

7 Paradigms for Dynamic Sales Growth

As we approach the next century many companies and industries are facing greater and greater competition, and certainly we are among them. Consequently many are looking for new ways to rev the engines of their sales departments. Here are a few ideas I've run across recently, that may help get your sales team running at full speed.

Paradigm One: Think and Act like a Start-Up Company

Forget yesterday's sales and focus on tomorrow's potential. Ask yourself what tools do start-up companies use to build their organizations from ground zero. A strong lead generation program, database marketing, a thorough management information system, and strong rewards for performance are just a few tools to consider. Remember, create a sense of purpose, always verbalize the mission, the vision, and the team's goals, they should be clear for all to see and understand.

TIP: Treat every customer as if they are your first and only, and they will demonstrate their appreciation by spending more.

Paradigm Two: Stop Selling

In our case stop selling advertising. Remember your customers exist because they have a product or service that fills a consumer need. They are counting on you to span the gap between them and those consumers that have these matching needs. They are hoping you can make an effective and efficient introduction for them. Therefore, focus on your customers needs, help them solve their problems and focus on selling more of their products and services, not yours. They are looking for partners, not a vendors.

TIP: To be an effective bridge you must stay in touch with both sides of the revenue stream.(your customers and theirs)

Paradigm Three: Diversify to Synergize

This paradigm is self explanatory, but watch out, many a diversity program has become ineffective when the forces of cultural tradition have forced the newly recruited perspectives to conform or die. You may have an existing culture of A, therefore you hire B ,C, and D hoping for new ideas and perspectives, but after a while B, C, and D may begin to look a lot like A. And even if you successfully diversify and that new "KING KONG" of an idea comes along, the forces of conformity may label it to big a leap or even divisive and try to shot it down. After all remember what happened to "KING KONG" when he found an innovative, out of the box (building) way to climb the Empire State Building. They tried to shoot him down, even though had they hitched a ride they would have reached the top in record time. So diversify to synergize, but watch out for the forces of conformity.

Tip: King Kong loved Fay Ray the most, yet she screamed the loudest. (Those who scream the loudest often have the most to gain)

Paradigm Four: Innovate to Motivate

If you have successfully begun to think and act like a start up company, have successfully diversified, partnered with your customers, and have protected that endangered species "King Kong," then innovation and its rewards are only a heartbeat away. But, innovation, must come from the bottom up, it must be born from the womb of necessity. To innovate outside necessity is merely forcing change for the sake of change. The team you have built will recognize this as just another management edict, just more time spent on meaningless task forces, and will soon adopt the attitude that this too shall pass. However, when problems or opportunities present themselves, if rather than putting on the armor and rushing to satisfy, you step back and ask for the answers, true effective innovation will be conceived. Innovation like this is one of the strongest motivators. Suddenly, your team will buy into the vision, the mission and the goals, because they have created them and developed their solutions, and thus have an active stake in the success of the company. Innovation will allow you to lead, and the leader always win the race!

Tip: Look outside your industry for true innovation, everything else is hand me downs, just ask Henry Ford.

Paradigm Five: What gets measured, gets done.

A strong management information system is priceless. If you do not have one, get one, you will be surprised by how easily and cheaply this can be done today. Be sure to measure more than just the raw numbers, be sure to survey your customers, internal and external, and never, never forget market share (remember you are a start-up company). Measure this data against benchmarks which reflect your progress against previous data, and more importantly against your goals for the future. Also, look to benchmark yourself against experts outside your industry (remember innovation). For example if you are looking at customer service, measure yourself

against a company known for outstanding customer service such as Wal-Mart. All this data however, should never be used as a stick, but rather a carrot, use it merely to measure performance toward mutually agreed upon goals and expectations.

Tip: If you don't measure, you can't measure up!

Paradigm Six: Serve to Succeed

Invert the pyramid, and serve those who report to you. If you are in a management position your success is directly dependent upon the success of those who report to you. These people serve the customer, and your customers write the checks, including yours. The best way to serve is to ask lots of questions both inside and outside your organization, which means you better get in front of your customers on a regular basis. After you ask the questions, work together toward the answers, remember before ever great answer comes a great question. Then ask those whom you serve to evaluate your performance, this will give you direction on serving more effectively and with greater success. Also, listen, listen, listen, and listen to understand not respond there is big difference.

Tip: Only those who serve get the tips!

Paradigm Seven: Have FUN!

Fun, recognition, and rewards. Three words to insure a vibrant, active, and focused team. Ever one wants to be famous and a little recognition on a consistent basis goes along way. When the team wins, reward their accomplishments, and make sure they are deserved, political rewards only spoil the fun. This is why clear goals and measurement are so important. And we all know politics can kill any team. Finally, check yourself, if you enjoy your chosen profession, but still are not having fun, you are either working the wrong plan or planning the wrong work. Your attitude is very evident and it will affect your ability to lead.

So now what? How do you make these paradigms part of your sales teams everyday reality? First, share these ideas, and your vision, your dreams with your team members, ask lots of questions and get their feedback. Now, stop, don't rush in with that suit of armor, ask for volunteers to participate on teams to investigate each of these new paradigms. Don't worry lots of folks will want to investigate, "Having fun", and ways to get you to serve them. Ask these teams to involve your customers, and associates outside your industry, and to stay outside the box. Then listen to their conclusions, support their innovations, and reward and recognize their accomplishments. You'll be amazed how these paradigms are self-fulfilling. Finally, remember to ignore those who say you cannot teach an old dog new tricks, they have it backwards, new tricks keep the dog young.

Certainly, there is much more to be said about these paradigms, but space does not permit. Besides I rather hear from you and get your ideas and feedback, for there is so much to learn as we all strive to move our industry toward dynamic sales gains. I hope these ideas spark some in you, I look forward to hearing about your success.

What's In A Name?

On a recent trip to Indianapolis, Indiana I spent some time with Bill Legg, a Retail Advertising manager for the Indianapolis Star/News. That evening while watching the Indiana Pacers beat the New York Knicks our conversation revolved around our mutual experiences regarding the sometimes vocal hostility many advertisers express toward the newspaper industry. Often we both had heard, and I am confident you have as well, these advertisers speak of our industry's apparent apathy toward their concerns, needs and objectives. Often, they felt we had no interest in their well being, we only wanted the order, we were not there to be a problem solving partner. As all of us know and realize today these advertisers more and more are looking for partners to help them meet the challenges they face each day in an ever increasingly competitive business environment. It seems our industry is perhaps the only industry that still tries to call our customers, by something other than what they are, by calling them Advertisers. These customers of ours that sell autos, clothes, groceries and much more, are indeed auto manufacturers, clothiers, and grocers, not advertisers. As Bill, pointed out in the print industry he never called on a "printer," they referred to their clients by the business they were in. In fact, in our equation perhaps the only party which should be referred to as an advertiser is us, after all we are the only ones building and selling an advertising product.

So how does this help us pay more attention to our customers needs. By calling our customers by truly what they do we will naturally focus more on what they do, thus paying more attention to the concerns, needs and

opportunities of their industry, not ours. We will naturally learn to speak their language and listen more intently to understand their world. By refusing to call them advertisers, we will stop trying to put them in a box, our box. We will no longer force them to be something they are not, force them to learn a foreign language of column inches, SAU's, CPM, and Spadea. If we ask our customer, they would undoubtedly tell us they would prefer not to be advertisers. They would like to sell their product and services without advertising, that indeed advertising, to many of them, is a necessary evil. So let's stop call these very valuable partners of ours "advertisers" and focus on what they are, and let them focus on the task at hand, selling more of the products and services they offer. Perhaps in this process we will also focus more on our task, selling more of the products and services our customers offer. This may seem like a small and trivial matter, but as a wise individual once said, if you want to get someone's attention, first try calling their name.