

## **A shift in perspective can improve profits**

Could our age old perspective on business success be out of phase with reality?

In pre-Copernicus days, everyone thought the sun revolved around the earth (geocentric). Through Copernicus' daring studies we learned that the earth revolves around the sun (heliocentric). That change in perspective unlocked the mysteries of the solar system.

In many ways, daring businesses are undergoing the same type of change. The classic business equation has been "success revolves around profit." However, that perspective can drive short-sighted activity and decisions.

A study of sales people and businesses that consistently perform above the norms demonstrates what differentiates them. Their success is not because they have the golden product, cornered the best customers, or lucked out by being in the right place at the right time. Those only bring temporary success. What's their discovery? They have learned that success revolves around the customer. They understand that profits are a necessary aspect of business. However, rather than a good measure for success, profits are an automatic result of working inside that customer-centric perspective.

What do we mean when we say that a salesperson is customer-centric? They recognize that they can only be successful if they first help their customers succeed. The only way they can accomplish this is by uniquely applying their company's offerings to meet specific customer needs.

### **Become Customer-Centric**

- Be an expert in all areas of your products and services offering. By knowing your business inside and out you enhance your value to customers. It's often some small nuance relating to your offering that can become a home run. For example, a salesperson showed his company how to make a customer's field modification of their product a factory option, saving the customer time and money, while increasing the supplier's sales and profits.
- Develop a sincere interest in your customer's business needs. Probe for ways you can help them solve their problems. One supplier to a fast-food company discovered that the person he dealt with was concerned about construction delays the customer was experiencing. The salesperson stepped in to learn more about the cause for the delay, which centered on coordination of the contractors who ordered his product. Once a procedure was put in place to help eliminate the delays, the salesperson earned the position of sole supplier.
- Become conversational with your customer. Determine what is keeping them awake at night. You will be amazed at what you learn if you listen intently instead of focusing on presenting your products. One customer shared that they could not obtain a satisfactory product in another area of their specifications. The salesperson took the information back to his company with assurances that the customer would buy if they built the product requested. The supplier created an entirely new but related product for their customer. This product eventually spawned a new division within the supplier's company and became a key contributor to growth.

- Put the needs of your customer first. A customer tried a new approach to impress her boss. When the sale person discovered things weren't going well with her idea, he called in additional resources, met with the customer and determined how they could contribute. Whether the project was ultimately successful or not, the salesperson won big with the customer.
- Treat your customer with integrity. When we consider a customer's purchasing power over the next ten years, squabbling over misunderstandings on one project becomes very insignificant. Even if it costs you more today, always do the right thing in your customer's eyes. Customers prefer to do business with people they trust, and they will look for other ways they can work with you

Do we see a pattern here? By setting your agenda aside and developing a customer-centric approach to communicating and working with your customers, you will learn many ways you can provide value. As an automatic result, you will increase your sales, grow your share of the customer's business, evaluate new products and services offerings, and become the customer's preferred provider.

You cannot fake being customer-centric. It's an attitude that must be developed; knowing that when you serve the customer first, your rewards will follow. But how can you do that when the only measurements are hard numbers like sales growth and profit margin? If you focus solely on those measures, (profit-centric) you will likely focus on how to squeeze more out of your customers. That sets up an adversarial environment typifying most customer-salesperson relationships.

#### **Focus on Customer-Centric measures**

- Am I an expert in my product and service offerings?
- Have I identified my customer's business needs?
- Do I have a customer approved "plan" on how to work with them to resolve their current problems?
- Have we developed a customer interface process that will enable us to work more effectively together?
- Do we meet regularly to evaluate how well we're maximizing the value of the relationship?

While these may seem difficult to measure, you can actually document the progress and success in these customer-centric areas. And if the salesperson is proficient with the customer in these areas, you will see sales increase automatically and consistently. Not only will your customer be happier, you'll find that customer-centric sales personnel enjoy their job more, experience greater success and stay around longer.

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