

Better Business Focus

Expert Inspiration for a Better Business

November 2011

Holding your fees in tough times

By Chris Merrington

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Better Business Focus is the essential key for business owners and managers. It achieves that by focusing on the way in which successful businesses compete and manage their organisations.

It focuses on how people are recruited, coached and developed; on how marketing and selling is undertaken in professional markets as well as in markets with intense competition; on how technology and the Internet is reshaping the face of domestic and home business; and on how people are being equipped with new skills and techniques. In short, it offers expert inspiration for a better business.



Holding your fees in tough times

By Chris Merrington

Your fees and rates are probably under more pressure than ever. It is highly likely you are not charging high enough fees compared to the value that your client derives. Many businesses under-charge in relation to the end result the client enjoys. You can easily drop your prices however, that is a one way street. It is easy to come down in price and much harder to go up. There are specific strategies that will help you hold and even increase your fees whether in tough times or normal times (whatever that means!)

Take time to prepare for price discussions. Do not just turn up and hope for the best. Hope is not a strategy. It is rarely "all about price". Your client's decision to purchase will be based on a variety of reasons. Understand those reasons and their importance to their decision. Your fee should be based on the difference you make. Aim slightly higher than you feel comfortable with. Understand how you will justify your fee level. Anticipate their likely price challenge(s) and plan how you will respond. Ensuring your level of confidence is high should be a key part of your preparation. Confidence in your price is vital. Never apologise for your price or fee. The first person you need to sell your price to is... YOU. Say your price slowly, clearly and confidently. Put yourself in their shoes and see the deal from their perspective. What is most important to them?

What is your pricing strategy? Do you have one? Or do you just charge the 'market rate'? Or cost plus a mark up? Do you charge an hourly or daily rate? Or do you charge value based fees? The price

you charge your client in 2011 will largely dictate the price you will be charging in 2012, 2013 and even 2014. You are not just providing a price today! Today's price has long term implications for your pricing for that client.

Clients say they want price reduction. In reality they want 'risk reduction'. They want the right quality, they want value for money. It is a basic human need to ensure we don't get a bad deal. Don't immediately believe clients when they tell you that you are expensive. Often it is a knee-jerk reaction by them designed to elicit a price reduction in response. It is part of your client's job to challenge your price. It is part of your job to know how to respond to that challenge.

Do you accept your client's brief at face value? Or do you ask high value incisive questions to turn an average brief into a great brief – this can give you a strong competitive edge. "Garbage in, garbage out" if you accept and work on a poor quality brief it is likely your output and response will not be as good as they should be decreasing your likelihood of winning the business and ability to justify premium fee levels.

Really understand the value that you provide for your clients. Do your clients value what you do? Do you? I see in my workshops many people too focused on 'implementation' and 'delivery' and not enough thinking about the end result they provide to their client. Once you know your true value to your clients you can charge more realistic levels, assuming you provide a high value. Your expertise is probably a vital part of your value. How does your expertise help your clients? Can you become a 'thought

leader' in your field? Someone who is seen as the recognised expert. This can support your pricing rationale and strategy.

The more your business is viewed as similar or the same as your competitors the harder it is to charge a premium price. Work on your differentiation in ways your clients value. Find points of real distinctiveness. How compelling is your answer to the question "Why should I buy from you?" Or is your answer a cliché, platitude or generic truism?

Do you say 'yes' too readily? Your preparedness to say 'no' will substantially increase your ability to hold and increase your fees. The challenge is to 'disagree without being disagreeable'. How comfortable are you pushing back?

What are the dangers of not increasing your fees? Firstly as your costs increase unless you are finding ways to work more efficiently, your profitability will decline. The client will think you are weak and your self-belief will decline. In a year's time it will be a bigger problem unless you take action now. Morale in your business is likely to decline as teams who work on unprofitable clients are often de-motivated.

The dangers of increasing your fees may be that you put your fees under the spotlight with the client and may prompt the client to price compare and benchmark you. You could lose a client.

So only increase your fees if you are delivering immense value, are highly differentiated, provide outstanding

results and offer true expertise.

Generally the best place to start if you want to increase your fees is with new clients. Test out a higher rate and gauge their reaction. Increase your fee when you have recently won some new business and you are feeling more bullish. Increase fees when your confidence is on the rise.

With existing clients you must increase fees on a regular basis i.e. annually. Increase fees with existing clients, one at a time. Start with your least profitable client and increase their fees. Ask your client questions casually to help assess how you are perceived and valued by them. Choose your timing carefully. There never is a right time to increase fees. There are just some times which are better than others.

Rehearse with a colleague how you will raise the subject of a fee increase with your client. Anticipate the client's likely response and plan what you will say.

So how will you hold your fees in tough times? Or maybe even increase them? Or will you drop your fees, work even longer hours than you do now and wonder why you are exhausted and your profitability is declining?

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About the author:

Chris Merrington is the author of **'Why do smart people make such stupid mistakes'**- A practical negotiation guide to more profitable client relationships for sales teams, marketing and communication agencies and professional service people. Chris Merrington regularly runs workshops with directors and sales teams in the areas of Negotiation, Profitability Improvement, Selling Consulting Services, Business Prospecting and Pitching to Win. More information at www.spring8020.co.uk

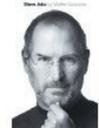
Bestsellers



- 1** **Memoirs of a Fruitcake**
(Paperback) By Chris Evans
Harper Collins; First Edition edition (14 Oct 2010)
Price: £14.00



- 2** **Economyths: Ten Ways That Economics Gets it Wrong**
(Paperback) By David Orrell
Icon Books Ltd (6 May 2010)
Price: £11.69



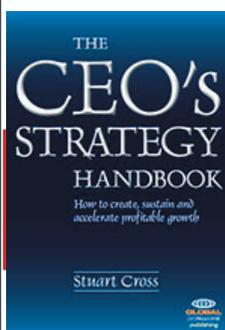
- 3** **Steve Jobs: The Exclusive Biography: A Biography**
(Hardback) By Walter Isaacson
Little, Brown & Company
Price: £16.99



- 4** **The One Minute Manager**
(Paperback) By Kenneth Blanchard & Spencer Johnson
Harper; New edition edition (1 Sep 2011)
Price: £9.34



- 5** **Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything**
(Paperback) By Steven D. Levitt & Stephen J. Dubner
Penguin; 1 edition (18 Jun 2007)
Price: £8.49



BOOK OF THE MONTH

The CEO's Strategy Handbook

By Stuart Cross

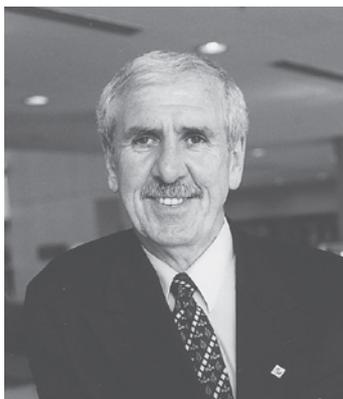
Published by Global Professional Publishing

Price £19.99 plus P&P

The term 'strategy' has, with the help of consultants and academics, developed a mystique that makes it sound difficult, complicated and only for people with an IQ greater than 150. In The CEO's Strategy Handbook I smash through this misconception, and show Chief Executive Officers that strategy is a critical element in improving the performance of their business and is a straightforward – and even enjoyable – process that they can feel confident in mastering.

The book includes case studies, self-tests, interviews with leading CEOs, charts, frameworks and action plans to help bring the ideas alive. Published by Global Professional Publishing, The CEO's Strategy Handbook gives CEOs and senior executives provocative insights and pragmatic advice to set strategy for their business, lead the strategy process, and turn winning strategies into rapid, profitable growth.

To buy the book of the month online from the Better Business Focus bookshop for just £19.99 plus P&P, or for further information please call: (01730) 233 870 and quote BBF Bookshop. Source: <http://www.global-investor.com/bbf>



No rules, rule

By Barry Urquhart

Traditions, established mores and long-held beliefs and practices should not be forgotten. However, in many instances, they should be discarded.

Technology, innovations and creativity represent the future. Significantly, the future has arrived.

The past should be recalled, reviewed, refined and yes, in some instances, revered. Then it should be put to bed, retired or archived.

Ground-breaking, ground-setting

The current charge, charter and challenge for all management teams are to establish, foster and provide support for a host of small, open, flexible and motivated teams to explore, discover, improve and introduce new products, services and processes.

Necessarily, the most appropriate team-members will be the individuals who do not seek or are bound by rules, structures and strictures.

By nature, they will need to be leaders (if not by title, certainly by character) who are prepared to set, implement and maintain new flexible rules. A healthy tolerance of risk and possible failure will be imperative. So too with a willingness to learn, as well as a predisposition to sharing, to celebrating and acknowledging the contributions of others. That is, a hive of activity in which everyone is contributing, being committed and understanding their roles to create...wealth, sales, satisfaction and development.

No boundaries

Cabals, in-groups and concepts like being in the tent rather than outside the tent have no place in the dynamic nature of the optimal fast-evolving entities. Job descriptions will be malleable and "territorialism" will rightly be deemed to be a thing of the past.

Respond, now

Hierarchical structures and centralised decision making cannot respond or make decisions fast enough to match the current rate of change in the needs and expectations of consumers and clients. As a consequence many businesses lag, become exposed, vulnerable and typically falter.

The nature and speed of change within the marketplace is typified by the transformation of "word-of-mouth" to "word-of-mouse". The latter is an instant, comprehensive process which is difficult to measure, monitor, influence or control, let alone respond to.

Responses that are required to negotiate layers of an organisation, filters, blockages and egos are left in a shadow. That can be a dark lonely place to find oneself.

Structures

The good news is that now that the future has arrived bureaucracies will only be the subject of interest to business archaeologists. These quaint fossils and those who inhabit them will doubtless fight for their retention and will revel in the rules and inertia. Such entities and people will be the subject of rightful disdain and will confront the removal of funding.

We will all be witness to "Take Two" of the concept of horizontal organisations, in which everyone is a manager, responsible for performance, client and customer satisfaction, continuous learning and constant evolution.

Image. "I am responsible for this and I will see it through to your satisfaction" will be the only utterance that external and internal customers will ever experience. Phrases like "It's not my department" and "I don't have the authority" will be disposed of, along with those incompetents and individuals who are reluctant to take on personal responsibility.

No place to hide

The new dynamic organisation will by nature be lean and definitely not mean. There will be no fat. Nor will there be space for the uncommitted to hide. Transparency and real-time accountability will provide the feedback necessary to motivate and to provide clarion-clear assessments of performance and sub-optimal performance levels.

Wake up

No, one is not dreaming, experiencing an out-of-body phenomena or withdrawing from an encounter with some hallucinates. This is a wake-up call. It's a brand new day, possibly the birth of a new generation of businesses.

Support infrastructures will be psychological rather than physical or documented in countless procedure manuals, job descriptions and policy statements.



True union

Business owners, managers and team-members will be in a true union of endeavours, visions, beliefs, goals and action.

Refreshingly, there will be no explicit or implicit threats for the team-members to slow down and to work-to-rules. There will be no rules.

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About the author:

Barry Urquhart Marketing Focus, Perth. Internationally recognised keynote speaker, business analyst and author.

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Steps to avoid writer's block

By Mindy Gibbins-Klein

We have all come across the expression "Writer's Block" at some point in our lives, but what does this really mean? In fact, is there even such a thing as writer's block, or is it just a myth?

What if I told you for a fact that writer's block does not exist at all? Its true! I have come up with a few simple steps to help you on your way to avoiding writer's block. I have worked with many businesses over the years as a publishing consultant and book coach and one of the most common problems is the lack of a good plan.

Most writers are so eager to set off armed with lots of great ideas, and often they do not have a watertight plan. Some don't think that a plan is even important to their writing process but the truth is, by consciously planning out your story it's guaranteed that you'll be speeding through the chapters faster that you ever thought possible. Failing to produce a good plan will waste you valuable time and energy.

Make sure that you are getting into good habits. By establishing a habit of writing for two hours a day rather than five or six hour stretches you'll ensure that you stay fresh, keep your concentration and won't run out of steam. Sometimes what you think of as writer's block is just being tired!

Also, I would recommend that you take a good look at the resources that are available out there, as there are several things you can do from home which can help you on your way to writing your book. There are products and services out there which can help you through the

writing process and even ways that prevent writer's block. Just get in touch if you need help.

Don't let reasons like having no time or money derail you. I have worked with people who have put off their writing, and then finally do it, and have gone on to make £100,000 of business as a direct result. I would highly recommend that writing a book should be very high on your agenda before the end of the year. So overwhelm your fears and doubts and follow these steps to help you overcome writer's block!

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About the author:

Mindy Gibbins-Klein, better known as The Book Midwife TM, has shown hundreds of experts how to get their message out into the market by writing and publishing the best possible books, ebooks and articles, and through delivering high impact, relevant presentations and key note speeches.

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Internet Entrepreneur and author Eddie Yu explains what online networking is, how to be effective at it and reminds us that online business should NOT be your hobby!

Whenever people ask me what one single activity could I recommend that would change their entrepreneurial fortunes, the answer I always give is to go networking.

When I say networking, I mean more than just social networking online, I mean actually meeting people of your industry and meeting your potential customers wherever you think they might be. I think for a lot of new entrepreneurs, the thought of networking is actually quite daunting, and I can sympathise because this was also one of my own personal fears. In the beginning, I didn't even think that it was necessary to network and for a while I believed that if you made something amazing, people would just find out about it naturally. I couldn't be more wrong.

It was in my third year when I still wasn't making any money that I changed my way of thinking and started to go out networking. This simple act of going out to talk to people changed my entire fortunes for the better because there is so much value to be gained from other people doing the same thing as you, and from people who might be your customers.

Networking - Just do it

By Eddie Yu

My very first networking event was at a local greyhound racing venue and I was invited to a private event where I would be able to meet other affiliate marketers in my industry. At this event I met many people and the vast majority of people in this group were extremely high earners, people making the kind of money I was dreaming of.

Two things happened really, the first being that meeting people in this position helped me to realise how achievable my goals really were. When I met other people who had achieved what I wanted to achieve, it gave me the belief that I could actually succeed. The other thing I learnt was that people in the industry have an incredible amount of experience gained through their own efforts, and by sharing I learnt so many new ideas that I was inundated with new exciting ways to improve my website and its rankings.

I saw results immediately after implementing many of these ideas and from that point on I realised that networking was absolutely essential to success.

It's still not my greatest strength to this day; however I do it because I know its value to me and my business. You must be prepared to do things you don't like doing in order to succeed.

There's kind of a double-edged sword when it comes to online businesses today; whereas on the one hand it is really cheap to get started in online business these days,

the other comes back to bite the entrepreneur because the cheapness cultivates an attitude where they just don't care enough about their new online business to take it seriously.

I think it's partly because they haven't had to commit a large amount of capital to set up and so if they didn't succeed they wouldn't have lost very much money. For the most part you can get started for a small investment of £2000, which for a lot of people in this position is just one month's salary. If it failed, there's not a great loss there, perceptually.

You have to ask yourself this question, how serious are you about creating your own financial freedom through online business? Do you secretly fear failure so much that you don't even make the attempt, or only give it a half-hearted attempt so that in the event of failure you have some excuse?

Back in a time before the internet, when setting up a business meant having a large amount of starting capital, do you think if you set up a business then you would be so complacent? It certainly would matter if you failed because the amount of investment you were making would be perceived as substantial.

It's actually amazing in today's world of electronic communication and marketing, that so many people and I really do mean so many people, just seem to treat their new business venture like a hobby. Online business is not just for fun, it's not a place where you can just make



a half-hearted attempt and you'll make money, it requires serious commitment of your time and energy.

You need to start right from the beginning, building a solid foundation, treating yourself and your business with the utmost respect.

The first thing you'll need to consider is your business infrastructure. This is everything needed to run your business, from the legal structure, expenses collection, through to making appointments and schedules. Even if you are working just for yourself at the beginning, making sure you have a good working infrastructure will allow you to grow quicker more effectively.

Remember, an online business is not just for Christmas, if you get it right it is forever, so take it seriously and don't think of it as a hobby.

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About the author:

Since graduating from Leeds University in 1997, Eddie Yu has been involved in various Entrepreneurial activities throughout his career, and eventually having built up a part time business between 2001-2003, he went full time in 2004 with Lady Luck Media Ltd.

Before then, he has worked for British Aerospace, FNX Ltd and Derivatech Ltd, where he consulted for top tier banks such as Bank of America, ABM Amro and Bank of China.

Eddie firmly believes that with social entrepreneurship and technological advancements we can create a world without offices and impact climate change for the betterment of our planet.



Retail top tips

By Antony Welfare

Focus on the customer and provide world-class customer service

– Understand their wants, needs and desires – build your business to deliver these.

Establish your brand and values

– Build a brand that has the basic values to achieve what the customer requires and clearly defines your business and its way of operating.

Establish a customer-focused culture

– Build a team that lives and breathes your values, making world-class customer service the heart of every team and successfully growing your business.

Make sure quality is in everything you do

– Make sure that everything you do is done to the best ability of you and your teams – always strive to give the best service every day with every person you interact with.

Reward and incentivise to develop a motivated and happy team

– A motivated and happy team will lead to happy customers, which leads to success – listen to and look after your team.

Manage your cash

– Cash is sanity and profit is vanity, a business will go bankrupt due to lack of cash, not lack of profit. Understand where your money comes from and where it goes.

Develop and communicate a clear vision, strategies and plans

– Know what you are trying to achieve and have a plan to get there. Share the vision, strategies and plans with all your teams and partners.

Make your customers the heart of every team and make them feel special

– Happy and satisfied customers are loyal and keep you successfully retailing.

Retail is detail – Get the details right for the customer and look after the detail - understand what is happening and make sure you 'dot the i's and cross the t's'.

It's not rocket science – Retail is one of the oldest forms of business – we buy a product and sell it on to the end consumer with a margin; make sure that that your margin delivers a profit.

Make decisions – Just do it. Do not procrastinate; analyse the information, make decisions and give it a go – if it doesn't work, try another way.

Manage with facts and information

– Use the data and information you have in your business. Keep your emotions in check and make decisions based on solid information, analysis and research.

Don't forget to sell your products and your business

– After all we are in the retail business to sell products to customers – that is the reason they visit your stores and what they require from your business.

Be yourself and enjoy – This is your journey to achieving your potential in retail – make sure you take pleasure in it.

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About the author:

Antony is the director and founder of Retail Inspector Ltd and is 'The Retail Inspector'.

'The Retail Inspector's Handbook' (£14.99 Ecademy Press) is Antony's first book.



Are you the coupon kings and queens?

By John Stanley

Getting customers to buy your product has become a real challenge. Many marketing and advertising campaigns are not working and many retailers are wondering what they should do to generate traffic.

There is one tool that at present is the hot marketing tool.

Provide coupons for your customers and, at present, you will grab the attention of a lot of potential customers.

Coupons are not a new idea, they have been around and been used by many generations of shoppers, it is that they have taken on a new lease of life at present.

Many of your customers are looking at their cost of living and the family budget and wondering where they can save money. The result is that they are being bombarded with discount offers in almost every shopping window.

The more shrewd retailer are targeting consumers and using coupons as a means of getting the customer into their business.

American consumers are particularly attracted to coupons and over the years that I have been going to America I have observed coupon offers in newspapers and in stores. According to AC Nielsen, the research company, these coupons peaked in 2000 when the value of coupon offers reached 4.4 billion dollars. This has declined, but in 2010 it was still a 3.3 billion dollar industry.

According to Advertising Age, the Advertising Bible, 87% of American shoppers use coupons. Research

carried out by AC Nielsen indicated that 95% of customers like coupons and 60% actually look for them.

Extreme couponing

One reason some retailers dislike coupons is because of "Extreme Couponing" this is where the consumer abuses the coupon situation. It is estimated 13% of American shoppers fall into this bracket. They are heavy coupon users and abuse the situation. Some are buying the specials and then reselling them at markets or to their friends at a profit.

Having said that 70% of coupon users are looked on as enthusiasts, many redeeming coupons 188 times a year.

The old fashioned paper coupon is still popular with many shoppers and should not be neglected as a promotional tool. In the new "Bricks and Clicks" retail world we live in the coupon has taken on a new life.

Value marketing coupons...

E-marketing

The fastest growing marketing technique at present is Value Marketing Coupons.

This is where a retailer provides a coupon on a dedicated web site. 34% of women who are exposed to E Coupons are frequent users of them, whilst 51% of 18 to 24 year olds will use them if they are presented with them.

The value of coupon marketing is that they can:

- Expand your geographical market
- Entice new consumers to come to your business
- Attract existing customers to come more often
- Increase your profits by allowing

you to sell add-ons at a greater profit than the offer.

The introduction of digital marketing has seen the coupon move from being a paper coupon that was cut out of a magazine or newspaper or collected in store to a digital downloadable coupon.

Most digital coupons are time or volume related and this can be down to hours or a few hundred units, this encourages the potential consumer to make a quick decision.

The role of the retailer is to ensure that they have plenty of the product on offer in stock, plus use the opportunity to get the consumer to purchase other full priced products or to return to the store again.

Coupons are usually discount coupons, but BOGOF [Buy One and Get One Free] coupons are also promoted on such schemes.

The Value Marketing Coupons via a dedicated provider is either promoted via international sites, "Group On" being the most commonly recognised or via local web sites. In our city of Perth we have numerous sites including Cudo, www.cudo.com.au and Scoopon, www.scoopon.com.au

Integration is key

How can you make coupons work for your business? Imagine you have a coupon on line. It promotes a select number of products that are only available on a coupon offer during a quiet time in your business. You promote the coupons on line and tell the consumer they have to rush into your store before you sell out. The offer is promoted in-store as well as online with a ticking clock and number of units left.



Create some theatre around a coupon offer and let the team and the consumers join in the fun.

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About the author:

John Stanley is an internationally acclaimed conference speaker and retail consultant.

The author of several marketing and retail books including the best seller 'Just About Everything a Retail Manager Needs to Know', John's retail expertise covers shopping centres, malls, supermarkets, hardware stores, garden centres, real estate, farmers markets and drug stores.

For more information on how he can help your business, council or centre, visit his website: www.johnstanley.com.au or e-mail info@johnstanley.com.au

“I’m a firm believer that to really understand a business takes years, not months. As an investment analyst you think you understand a business from the outside, but the reality is that, once you are inside, you can go on learning for five or ten years. Chris Corrigan”



What makes one business stand above another in a highly competitive market? Is it price, or do customer service skills come into play? The latter can set a company apart and make the experience one consumers appreciate.

Singapore is known worldwide as a leading center for printing attractive books.

But Singapore has a higher cost base (labor, utilities, rent) than many other cities in the region. In a cost-conscious industry like book publishing, how do these apparent contradictions make sense?

I learned the answer first-hand as the first edition of UP Your Service! went to press. It's not about the lowest price – it's all about the service.

The first edition book cover has a four-color print with embossing, spot varnish and two flaps. The printer's response: "No problem."

The interior is 100-gram bright-white wood-free paper with digital photos on every page, thread-sewn for greater durability and value. The printer's response: "No problem."

The timeline was excruciatingly tight to get books into the stores in time for a scheduled launch. The printer's response: "Watch me hustle!" (And hustle he did!)

Speed, quality, logistics, flexibility, hustle. In a city where everything moves quickly, convenience and cooperation run high. The ultimate cost to publishers stays low. Customer service skills shine to win customer loyalty and respect.

It's not about price, it's about customer service

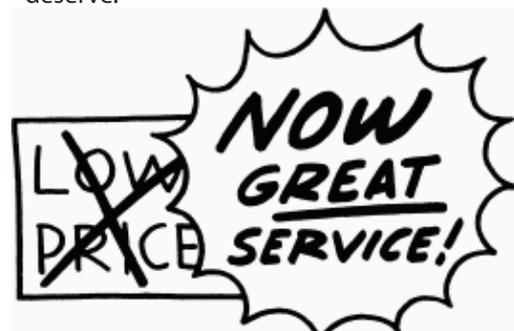
By Ron Kaufman

Key learning point for customer service skills

Do you try to win your customers based upon low price? It may not be what they care about most, and not what they'll remember. Often, it's not about the price at all; it's all about the customer service skills.

Action steps for customer service skills

Instead of working like mad to give the lowest price, work like crazy to improve the quality of your service. Your customer service skills will help you attract customers who value your effort, while earning premium pricing and the profits you rightly deserve.



About the author:

Ron Kaufman is the world's leading educator and motivator for upgrading customer service and uplifting service culture. He is author of the bestselling "UP! Your Service" books and founder of UP! Your Service. To enjoy more customer service training and service culture articles, visit: www.UpYourService.com.



How to leap from the shoulders of giants

By Gavin Ingham

What is it that separates great salespeople from merely average ones? What is that helps one business person grow their new business whilst another languishes, struggling to make a living?

Why can two sales presentations of the same product with the same client have radically different outcomes? Why can great new business executives consistently reach key prospects that mere wanabees cannot?

Why can sales superstars sell value over price time and time again whilst mediocre journeymen fight battle after battle and end up selling on price?

Questions like these and just the simple, "What differentiates top performers from mere average ones?" have over the years been the focus of my attention, my passion and my career. Helping others to realise them in their careers and in their lives is something that gives me great fulfilment...

As many of you know, I am tapping away on my laptop in Spain, where I am spending a couple of weeks in the sun, and I have been reading about the reactions to the recent UK riots from afar. The usual suspects have said the usual things but what has interested me is the reaction of the UK police chiefs and many of the MPs to the mention of taking any kind of advice in any capacity from Bill Bratton, the ex-police chief of Los Angeles who oversaw a fall in crime for six consecutive years.

Several said that the US was different to the UK and, more significantly, that they had nothing to learn from him. Where does this stupendous arrogance come from? And what purpose does it serve other than to prop up their own fragile egos?

For sure, Los Angeles is different to the UK but there's always something to learn even if it's what not to do. There's always something to learn even if it has to be adapted to your situation.

There's always something to learn if you want to be the best.

I see people every day who seem intent on reinventing the wheel out of sheer bloody mindedness. The concept of utilising OPE or Other Peoples' Experience seems to have passed them by. Why spend years clambering, climbing and crawling to the top if you can hop up onto someone else's shoulders and start from there with a huge advantage?

This week's task is to have a think about who you know and how you can utilise their skills, experiences and insights to give yourself a shortcut to sales, business and personal success. Take some time to think about someone who you know who is excellent at something, someone who excels in a particular area and then go and pick their brains to find out how you can give yourself a sales boost.

Sales Leadership Exercise: If someone in your team is great at something such as objection handling or dealing

with client complaints, let them run a short training session on it and answer some questions from the rest of the team. How much more successful can your team be when they share their best skills and attributes?

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About the author:

Gavin Ingham is a motivational and seminar leader.

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“Whenever there is a hard job to be done I assign it to a lazy man; he is sure to find an easy way of doing it.”
Walter Chrysler



How to stop losing good employees

By Lorraine Pirihi

Many business owners are disorganised and therefore time poor.

They often lack not only the time, but the skills to manage their people. You cannot afford to take your eye off the ball when it comes to your people.

Recently I received a frantic call from a business owner who said one of his keypeople resigned in the last week (he only has 5 employees).

To keep the business afloat he has to work all hours of the day and night to keep up with the work, until he can resolve this situation.

After questioning him, he knew this wasn't a situation that happened 'out of the blue'. The warning signs had been there for months that this person wasn't going to work out. Because he was 'too busy' and also didn't know how to change the situation, he buried his head and hoped that somehow the situation would rectify itself. He had considered getting coaching months ago but it wasn't until the 's..t had hit the fan' did he decide to contact me.

So here's what you need to be aware of:

You have to make time to look after your people. This includes regular communication, appraisals, training and developing them.

None of this 'just happens'. If you're one of those people who believes because they know what they're doing you don't have to 'do'

anything', think again. Or because 'they don't say anything'...think again. Most people will not tell the boss the real truth.

It's often poor leadership and a lack of on-going training and development that causes a high turnover in the workplace.

Employees also want reward and recognition regularly. Most want to learn and grow...and if they don't, then get rid of them. You want people who are an asset to your business, not a liability. Be careful spending all your time with the non-performers, those staff members who constantly need your attention to get the job done. 'Good' people still require a pat on the back too.

The final word

Even when business is doing well, avoid complacency.

In fact this is the ideal time to look at how you can do things even better. Life is a continual cycle of highs and lows. One minute everything can be going well and the next everything can start to crumble. When you're organised, you experience more highs for longer and can overcome the lows quicker and easier.

To find out more about ways to organise your time, your systems and your people so you have a business that is run effectively, is much more profitable than it is now and still enjoy time off, get yourself a copy of the proven Productivity and Profit Home Study System.

It's the proven system I've used for years with my personal coaching clients and it will work for you too.

Ready to finally get on top of the people problems in your business so you can concentrate on making more money? Find out how we can help you - send an e-mail to admin@productivityqueen.com

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About the author:

Lorraine Pirihi, The Productivity Queen is Australia's Leading Productivity Specialist. She's a business and life coach, speaker author and licensed Avatar® Master. Through her workshops, courses, coaching programs, and products, Lorraine shows her clients how to overcome stress, frustration and overwhelm so they reduce their hours, make more money and get a life!

You can learn more about Lorraine at www.productivityqueen.com

“Management is nothing more than motivating other people.”
Lee Iacocca



The gatekeep screen

By Sean McPheat

The Gatekeeper: the secretary, receptionist or personal assistant, whose job it is to “screen” your call and stop you from talking to the decision maker. If you are in business-to-business sales then you have come face to face with gatekeepers and a “screen” and learning to get past these guardians of the gold, is a mission-critical objective in your sales career.

While you may think of these front-line people as pesky low-level pawns that have nothing better to do but waste your time, understand that gatekeepers are important and powerful and play a pivotal role in business. Also, realise that while some gatekeeper screens may frustrate and anger you, the best screens are invisible. A high-level gatekeeper's screen is so sophisticated that most sales people never realise it is there, usually attributing their failure to reach the decision maker to bad timing or misfortune. Also, you will find that at the high corporate level, many gatekeepers have gatekeepers of their own. You may have to go through one or two screens just to get to the main gatekeeper!

If you are in B2B sales it is imperative that you learn to get past the gatekeeper and the hard screen. This template will show you step-by-step how to routinely negotiate the screen, get past the gatekeeper and get through to the decision maker. Once you have the keys to the gate, you will find that there really is gold “in them thar hills!”

Recognising a gatekeeper screen

The first key to getting past the gatekeeper (GK) is to learn to recognise a screen. Some screens are obvious in that the GK practically tells you that you cannot speak to the decision maker (DM). However, a top level GK will have you believing that you just missed the DM or that the DM is looking forward to speaking with you, when in fact, the DM has never heard of you. A good GK is not only a protector of the DM's time, but is also a public relations person, helping to maintain the image of the DM and the company. So your objective is to learn to recognise the difference between bad timing and a good screen.

Three tips to recognising a GK screen

1. Know the facts, the numbers: As a sales professional you should never rely on guess work or hypothetical assumptions. You have to know the facts of your performance and the statistics that surround your business. You should be using a comprehensive CRM (Customer Relationship Management) software tool like ACT!, GoldMine or SalesLogix that will keep detailed records of everything including exactly how many calls you make, as well as their results.

With this information, you want to note the ratio between the number of attempts to contact a DM, as compared to the number of actual contacts made. If this number is consistently low (under 40%) there is a problem and it may be that you are running into strong screens.

2. Watch the timing of the GK's questions: If you listen carefully,

often you can tell if the GK is screening you or not by the way he or she asks questions. Examples:

Example 1

Sales Person: “Is Mr. DM available?”
GK: “No, he is not in at the moment. Who's calling?”
Sales Person: “This is Mary Salesperson”
GK: “I'm sorry, Mary, Mr. DM is out, can I take a message?”

Example 2

Sales Person: “Is Mr. DM available?”
GK: “Who's calling?”
Sales Person: “This is Mary Salesperson”
GK: “I'm sorry, Mary, Mr. DM is out, can I take a message?”

Note that in the first example the GK answers the question as to the whereabouts of the DM before asking who was calling. In the second example however, the GK first asks the sales person to identify herself, before telling her anything. It is very likely that number two is a screen.

3. Note when you are put on “hold” for extended lengths of time: Look at the example below:

Sales Person: “Ms. DM, please.”
GK: “Who may I say is calling?”
Sales Person: “Bill Seller from ABC.”
GK: “Hold on, I'll check.”
On hold with music. After a minute or two...
GK: “I'm so sorry, Bill. But Ms. DM must have just stepped out. You just missed her. May I give her a message for you?”

With this complex screen, the GK may have you believing that he or she was trying to locate the DM but

discovered the DM had left the building.

However, it is possible that this GK put you on hold and went for a cup of coffee or had a chat with a friend on the other line, perhaps even joking about you. So how do you know if this is real or a screen? This is another place you must use your CRM. Make a note in your database when this happens. If it happens several times at the same company, then it is a screen. Trust the facts because this type of GK will sound very nice and friendly as if they are trying to help you, but this not the case.

Determining the type of screen

Once you know that you are facing a GK screen, you must immediately identify the type of screen. The reason it is so important to be able to recognise a screen, then the type of screen, is that getting past them requires the exact opposite technique. There are two types of screens:

A. The Investigative screen

The investigative screen is the screen in which the GK investigates and asks you a lot of questions.

B. The Blind screen

With a blind screen, the GK wants to stop anyone from getting through without asking any questions. If he or she does not recognise your name, that's it, you're done.

The Investigative screen

With the investigative screen, the GK's primary asset is time and he or she will usually ask you lots of questions. This GK will usually have a pleasant personality and will often seem to be a very nice, innocent person who will often engage you in small talk.

To get past this screen, you need to be the exact opposite of what this GK wants. With this GK, you need to reflect the personality of someone who is NOT in the mood to talk or answer questions. You need to project the image of a very important executive who is not very friendly and who is in a hurry. You need to project the tone of voice that you are

someone who expects to be put through to your party and immediately!

If the GK even asks your name, you want to answer in a tone that says, "You should know who I am, now put me through because you are wasting my time."

Please note, this is only the attitude and demeanor you need to project, not the actual words you should use. Do not be mean or rude. Simply project the personality of a very serious person.

The key is that you will force the GK to make a decision quickly without having time to think or ask the usual questions. Who are you? You sound like a very important person. Could you be the BIG BOSS? Could you be a very important customer? This GK has to either connect you to the DM or risk offending someone who might be a VIP.

The Blind screen

The Blind screen GK is just the opposite. This GK has no time and does not want to ask you any questions. This GK just wants to get you off the telephone because you are not on a preferred list of callers. This GK will often have a sombre, serious, almost rude attitude. So, as with the investigative screen, with the blind screen, you also want to be the exact opposite of what the GK wants.

With the blind screen you want to be someone who talks extremely slow; someone who has to think for a few seconds before each sentence. The blind screen GK is expecting the high-level sales person who is smooth, polished and perfect. So you do not want to be smooth, polished and perfect.

This GK has no time, so you want to take up his or her time. Once again, you force the GK to make a quick decision. You don't sound like a sales person, in fact you sound harmless. So the GK has to let you take up his or her time or put you through. And since they feel that you are harmless—they will put you through.

To get past the gatekeeper and screens you need to do the opposite of what the gatekeeper expects and is trained for. If the GK is looking to stop the fast talking smooth sales person, then you want to be a slow talking, confused person. On the other hand, if the GK wants to talk and ask questions, be a fast talking person who has no time to talk and answer questions. Force the gatekeeper to make a quick decision and they will connect you rather than risk making a big mistake.

Getting past gatekeeper screens

1. Recognising a screen
 - a. Know the numbers, keep good records
 - b. Listen to the timing of the GK's questions
 - c. Watch for the long "hold."
2. Identify the Type of Screen
 - a. The Investigative Screen
 - i. GK asks many questions
 - ii. GK has nice personality
 - iii. GK likes to talk
 - iv. GK's has time
 - b. The Blind Screen
 - i. GK ask few or no questions
 - ii. GK has sombre personality
 - iii. GK does not like to talk
 - iv. GK has no time
3. Negotiate the Screen by Becoming the GK's Opposite GK is nice and talkative...be someone who is not very nice or talkative.

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About the author:

Founder and Managing Director of MTD Sales Training, Sean McPheat has been referred to in the national press as a thought leader on modern day selling. Sean is a bestselling author, a much sought-after international speaker and his passion and expertise lies in his ability to generate increased revenues and profits for his clients.

For further information visit:
<http://www.mtdsalestraining.com>



Investor and former Channel 4 chairman Luke Johnson gives 20 essential lessons for growing your business.

20 business lessons

By Luke Johnson

1. The world is in love with the romance of start-ups. But all other things being equal, I believe it can sometimes be better to buy a business than start one.

2. Never demand a certainty: if you wait for that, you will be on the sidelines for ever.

3. Leave behind the notion of the big idea and just do what most successful entrepreneurs do: copy and improve. Imitate first, and then devote yourself to constant incremental improvement.

4. Whenever you can, make sure a name has some underlying meaning. Don't copy the example of Diageo; one of the world's biggest drinks manufacturers. "Diageo" means nothing. It's not even easy to spell, or to Google. For everything that's bad about high-concept names, look no further than Diageo's own toe-curling explanation: "The word Diageo comes from the Latin for day (dia) and the Greek for world (geo). We take this to mean every day, everywhere, people celebrate with our brands." I wonder if Diageo's management realize that having to listen to that sort of rot could well make its staff want to quit and start their own business.

5. Today is a better time to start a business than tomorrow, no matter how today looks.

6. Achievement changes people. Once someone attains status and

wealth, their attitude towards sharing the spoils and the glory alters. It slowly dawns on them that actually all the clever moves and breakthroughs were their idea and, in fact, they are the only one who really does any work.

7. When I interview managers, I ask them about their customers and competitors. The high achievers will know them intimately, and can talk for hours about the strengths and weaknesses of their rivals.

8. I tend to respect actual experience in a line of work, or a specific trade qualification, over an MBA.

9. It can be better to take a bad decision and correct it later than procrastinate and sit on the fence.

10. Anyone who employs talented people knows that talent is a rare commodity. The entrepreneur should move heaven and earth to hire it. Yet at the same time, no company should ever be in thrall to its stars.

11. Football clubs are essentially charities run for the financial benefit of staff, as are most investment banks.

12. It's a sad fact that if an entrepreneur employs enough people, sooner or later there will be a thief on the payroll.

13. The most common personal issue I've encountered among associates has been the male mid-life crisis, with the classic accoutrements: mistress, motorbike, drugs, long hair, and even cosmetic surgery.

14. The very utterance of the letters HR should strike fear into the heart of every self-respecting entrepreneur. Human resources are like many parts of modern firms: they are a pure expense and a burden on the backs of the productive workers.

15. The life of a self-made man is not always pleasant. Driving hard bargains, dealing with litigation, juggling creditors, making staff redundant, fighting for customers – these are all part of the craft of running your own show. Managing a business can have a brutalizing influence on your character.

16. Hugely successful entrepreneurs probably don't make for tranquil life companions as a rule.

17. The greatest ritual of all is, of course, the "meeting". This is a magnificent engine of bullshit of all kinds. It gives the participants the feeling they are making progress with their project, whatever it may be.

18. It soon becomes apparent that some angel networks are run by people with no obvious record of great success themselves. Robert Frost put it best: "A bank is a place where they lend you an umbrella in fair weather and ask for it back again when it begins to rain."

19. The most fertile period for innovation is when people are in their twenties: from Nobel Prize winners, to entrepreneurs, to composers, to writers, real breakthroughs and greatest works tend to be the province of the young.



20. A complaint that's well handled often leads to repeat business. The fascinating thing is that good service does not necessarily cost a firm more to deliver than shoddy service.

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Luke Johnson is the chairman of Risk Capital Partners, a private equity house. He is the part owner and chairman of Superbrands, Giraffe Restaurants, Patisserie Valerie and Baker and Spice. He is also director of car-park equipment firm APT Controls.

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The 7 essential foundations of sales & marketing alignment

By Bob Apollo

I've carefully studied the winning habits of some of the best-aligned organisations, and I believe that I can identify 7 common factors that seem to be particularly important in laying the foundations for exceptional sales and marketing alignment:

1. Creating one plan that spans all your key sales and marketing functions and which ensures that every single member of those teams is on exactly the same page, facing in exactly the same direction and motivated to achieve exactly the same goals.
2. Managing one pipeline that aligns and integrates all your sales and marketing actions around a common understanding of how you can together most effectively and profitably raise awareness, generate demand and convert interest into revenue.
3. Agreeing ideal prospect profiles for each of your key target markets that ensure that marketing are targeting the right sort of prospects and that sales people are qualifying consistently and accurately from the earliest stages of the sales process.
4. Defining "sales ready leads" in a way that ensures that marketing are generating exactly the sort of leads that the sales organisation will want to actively follow up - and which are likely to convert into forecastable sales opportunities.
5. Establishing service level agreements between sales and marketing - starting with how "sales ready leads" are to be managed - that clearly define mutual responsibilities and expectations, reviewing and if necessary adjusting them on a regular basis

6. Setting clear data quality standards for the completeness, accuracy and timeliness of all the significant information required to successfully manage the marketing and sales process - and make sure ownership for data quality is clearly assigned.

7. Implementing common measures, metrics and reward systems that are thoughtfully designed to encourage and incentivise the collaborative behaviours you are looking for throughout the sales and marketing functions.

To read more visit: <http://www.inflexion-point.com/Blog/bid/71012/The-7-Essential-Foundations-of-Sales-and-Marketing-Alignment>

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Bob Apollo is the founder and principal consultant behind Inflexion-Point Strategy Partners, one of the UK's leading B2B sales and marketing performance improvement specialists. Bob works with clients to help them implement repeatable, scalable and predictable sales and marketing processes. The results typically include shorter sales cycles, higher sales win rates and improved sales forecast accuracy. He can be reached on 07802 313300, by e-mail, or through the Inflexion-Point website.

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