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The Power of Partnering

By Kelley Robertson

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"Get the sale at any cost."

"Make more calls."

"Tell them what they want to hear."

Sales professionals in virtually every industry are under tremendous pressure to close sales. It is not uncommon for them to hear comments similar to ones above from their sales manager, supervisor, or boss. But this approach does not create trust with customers and does not encourage repeat business or a lasting relationship.

A more effective approach is to develop a partnering relationship with your clients. This means working with them to help them achieve their goals and objectives. Simple in theory, this strategy requires a completely different approach. Here's what I mean.

In the majority of sales meetings, the sales person looks for ways to position his or her product/service so that the prospect will buy it. However, a partnering approach means putting your goals and objective aside. It means focusing 100% of your attention on your customer. It requires a self-less mindset because there are situations when the best solution is not yours. In fact, it may mean telling your customer to contact a competitor. I experienced this just a few days before writing this article. A subscriber to my e-zine contacted me about delivering a particular service. Although I may have been able to help her, I knew someone who could better meet her requirements. It was mentally difficult, but I made the decision to refer her to my competition.

Partnering also means that you provide exceptional follow-up to ensure that your customer is completely satisfied with their purchase. This does not mean you make just the obligatory follow-up call. It means you explore their actual use of your product and/or service and help them maximize its full potential.

A client of mine was experiencing less than favorable results after implementing a new program into their business. We scheduled a follow-up meeting with the management team, because as the vendor,

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I knew that the answers lay in the execution of the program. During the meeting we explored several ways to improve their results and one of the solutions required me to provide additional follow-up. Although I could have charged this client for my time, I knew that it made good business sense to absorb the cost of this follow-up because my primary objective was to help my client achieve the best results possible. Subsequent meetings indicated that this investment was worth it as my client began discussing how we could take this initiative to the next level.

The challenge with this concept is that most sales people want some form of instant gratification. But this approach does not offer a direct or immediate payoff for the sales person. However, from a business perspective, it makes good sense.

It is also important to note that you don't necessarily have to give away this additional service. A few

sales trainers I know (including myself) incorporate telephone coaching into their proposals. They charge for this service but they position it as a way for the company to improve their results. They demonstrate how this additional investment will drive more dollars to their clients' bottom line. Ultimately, your goal should be helping your customers and clients improve their business results. Here are a few points to consider.

1. Focus on their goals and objective instead of your personal agenda (closing the sale). If necessary, recommend another supplier or vendor who offers the exact product/service your client needs.
2. Follow-up. Contact your customer and talk to them after they have made their purchase. Ask them if they are getting the desired results. If they aren't, look for ways to help them maximize their results. Offer additional support. Give them extra resources. Help them get the best results possible.
3. Incorporate a systemized process into your sales pitch or proposals. People will pay for extras providing they see that value that is brought to their organization.
4. Send information to your customers on a regular basis without being asked. I like to send articles that are relevant to my clients on a regular basis. This demonstrates that I am looking out for their interests, rather than my own. I prefer to send articles written by other people, not just the ones I write.

Zig Ziglar once stated, "You can get anything you want in life if you just help enough other people get what they want." When you help your customers achieve their goals and objectives you become more than a supplier or vendor. You become a preferred partner. And this will prevent your competition from overtaking you in the marketplace.

Create a checklist of the additional services you can offer to your clients to help them achieve their goals. Helping your customers reach their objectives will help you increase your profits.

One word of caution...this is a process, not a quick fix. This strategy does take time to generate a return. However, it is well worth the investment.

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Kelley Robertson is a professional speaker and trainer on sales, negotiating, and employee motivation. For information on his programs, visit his website at www.RobertsonTrainingGroup.com.

Receive a FREE copy of "100 Ways to Increase Your Sales" by subscribing to his 59–Second Tip, a free weekly e–zine available at his website.

Relationship Networking

By S. Housley

What is Relationship Networking?

Relationship networking is simply the art of meeting people and benefiting from those relationships. Often the benefit of these relationship is to obtain information and leads to further grow your business. Any successful relationship, whether a personal or a business relationship, is unique to every pair of individuals, and it evolves over time. Effective relationship networking is all about building those relationships and maintaining long lasting connections with other professionals.

The Internet is an excellent vehicle for networking. Relationships can develop in newsgroups, forums, and via email. Though nothing really beats good old–fashioned face–to–face networking to start the process of building a relationship and trust, which is why industry conferences can be so important.

Not all contacts will be useful or worth pursuing. There will be leads that don't provide much information. Use your judgment on whether the information and relationship is worth spending more time on.

Relationship networking opens new doors, often it's "who you know, not necessarily what you know".

Tip to Build Network Relationships: Provide genuine assistance to others. Be open–minded. Remember personal details. Respect cultural differences. Research people and companies. Know their goals and interests. Reciprocate. Introductions.

Where to Network:

So many people wear multiple hats; everyone and anyone could possibly be a networking opportunity. However, just like targeted search engine traffic, the more targeted the networking the higher the chance of success. 'Targeted' networking offers the most potential. Trade associations or industry specific organization. Trade shows. Friends. Schools. Focused newsgroups and topic specific forums. Customers. Suppliers. User groups.

Constantly refine and grow your network of relationships, as they are valuable and need cultivating. If you are perceived as someone who is only trying to get something your network will likely not increase. Networking is about building relationships and mutual interaction benefiting both parties. Share information and help others grow their businesses.

In many ways relationship networking and partnering overlap, and on some occasion's relationship networking will lead to synergistic partnering.

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Partnering

Partnering is an attractive flexible way for companies to develop new markets and additional revenue.

Working together, partners can combine strengths in critical areas. Often a larger well-known vendor provides small vendors with credibility, while the smaller vendor contributes specific industry knowledge unknown to the larger vendor. Synergistic relationships come in all shapes and sizes, but the best relationships and partnerships are the ones that benefit everyone. Partnering is a good way of tapping into related customer bases. Often the partners complement each other in such a way that they can provide a combined solution that neither partner could deliver alone.

Expectations

In order for a relationship to work you must have a clear understanding of both your companies and product(s) strengths and weaknesses. By being aware of any deficiencies, you will find partners with strengths in the areas of your weaknesses. Know what you have to offer. Know what you are looking for. Don't waste yours and your potential partner's time.

Different relationships/partnering that works: Product bundling. Newsletter exchanges. Integrations.

Link exchanges. Technology or knowledge exchange. Revenue share. Ad exchange.

Win/Win

Only when each partner is successful can the partnership itself claim success. Partnerships are genuinely a win-win. Developers, who master the art of strategic partnering and relationship networking, will obtain long-term profitability and success.

Final Tips Qualify sources. Adage – you are who you hang with. Not every relationship is a good one. Evaluate potential partners. Make it personal by taking the time to say thank you. Results are not always immediate. Carry business cards everywhere you go.

Being proactive and following up, you can have a network of contacts that you will be able to access quickly when you need them. Whether by more traditional means, such as in person or over the Internet, personal networks are essential for furthering your business. Relationship networking is give and take, be sure to help others in your quest for help.

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