

STYLUS

Scratching Beneath the Surface

stylus n. an instrument of metal, bone, or the like,
used by the ancients for writing

CLOSING THE SALE An Entrepreneur's Guide for Happiness

by Nina Durfee

Among the top concerns entrepreneurs voice about their business are “following up” and “increasing the bottom line.” More consistent followup and greater income (i.e., closed sales), raises the happiness quotient for business. I propose that happiness in business depends on happiness in personal life. How are the two related? First, let's define happiness.

A recent episode of *60 Minutes* addressed the general subject of happiness, naming Denmark as the happiest country on the globe. Danish newspaper columnist Sebastian Dorset points to the evidence: less violence; fewer murders or high crime than other countries; and very little national turmoil for more than half a century. He says, “[Danish] People . . . feel very safe.”

Morley Safer interviewed Professor Kaare Christensen and a handful of students at the University of Southern Denmark. Each expressed a bit of confusion over the whole concept. None of them claimed to be deliriously happy or even to know someone else who is.

One male student suggested Danes may be more content than happy, stating that if you're content you don't have so much to worry about. To the suggestion that Dane's begin with lower expectations, Professor Christensen suggested that it's not a matter of high expectations, but rather the attachment to the expectation that causes distress. Danes have an attitude of “this is good enough.”

How does this apply to entrepreneurs?

It goes to our expectations about followup and closing. It's not a matter of lowering our standards for good enough. But it's important to know what good enough means. When aiming for an outcome, a critical consideration is why you want it. Do you want a million dollars in closed sales to unhappy customers that you'll never see again? Or would you rather close half a million in sales to happy customers who will continue to bring repeat

business and refer you to others? If repeat business is what you want, how do you ensure that from the very first contact?

The basis of sales is relationships.

“According to the 2006 Edelman Annual Trust Barometer,” reports Rioald Soerjanto in the February edition of *Eastside Business*, “68% of consumers trust the information they get from a person they perceive as being like themselves more than any other source, up from 22% in 2003.” Trust between two people simply makes communication easier. Just as we each have a spacial comfort zone, we also have a receptivity comfort zone. When pressure to close a sale comes from a place of desperation on the part of the salesperson, the potential client (PC) feels your invasion or encroachment into his space.

Danes are very nonconfrontational, embodying the ideal of peaceful coexistence. They profess not to be overtly friendly to strangers, communicating less with words and more with polite and mutually understood body language. This adds heft to the “silence is golden” theory. Peaceful coexistence opens the comfort zone of PCs in a way that in-your-face pressure does not.

So, how do we reconcile remaining “silent” and still follow up to close the sale?

Shift the focus.

Don’t abandon the vision for specific closing dollars. In fact, the more specific the intention, the greater the probability of success. But it’s not enough to know *that* you want success. You must also know *why* you want it. In other words, what’s the relationship of money to happiness?

When Morley Safer asked a Danish student to describe the qualities that a successful person would have in Denmark, the student replied, “Well, in order to see myself as a success I would want to be happy and have a lot of time with my family. I think that’s very important to me. And the money is not that important.” Another student said, “It is more about the softer values, such as not being stressed, and feeling passionate about what I’m doing.”

Keep in mind the well-being that financial success brings, and you move forward in a way more conducive to receiving it.

Lecturer Tal Ben-Shahar teaches a course at Harvard called “Positive Psychology,” the science of happiness. He says, “The number one predictor of well-being is close friendships and close relationships in general. . . . Much better predictor of well-being than affluence is.”

Don’t disregard the bottom line, but know why you want it. Aside from the primal elements of keeping your business afloat, what does a larger bottom line give you? Is it

respect? Recognition? Security? Love? Contentment? Confidence? Capacity to enrich others?

Connect on common ground.

If well-being (whether personal, social or financial) is the desired end result, it follows that focus on relationships will naturally beef up the bottom line. Behave in a way that honors others with respect and consideration by being genuinely curious. Find your center ground of relationship, knowledge, expertise and passion (mutual interest), and you'll draw the clientele that grow your business comfortably. Honestly be yourself, present what you know in an environment where it is welcome, and the pieces fall into place gracefully.

There's no right or wrong way to initiate contact, to follow up, or to close a sale. Different approaches and different levels of receptivity come naturally to different people. Pay attention to the comfort zone of your PC, and know your own comfort zone.

When your desired outcome aligns with your client's desire, you'll both enjoy the process of contact and followup, and you'll each receive benefit from the closing. Trust your instinct, and move forward in a way that energizes you.

And feel free to borrow the Dane's logic that there's such a thing as good enough. You'll gain the richness of relationship, and the bottom line will take care of itself.