayward, found that in the last 18 months, customers have become less loyal and more particular. They realize how *privileged* retailers are to have their business. Half admit to increasing their service expectations.

Customers now have easy access to consumer reviews, detailed technical information and competitive product data. They have tighter budgets, so they've become more discerning in both the products they buy and the service they expect. And most say that they would leave the store if they encountered poor service.

Companies that offer exceptional service are better prepared to deal with this new generation of customers. While your team may be well-versed in some areas of customer care, are they well-versed in all of them? Have you clearly conveyed specific expectations for how they treat your most valuable asset—your customers?

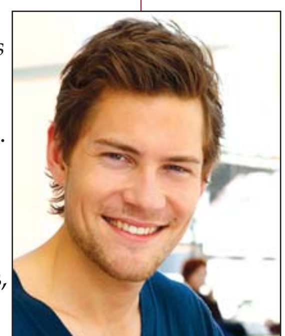
Since this hypersensitive customer is coming your way, what should you emphasize to better accommodate them? Here are seven suggestions:

1. Emphasize hiring the right people. People prefer to do business with people they like. How can you be sure that your customers will like your people? Hire those who genuinely enjoy helping others. Hire people with good attitudes and personalities that suit your service positions. You'll find that your company culture will naturally evolve to become more customer-friendly.

Singapore Airlines has an unusual hiring procedure, but it definitely contributes to their reputation for exquisite service. Potential new hires are all brought in at the same time. They wait together in a room set up with a tea service and one-way mirrors so that the hiring team can watch how they interact. Only those candidates who attend to the others waiting with them—serving tea and making conversation—move on to the next round.

2. Emphasize authenticity. The advent of social media has brought with it a more authentic and interactive communication with customers. A down-to-earth, even casual, tone is becoming the norm in advertising and marketing. It's the same in customer service. Customers quickly sense insincerity, and are repelled by sickeningly sweet, overly scripted dialog. Encourage employees to find their own authentic style for communicating a message of respect and care for the customer. Thinking of themselves as *tour guides* for the customer's positive experience with your company can provide a context.

3. Emphasize customer input. Customers want to know that you are interested in their opinions. If you ask for customer comments, you'll learn what you need to do to serve them better. Consider making follow-up calls to ask, "What could we have done to make your experience even better?" Some customers won't ever tell you that something wasn't right; but when you regularly query them with surveys or personal conversation, they'll tell you what you need to do to improve your service and your product.



4. Emphasize a long-term relationship. Do you communicate regularly with your customers, even long after the transaction has been completed? Your competitor might be. Repeat business and referrals increase through an emphasis on *long-term relationships*.

The Green Company, a builder and developer, is in an industry with a long purchase cycle. They sell the home, build it, then hand it over to the buyer. With most builders, that's where the relationship ends. But The Green Company created a Residential Services department to help homeowners with repairs and vendor referrals for years after the warranty has ended, resulting in a solid base of referral and repeat business from satisfied customers.

5. Emphasize finding the customer-friendly solution. When something goes wrong, it's how service staff respond that creates either a *crisis* or *stronger customer relationship*. Millions have heard of how musician Dave Carroll's Taylor guitar was broken by United Airlines during a flight with his band. Why did he create a music video to tell his story on YouTube? Because he spent a year talking to United employees, and not one of them resolved his dilemma.

How can you avoid a similar occurrence? Encourage your employees to make every effort to make the customer happy when things go wrong. Advise them to call on their manager for help if they're unsure of what they can do. Ask them to inform management when a company policy doesn't seem to fit a special situation. Suggest that they become the customer's champion until the issue is resolved.

6. Emphasize awareness. Every customer has a unique style and preferences. Some are chatty and happy to tell you their life story, while others just want to do business and move on. Encourage your team to pay attention to customers, to focus on them during each and every transaction, and to avoid distractions. Educate staff on how to discern different customer styles, so they know how to best interact with them. Talk about body language so that team members become more open to varying their demeanor depending on the customer's needs and personality.

7. Emphasize appreciation. Let customers know that they are appreciated. Train employees to acknowledge them with a "goodbye" or "see you later," as they leave. Make sure customers are thanked when they return your call or provide exact change. Send thank-you notes and follow up with an occasional phone call to make sure they were happy with their last visit.

Conduct a quick review with your managers and staff. How are you doing with proper staffing, authentic interactions, customer feedback, a long-term focus, customer-friendly solutions, customer awareness, and customer appreciation? Are these key customer service practices emphasized and modeled by management? If you emphasize these factors, they become *the way you do business*. When a hypersensitive customer comes your way, you'll be ready. SSE

Marilyn Suttle and Lori Jo Vest are authors of Who's Your Gladys? Turn the Most Difficult Customer into Your Biggest Fan *(AMACOM). www.whosyourgladys.com*

ACTION: Care for your hypersensitive customers.

SERVICE/IDEAL

Deciding and Doing

Create an ideal customer experience.

by Linda Ireland

DEFINING YOUR IDEAL CUStomer experience is the first step toward better performance and financial reward. You've decided what must be done. Implementing that experience can be a challenge.

You've decided that customers reward or punish organizations based on the experiences they encounter. Their experience starts when they seek to solve a problem or desire. If it is solved well, they will drive your organization's financial performance.

To define your *ideal customer experience,* you must identify *target customers* and problems you can solve for them better than anyone else. Every customer experience revolves around a six-step cyclical process. Customers: 1) *realize* a need, 2) *learn* about different options to fulfill that need, 3) *try* different options, 4) *buy* the one they like best, 5) *see* their problem solved, and 6) *evolve* to another need. What must happen and how must customers feel in their experience with your company?

Once you define your ideal, target customer experience from a customer's point of view, you must translate it to the decisions and actions that happen in your company daily. It's the difference between deciding and doing.

Organizations: 1) *choose* target customers whose problem they can solve, 2) *earn* customer consideration as they learn about options, 3) *demonstrate* that they offer the best solution to the needs of their customers, 4) *protect* customers through the buying process, 5) *prove* their promise, and 6) *anticipate* next need that the customers will develop.

Think If/Then

If the ideal experience is to happen, what must you do inside—and across—your company? These questions help you define the actions and know if you're performing well at each step:

1. Choose: What problem do you solve well for your target customers? Can you articulate how customers' lives will change once you solve their problem? Do you know how the problem you solve defines the size of your target market? Does everyone focus on solving the same problem for customers?

2. Earn: Are the *right customers* finding you when they go looking for the solution to problems you solve well? Are enough of them finding you? What can you do to make prospective customers' short list of good options?

3. Demonstrate: Do you create a *virtual reality* that shows your customers what life will look like on the other side of the purchase with their problem solved? Do you stand out among your competitors as being your target customers' better option? Do you tie your product or service's unique characteristics to the problem being solved?

4. Protect: Do you make your customers feel secure about their decision during and after they buy from you? Do you provide convenience and control in the buying process? Do your internal forms, contracts, and delivery methods *affirm* their decision?

5. Prove: Do you deliver on promises you made to your customers as their experience began? How do you know that your target customers' need was solved? Do your efforts help customers get the most out of your solution?

6. Anticipate: Anticipate customers' evolving demands. Invite design, service, finance, and operations to join sales and marketing in anticipating new problems to be solved to drive new demand.

Use customer experience as an operating strategy to drive profit. Once you define your target customer experience, align the actions of employees to that definition. Draw a map that links operations to the customer experience. SSE

Linda Ireland is a consultant and partner at Aveus and author of DOMINO*. Visit www.aveus.com.*

ACTION: Create an ideal customer experience.

SALES/EFFECTIVENESS

Lion or Gazelle?

Either way, you must move.

by Patrick McClure

REMEMBER: ***"EVERY MORNing in Africa a gazelle wakes up. It knows it must run faster than the fastest lion or it will be killed. Every morning a lion wakes up. It knows it must outrun the slowest gazelle or it will starve. It doesn't matter whether you are a lion or a gazelle—when the sun comes up, you had better be running."***

Whether you're a lion or gazelle, you must run faster than your competition—or you'll be eaten alive!

With fewer buyers and deals, you need to make a quantum leap in *effectiveness* and *efficiency*.

Increasing Effectiveness

Effectiveness is the amount of activity or energy produced—the sales calls, pitches and proposals, or practice. In the African wilds, a ***gazelle*** simply runs as fast as possible, expending maximum effort to avoid the lions.

In sales, *effectiveness* would include: phone calls to prospects, face-to-face meetings, telephone appointments, sales presentations. *Effectiveness* gets you into the game. If you don't make the calls, set the appointments, get in front of the clients, and ask for the order, you'll never make it in sales.

To be more effective, you need a good plan with specific and measurable targets. Then, you need to execute the plan and measure how you perform against the plan. If your target is to spend two hours every morning calling new prospective clients, your weekly plan would include 10 total hours of production. At the end of the week, you need to review your telephone logs and determine if in fact you invested 10 hours, how many clients were contacted and the result.

Increasing Efficiency

Efficiency measures the results you achieve and determines how you can improve those results. While *effectiveness* looks at how much, *efficiency* looks at how well. In Africa, the ***lion*** is efficient in how she runs, focusing efforts on chasing down the slowest gazelles. In sales, *efficiency* requires a study of ratios: closing ratio—number of closed sales achieved; lead conversion ratio—the number of inquiries that convert into qualified leads; average time to close (in days, weeks, or months); average sale amount; and percent of market share for your product and industry.

To improve sales, study your process, isolate the key performance ratios, and define the ideal sale, the optimum sales ratios, and the expected activity level.

Sales Management is the art of increasing both *effectiveness* and *efficiency*. You boost the *effectiveness* of salespeople (how much are they doing) and *efficiency* (how well they are doing it). Attending to both areas yield stellar results! SSE

Patrick McClure is president of the Connexia Group and a member of the Association of Professional Consultants. Visit www.ConnexiaGroup.com.

ACTION: Improve efficiency and effectiveness.

Customer Service

Avoid three deadly assumptions.

by Jerry H. Seibert

SILVIO MANAGED SHARED Services for a fast-growing firm. He had always met regularly with his key customers—the leaders of the six strategic business units—to discuss Shared Services' goals and how they contributed. "You must ensure our customers understand the value we deliver," he said. Silvio paid attention to details; he even trained his people in telephone "etiquette" to enhance customer satisfaction.

Despite all the hard work, Silvio felt blindsided by comments made during a Leadership Council meeting. He had just finished reporting on the last stages of an integration effort, which met all targets, including metrics related to service levels. The head of European operations stepped up to disagree; she reported hearing a different story from her VPs. Before Silvio could ask for details, three other executives made similar comments. As he struggled to reply, the CEO ended the agony: "Looks like your integration isn't wrapped up after all. I'll look for your service mitigation plan at our next meeting."

What went wrong? To understand Silvio's blind spot, you need to understand that internal customers include all stakeholders who depend on you to meet their objectives, not just peer leaders. How you listen, who you listen to, what you focus on, and how well you deliver all impact stakeholder perceptions. The risk of an unpleasant surprise is one reason to be concerned with internal customer service. More important is the strong connection between levels of internal service and company business performance.

Three Deadly Assumptions

Three deadly assumptions can kill internal customer service. Avoid them to guarantee a win-win for you, your internal customers, and the company.

Mistake 1: Assuming talking to stakeholders is sufficient. Of course, talking to stakeholders is not a mistake. The problem is that for many leaders this constitutes their only customer outreach. We asked managers what methods they used to assess internal customer service. They said they met regularly with key stakeholders. Only about half used some more formal, structured method, such as surveys or incident tracking databases.

Unfortunately, periodic conversations are not enough. We examined the internal customer service (ICS) levels for many departments. Those taking a rigorous, *measurement-based* approach had more favorable ICS ratings compared to those that relied on just talking to stakeholders. There is value in talking to peer executives—key stakeholders. But theirs is just one perspective. As useful as their comments may be, know that *the plural of anecdote is not data*. Few stories or examples will be representative of your "internal customer base." Getting feedback from a range of managers and employees, a cross-section of all your stakeholders,

is the only way to ensure a full 360-degree view of your function's ICS.

Mistake 2: Assuming you know what's important. No one knows better than you what is important in delivering on your core products or services, right? You know how your group functions and what results it must achieve. Yet how you judge quality and how your stakeholders judge it may not be aligned. It is a common failing to base your assessment of ICS on the metrics you've designed to manage the operation. The mistake is assuming those metrics also capture what's most important to stakeholders.

I recently reviewed the results of an internal customer survey with the leader of HR in a Fortune 100 manufacturer. He was puzzled by the poor ratings on talent acquisition. The company had outsourced recruitment, but the statistics related to several key outcomes ran counter to survey results.

What their statistics did not show was the frustration of managers with the new supplier. Contract recruiters had none of the institutional knowledge of the old in-house team. They struggled to learn the unique markets for specialized engineers; hence, they were pulling the managers into the process more. Turnover among the recruiters meant there was *always* a learning curve. Managers were aggravated, feeling they were doing most of the recruiting themselves. The frustration never showed in the traditional efficiency-focused recruitment metrics.

Mistake 3: Assuming friendly service equals customer satisfaction. We all want a pleasant experience when we interact with a supplier—a likeable staff that tries hard can make up for many failings . . . at least for a time.

At a northeastern utility, we worked with a function that had fantastic ratings on many service dimensions. Service reps were always available, returned calls, were courteous and personable. Their stakeholders praised them for these characteristics. Many of the service reps had moved into the department from other areas and were chosen for their interpersonal skills. Few had any training or certification in the field. Over time, the lack of base skills and knowledge compounded. Errors were common; projects fell behind schedule; and most core function deliverables were rated below the norm. "Nice" does not cut it with executives.

How you interact with your internal customers influences their assessments. It is important to know if there are issues with availability, timeliness, professionalism and the like. Yet in the end it is *what* you do that matters most. You have to deliver on your core services.

Why internal customer service matters. External customers can take their business elsewhere if service is poor. Internal customers don't have that option. The implications of acute failures such as a bad hire or late reports are obvious. But does it matter if internal service is not a priority?

Low internal service ratings impact financial performance, productivity, and external customer satisfaction. And internal service failures clearly put you at a competitive disadvantage.

Don't be blindsided by internal customers. Know their priorities, use a system to get broad-based feedback, and don't confuse customer relations with core deliverables. Avoid the deadly assumptions and reap the benefits. SSE

Jerry H. Seibert is Global Director of Diagnostic Services, Metrus Group. Visit www.metrus.com.

ACTION: Avoid these three deadly assumptions.

SALES/MEETINGS

Sales Meetings

Make them meaningful.

by Dave Kahle

YOU HAVE A SALES MEETING in two weeks—what should you do to get ready? You might go over last month's numbers. Then ask a credit manager, who has complained about the state of receivables, to complain directly to the sales guys for an hour. Now what?

Does that scenario sound familiar? That's how we often plan sales meetings. The focus is on how to fill the time, what information we want to transmit, and who we want to present it. When the focus is on the agenda, it's easy to wander off, fill the time with needless details, and end up with a boring meeting. With such meetings, it's no wonder that most salespeople would rather be in the field, doing their jobs, than attending meetings.

To make sales meetings meaningful for your salespeople, and more valuable for you, instead of starting with an agenda, focus first on the end result that you want from the agenda—then, build the agenda to achieve that focus.

For example, suppose you have a range of new prices on your products. You plan to spend an hour presenting them and answering questions. So, your agenda looks like this: First, present new prices. Why are you presenting the new prices? You might say, "So the salespeople will know them and understand why we are changing prices." Okay, why do you want that? "So they can convey them to the customers." Why do you want to do that? "So the customer will accept the new prices without much objection."

What you want, then, is the customer to accept the new prices, and you want salespeople to convey the prices in a way that achieves that? Okay, so start there. To get what you want, the salespeople need to make some commitments with deadlines as to when they will present the new prices, and they need to be trained in the best way to present them.

So, what can you do in the meeting to ensure the desired outcome? I'd have the salespeople make specific commitments to deliver the prices to the appropriate customers—and train them how to do that. You might do some role-plays so the salespeople practice conveying the prices, identify common objections, and practice responding to them. Before doing the role-plays, I'd show them some best practices for communicating the price increases. And before that, I'd describe the price increases, the rationale, and the best way to communicate them.

Now, I have my agenda: 1) Describe the rationale for the price increases. 2) Describe the best way to communicate them. 3) Demonstrate the best way to communicate them. 4) Organize a role-play. 5) Discuss what was learned in the role-play. 6) Repeat the role-play. 7) List which customers need to have the new prices. 8) Identify a date by which salespeople will communicate the new prices. 9) Ask them to report, by a certain date, on how well it went.

Look at the difference in the two agendas. The first is unfocused, and emphasizes time and subject matter. The second is focused on results, uses interactive exercises, and is practical.

So, start at the end. You'll see that the end of the meeting is expressed in some behavior that you want from the customer, and some behavior that you want from the sales force. You want salespeople to stop doing something, to start doing something, or to do something better. *Every sales meeting, and every item on every agenda, ought to be designed to bring about some specific change in the salesperson's behavior.*

To improve your sales meetings, start at the end, with a description of the change in behavior that you want in the sales force, and work backwards. SSE

Dave Kahle is a consultant and author of over 500 articles, a monthly e-zine, and six books. Visit www.davekahle.com or contact cheryl@davekahle.com.

ACTION: Make your sales meetings meaningful.

SALES/RISKS

Stuck Opportunities

Learn how to eliminate the risk.

by Rick Cheatham

IN A DOWN ECONOMY, ELIMInating risk can be as important as demonstrating value.

Many decisions are based on fear. Salespeople who are trusted advisors help their clients navigate the path to shared success. In fear-based decision making, *doing nothing* usually wins. Exploring common causes of risk avoidance could get the opportunity moving.

Risks in Tradeoff

For every initiative a firm funds, it gives up something.

Do you know your customer's funded priorities? Project funding is a clear indication of priorities and desired results. So, know your customer's strategic initiatives and reposition your offerings to enable those initiatives.

What other initiatives are being considered? Competitors present options, and internal projects compete for capital. Know how the value of your offering fits into your customer's strategic initiatives. Don't invest time where you can't create maximum value.

Risks in Financial Justification

When a team is assembled to make a major purchasing decision, the team must present recommendations to executives who won't meet with suppliers and don't want details.

Is the financial justification in the customer's format or yours? Help your client build the executive presentations and customize financial justifications. You will budge the "stuck" opportunity and gain insights into their culture and measures of success that will help you win the next one.

Is finance on your side? If finance is represented on the team, encourage that team member to *prep* the finance leader for the meeting. If finance isn't represented, meet with your client and one of finance's most trusted team members to review the data before the meeting.

Personal Risks

The client thinks this is the right thing to do but fears the consequence of any misstep.

Has the customer had a big reduction in force or reorganization? Know your client's career goals and help them to see this is the time to *show leadership* and *take action*.

Is your client a powerless decision maker? Help your client to force every member of the team to express her or his position and to find ways for his or her boss to gain some ownership early (perhaps by participating in a trial or presenting to the executive team).

After you help your client eliminate risk, acknowledge it with your client. Show your interest in partnering for long-term success and earning the first call on the next opportunity. SSE

Rick Cheatham is a leader in the BTS Sales Practice. Visit www.bts.com.

ACTION: Eliminate the risks for clients.

Rainmaking 101

Grow your client base and income.

by Patrick D. Kelly

MILLIONS OF PEOPLE EMBARK on professional careers as CPAs, engineers, insurance agents, financial advisers, bankers, lawyers, and managers only to discover that being technically proficient is just one element. Few receive any formal training in selling their services and themselves. For most, developing business is a sink-or-swim proposition.

Many young professionals are more accustomed to text messaging and instant messaging than having a direct conversation. They are uncomfortable in many social situations where direct communication and interaction are required to develop business relationships.

Most executives are more accustomed to, and demand, direct communication. The technological and communication gap that exists between young professionals and their superiors and clients is pronounced. Young professionals who bridge this gap, build relationships with people of all ages, and hone their direct communication skills—basic rainmaking skills—will surpass their peers and will dominate their fields.

Relationships are the core element of any business. Those who possess strong relationships have a huge competitive advantage over those who do not. The better you become at developing and maintaining relationships, the more successful you will become.

How to Build Relationships

No cookie-cutter approach exists for relationships. Each one is unique to the people involved. However, two principles apply—*visibility* and *credibility*.

First, you need to become aware *of* and become aware *to* the person with whom you want to build the relationship. You need to be *visible*. Attend business and social events, serve on boards, develop blogs, become involved in your community, speak at seminars, publish articles, or provide great service to existing firm clients.

Pick the proper forum for increasing visibility. If you sell a specialized product or service, go to the place where people who buy that product or service congregate. Conrad Hilton, founder of one of the largest hotel organizations in the world, said: "If you want to launch big ships, you have to go where the water is deep." Find the place where the water is deepest for you. Industry associations are a great venue for marketing. Everyone has a similar interest. If you sell hospital beds, attend association meetings of hospitals, nursing homes, and personal care homes. If you specialize in estate planning, go to places where wealthy people are likely to be—country clubs, stock brokerage operations, and banks. Developing a relationship with a banker or stockbroker who can refer business to you makes sense. Think about your market and go to it. Don't wait for it to come to you.

Talk to your existing customers and find out what activities and meetings they attend. Are they members of a service organization like the Rotary Club or Kiwanis? Are they members of a country club? Do they belong to a lodge? Ask them what publications they read and submit an article to that publication. Do they get information from the Internet? Create a blog. Find the forums in which you can become more visible to the people with whom you want to develop a relationship.

How to Develop Credibility

To develop *credibility*, you must be reliable and trustworthy. If you tell someone you'll do something, you better do it and do it on time. Keep promises. For some, meeting people and developing instant rapport is second nature. But when it comes to delivering the goods, they fall apart. Following up on promises and commitments takes organization, hard work, and discipline. If you don't put the time and effort into it, your relationships will deteriorate.

You have to pace yourself and know your limitations. Self-assessment is critical. Over-promising leads only to problems or failure. You probably know people who join every organization and volunteer for high-profile tasks to increase their visibility. Inevitably they fail because of over-commitment or burnout. In the end, all they achieved was a high-profile failure. The people they were trying to impress watch them fail and are left to clean up the mess. Why would anyone who witnessed that sort of result want to do business with these failures? As you begin your rainmaking, don't spread yourself too thin. Concentrate on doing a few things really well. You want to impress people and build credibility. In time, after performing a task well, you can move on to a different position in the organization or resign.

Always leave an organization or project on a high note with people impressed with your abilities. As the theater axiom goes, *Leave them wanting more*.

To develop visibility and credibility, try these tips:

- ***Remember names:*** After you're introduced to a person, repeat his name. Say something like, "It is nice to meet you, Mr. Brown." Repeating the name forces you to listen carefully to the name, and saying the name out loud reinforces the name in your memory.
- ***Make the most of events:*** To improve your networking skills, study the guest list before an event. You can identify people you know and refresh your memory with their names. You can also identify people that you want to meet.
- ***Distinguish yourself:*** In an age of electronic messaging, go "old school" and write a personal note acknowledging a promotion or a significant event. People tend to remember and keep personal notes longer than emails.
- ***Practice good manners:*** Learn the basics of table etiquette. For example, when someone asks you to pass the salt or pepper, you should pass both.
- ***Become memorable:*** Most people put their name tags on the left side of their chest. However; when they reach with their right hand to shake someone's hand, the left side of their body turns away from the person and the name tag disappears. Place your name tag on your right side. When you shake hands, it will be in front of the person, helping him or her remember your name.

Perfect these skills to gain the visibility and credibility necessary to build strong business relationships. SSE

Patrick Kelly is the author of Rainmaking 101: How to Grow Your Client Base & Maximize Your Income. *Visit www.rainmaking101.net.*

ACTION: Boost your visibility and credibility.

MARKETING/PRODUCT

Prospect-Driven Launch

Put potential customers to work.

by Dan Adams

IF NEW PRODUCT LAUNCHES aren't delivering exciting results, you are likely working too hard. Put your prospects to work for you.

Your potential customers can do much for you—willingly. Compared to end consumers, your B2B buyers are more insightful, interested, rational, and fewer in number. They are the perfect marketing partners. Take advantage of their clear-headed wisdom when you launch a new product.

Involve prospects early and in every stage of your marketing. You need to let your prospects find you on their timetable and spread the word about your new product organically.

Put prospects to work in three ways:

1. Make it easy for prospects to find and study your new product. Think less about helping your sales reps convince prospects and more about helping prospects find your product when *they* are ready. Customers now find suppliers in most B2B transactions. B2B buyers like to research, analyze, and make rational group decisions. You can either make their job difficult or easy. *Easy* looks like this: Your B2B prospect does a Google search using his favorite keyword, and a top hit has content he finds interesting . . . which happens to be linked to your website.

To make this work, you have to be *accessible* and *interesting*: Send out news releases full of content that will appeal to readers (and editors) of online magazines, journals, and blogs. Include both a link to your website and the keywords your prospects will likely use in their Google searches. When prospects search, they'll find articles that lead them to your website. If your website is packed with interesting presentations, videos, comparisons, they could spend an hour doing the work your sales reps normally do.

2. Encourage word-of-mouth marketing. A kind word about your new product from a trusted colleague or expert is very convincing. Consider these six approaches: 1) identify and promote to industry thought leaders—use communications to VIP editors and bloggers; 2) promote to people *already* in groups—at trade shows and conferences—so they can discuss your product; 3) seek opinions from industry experts—commission lab tests, seek evaluations, and create advisory panels; 4) gain testimonials from respected early adopters—get advance samples in the hands of willing customers; 5) locate the decision influencers at prospect companies and connect with them; and 6) make it easy for them to tell their colleagues about your product, with leave-behind presentations and sales aids, e-mails with links to videos, and content-rich newsletters.

3. Let your prospects help you figure out your new product launch message and media mix. To get the message right, uncover customers' *hot buttons* during the same voice-of-the-customer interviews that you use to help design your new product. Shamelessly use *their* language in your advertising copy, as keywords to attract their Google searches (data-mine your customers' comments for this purpose). Also, ask, *How does your company learn about new ideas?* This lets you know your target market's media preferences—trade shows, seminars, websites, e-mail—so you can optimize your media mix.

When you put your prospects to work, they *like* it. You make it easy for them to do what they *naturally* do. They research new ideas, share their opinions with colleagues, and give advice to suppliers clever enough to ask for it. You'll have a better product launch when you engage your prospects in it. SSE

Dan Adams is president of Advanced Industrial Marketing and author of New Product Blueprinting *(www.newproductblueprinting.com) and* 12 New Rules of B2B Product Launch *(www.b2bproductlaunch.com).*

ACTION: Put your prospects to work.

SALES/CULTURES

Cultural Needs

Consider them in sales.

by Tom Hopkins

IF YOU DO BUSINESS WITH people from various cultures, invest some time understanding their cultures as well as their needs in terms of your products and services. To win their business, you have to understand their needs.

Also, if you are building a web site, you need to consider who the viewer might be and their cultural situations. Some words and phrases just don't translate, thus confusing the visitor. Or, worse, the translation may unintentionally be offensive.

When dealing with clients from different cultures, practice these six guidelines:

1. Be patient when building trust and establishing relationships. People from other countries generally need more time to build trust. It is important to observe a greater degree of formality when becoming acquainted than you would use with a client who was born and raised locally.

2. Speak more slowly than you normally do, but don't raise your voice because you think the other person can't understand you. Volume doesn't increase comprehension. And don't speak down to them as if they're children.

3. Avoid slang, buzzwords, idioms, jargon, and lingo. These can be easily misunderstood by those who don't speak your language as their primary language. Use simple language until you can get an idea of what level of your language they understand.

4. If you use an interpreter, make sure the interpreter meets with the people for whom they are interpreting before you begin to sell them your product or service. This enables the interpreter to learn the language patterns, special terms, and numbers used by the people they're translating for. If your business sells to other businesses, you need to be certain you are both using the same product identifiers or other codes specific to that company or industry to ensure that you understand the needs and terms of any transaction.

5. Pay attention to nonverbal cues. The word *yes* or an affirmative nod often means, "Yes, I hear you," in Asian cultures, not, "Yes, I agree." If you see a nod and move on to closing the sale, you may frighten them off with what appears to them as over-zealousness. Culture is as much an influence on people as their personal experiences, so know about your clients' customs and traditions. When neither you nor your client is made to feel uncomfortable, you can sell more.

To learn out about other cultures, access resources that tell you everything you need to know. Browse a library or bookstore. Go online and look under *protocol*, *diversity*, or *cultural awareness*. Visit www.usaprotocol.com to find the handbook for U.S. diplomats on etiquette and protocol when meeting with people from diverse cultures. Knowledge is power. SSE

Tom Hopkins is a speaker, trainer, and author of How to Master the Art of Selling, Selling for Dummies. *Visit www.tomhopkins.com.*

ACTION: Consider cultural differences.

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