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THE POWER OF LISTENING

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PLANNING YOUR CAREER

There are many circumstances where a person is faced with the task of considering their career path. Certainly students coming out of college - and even high school students considering which college to attend - have to think about their careers. So too do women who have spent years raising their children and now wish to re-enter the workforce. Many times these women feel lost because they do not wish or cannot resume the careers they had prior to their homemaking years. Consider also the man or woman who, after a full career at a company,



DULY QUOTED

"There is a fine line between marketing and grand theft".

- Scott Adams

WISH WE SAID IT

"You can fool all the people all the time if the advertising budget is big enough".

- Ed Rollins



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THOUGHT OF THE MONTH

It's All About the Fundamentals

The current business environment has forced marketing professionals and business executives to revisit business basics and go back to the fundamentals. For years now companies have been focusing their marketing energies toward creating demand and not maintaining customer loyalty. The result has been a constant flow of new product introductions - from brand extensions to so-called innovations.

The demand machine was fueled by new additions to our communications channels, such as cable television and the Internet. With so many ways to reach potential clients, and advances in targeting, the marketing professionals - driven by executives that demanded constant sales increases - moved ever farther away from fundamentals. Rather, they embraced whatever would deliver great numbers for the most immediate quarterly results.

After experiments with revenue generating schemes and risking the alienation of core customer constituencies, many companies are finally starting to come back to the fundamentals. They are once again emphasizing service and quality and trying to compete on an even playing field.

This renewed interest in the fundamentals is refreshing. The abandonment caused severe damage to consumer confidence and all but eroded loyalty. By going back to the fundamentals companies will have the chance to re-engage customers and rebuild the relationships that they once recognized as their core business asset.

And this will be good for everyone....and it will be as it should be. They don't call them the fundamentals for nothing.



THE POWER OF LISTENING

By Craig R. Frank

Most people struggle with listening. We are more inclined to speak or are busy thinking of what we want to say to really be hearing what the other person is saying. From a human relations perspective listening is important because it makes people feel appreciated and validated. From a business perspective listening is important because it is how we gain the information we need to make critical business decisions.

Listening leads to the quintessential win-win situation. Not only does it provide you with understanding, but it also earns you the appreciation of the person communicating with you. Nothing creates an atmosphere of respect and trust better than listening.

Why Listen?

In addition to the good will we earn and the information we obtain when we listen, there are solid business reasons to learn to listen.

Listening ignites the imagination and gets the creative process going. Most ideas come from something we saw or heard. If we are not listening, we are reducing the influx of stimuli by 50%, and most likely reducing the potential for new ideas by a similar percentage. When we listen we are the recipients of other people's views, and with those views – by understanding those views – we are able to formulate products and services that are more likely to find their place in the market.

Finally, the relationships you built and the loyalty you earn by listening should not be underestimated. In business, loyalty is one of the key drivers of profitability because it leads to stable and sustained sales while lowering marketing and sales costs by creating positive buzz.

Listening is not only the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do.

How to Listen

Being a good listener isn't easy. We all have things on our minds and time constraints to consider. Tudog understands the pressures dragging you away from being a good listener, and so we offer 4 hints to help you be a better one. They are:

1. *Repeat Yourself*

One way to make sure you heard the other person correctly is by repeating to them what you understood and asking them if you got it right. This not only gives the person the chance to correct any misunderstandings on the spot, it also demonstrates how well you were listening and how much you care about understanding his/her point.

2. *Take Notes*

Taking notes is a good policy because it provides you with a written record of what was said and gives you the mechanism through which to pay attention. When you are taking notes you are careful not to miss anything said, and you are careful to make certain you understand what was said. The speaker is appreciative because he sees the note-taking as an indication of your interest.

3. *Ask Questions*

Nothing proves you are listening more than asking relevant questions. By asking a question you not only indicate an interest, but also a desire to attain an even deeper understanding. This makes the person speaking feel engaged and respected.

4. *Pay Attention*

Paying attention is much more than listening. Paying attention helps us sustain listening because it keeps us focused and prevents our thoughts from drifting. People can tell when you are paying attention through your posture, your body language, the extent to which you interact, and by your facial and verbal expressions. People appreciate when you pay attention because it shows you have a genuine interest in what they are saying.

Leveraging Listening

As already established, listening leads to information, and information is used as the foundation upon which we make our decisions. Leveraging listening is all about improving our processes and products, service and market presence. By listening to customers, competitors, critics and fans we can learn about how our company and our products are being viewed, and we can make adjustments to maximize and meet our potential.

Listening isn't always convenient. We have all met the person that says more than is necessary and uses far too many words to say it. But in all that babble may be brilliance, which you will most likely miss if you have tuned the person out. We can demonstrate our concern, commitment, and respect by listening. We can also improve our operations and profitability. All in all, a proposition worth listening to.

Craig Frank is Tudog's CEO.



COOPERATING WITH COMPETITORS

By David Gilad

There once was a time when the very idea of cooperating with a competitor was seen as absurd. After all, the role most companies set out for themselves was to beat the competitor in a contest for the consumer's dollar. Cooperating would mean giving up on that competition, and somehow redefining the way businesses see themselves.

The idea is not as far-fetched as it may have once seemed. In today's hyper competitive market, where buyers have choices, the idea of matching up with a competitor to strengthen the overall offer may mean more business. In fact, in some sectors customers are demanding it.

The reasons for avoiding cooperating with competitors are evident. Not only do we not want to assist them in making money and expanding their reputation in the market, we also do not want them to be exposed to our operational methods and strategic thinking. These core aspects of our business are what often give us our strategic advantage and the last thing we want to come from a cooperative arrangement is the transfer of vital know-how that the competitor can later use to our detriment.

These are vital concerns, but the reality of the market requires that we find a way to overcome them and learn to work together when necessary. Tudog recognizes both the challenges and the need for cooperating with competitors, and we offer the following 6 tips to make it more effective and less risky.

1. Set the Rules and Set the Boundaries

Just because you are cooperating with a competitor on a specific project does not mean that the competition won't resume when the project is completed. You need to make sure that both sides are aware of the rules under which the collaboration will take place and where the boundaries of acceptable behavior lie. For example, if one set of offices is going to be used as project HQ, then the access to certain areas of the office (such as archives and certain computers) may be limited to employees from the other company.

This is not to hinder their ability to fulfill their tasks under the current project, but rather to make sure there are no misunderstandings as the joint effort goes forward.

2. Set an Example

The employees of both companies may be a bit confused (and even reluctant) at the sudden respect and support they are expected to show to people with whom they were bitter competitors only a short time ago. It is essential that management on both sides set the tone of collaboration and demonstrate their commitment to making the project a success. The perfect example of cooperation, as well as the requirement of complete compliance, will help reduce resistance and defiance.

3. Give Everyone Room to Succeed

Chances are the collaboration you are engaged in was the result of each party having a capacity the other lacked. Make sure that each side has the freedom and space to do what they are best at, while having the mechanisms in place to ensure that each side knows what the other is doing. By giving everyone the room they need, you will prevent one party from trying to dominate the process or inject itself where its expertise is lacking. Even in circumstances where it is evident that one party is the lead partner, the space should still be given to the junior partner.

4. Make Sure Everyone Knows Their Job

Keep in mind that during a collaborative effort you are, by definition, bringing together two complete organizations to share the work. Each company has its own capacities, most likely, to do each task, although the collaboration is proof of varying competency levels. You need to make sure that each side, and every member of each side, knows exactly what their job is – and by extension what their job is not. This will eliminate both a likely source of tension and wasteful repetition of tasks.

5. Keep the Communications Constant

One of the most common causes of misunderstandings is poor communication. When competitors are cooperating with one another the potential for misunderstandings is high. The way to counter it is to make certain that the two sides have open, rapid and constant communication channels. Those responsible for execution should be certain to speak daily, and there should be channels set up to address conflicts swiftly. By making certain the communication channels are well defined and engaged regularly, you will avoid the minor misunderstandings from erupting into full fledged battles. With communications you may not be able to prevent disagreements, but you will be able to control how they are resolved.

6. Manage the Collaboration

Regardless of the skills and authority of the people placed in charge of implementation, it is management's job to manage the collaboration and make certain that each side is not only bringing to the table what was agreed upon, but also that the foundations for future mutually advantageous collaborations is being laid. Relying on others to manage the collaboration removes management from evaluating the consequences and benefits of

the venture. By being engaged, you are also there to determine how to best benefit from such arrangements.

Cooperating with competitors is a new business reality. It is a sign of strength that companies that compete for the same customer are also able to team up when the needs of that customer so require. The use of collaboration can bring additional value to your company, as the joint appeal of your company and a competitor may be all it takes to land an attractive assignment. While it is always wise to keep aware of the risks, it is seldom wise to let the prospect of risks deprive you of the potential benefits. Cooperating with competitors can be a good thing....give it a try sometime.

David Gilad serves on Tudog's Board of Directors



PUBLIC SPEAKING WITH CONFIDENCE

By Ilan Sarid

Not everyone has a natural capability to speak in public. Some people lack the confidence and others get too nervous to concentrate. The idea of standing in front of a group of people and being the sole focus of everyone's attention also makes people, who are humble and unassuming, uncomfortable. The presentation can be as first-class as they come, but if the presenter isn't engaging and capable of maintaining audience interest, the presentation will be unsuccessful.

Despite discomfort, many of us are at some time called upon to make a public address, whether at a conference, a lecture, or company event. And whether we are speaking in front of 1,000 people at a conference or 10 people in your company department, chances are we want to do well. The art of speaking publicly can be enhanced by taking some simple steps. These include:

1. Watch What You Eat

The last thing you want to be doing while speaking is clearing your throat all the time. Avoiding dairy products prior to your talk will reduce the chances that you'll have some build-up in your throat. Likewise, you probably don't want to be too thirsty while talking, as so you should avoid salty foods and bananas, which will increase your urge to drink.

2. Keep Water Close By

Naturally you want to make sure you have some water nearby in case nerves cause a small case of dry mouth. You want to have the water with you so you can take small sips as needed. Depending on the length of your talk, you want to balance your need to wet your mouth with your wish to avoid building up water in your system. You may not be able to take a bathroom break during the talk, and it becomes uncomfortable speaking and difficult to concentrate when your bladder is knocking.

3. Release Energy Before the Talk

While you may not be able to hit the gym right before you talk, you can release some energy before you begin by shaking up the muscles a bit. The release of energy will

relax you and allow you to give your talk in a paced and casual manner. The energy, if not released, may cause you to race through as it is pushing the talk out of you.

4. Neutralize Your Risks

There are some things that you most dread, such as falling on your way up the stage, standing before the group with your fly open, and other embarrassing possibilities. Neutralize these risks by going through a checklist before going on, and wearing clothing (and shoes) that are comfortable and risk free.

5. Face the Mirror

Before you go on face the mirror and practice your talk. Make sure you know the pace you want to speak, the jokes you want to tell, and how you want to time your delivery. By practicing you'll gain confidence and become comfortable with your talk, and when it's show time it will feel like just one more time.

6. Pick Your Points

One of the challenges speakers have is they fail to connect with their audience, and one of the key reasons this happens is because the speaker does not rotate his/her eye contact around the room. The best way to prevent this is to pick your points around the room and rotate your eye contact to each point systematically (but not mechanically). Make sure your points are at eye level with the audience and not above their heads so that the people watching you get the sense that you are interacting with them.

7. Speak Up

People will find it hard to stay attentive and interested if you are not speaking clearly and loud enough for them to hear you comfortably. Make sure you find the volume level that will do the trick.

8. Feel Free to Speak Freely

People know how to read. Your presentation is not a bedtime story where you read directly off the slides (unless you actually want everyone to fall asleep). Use your slides as topic indicators, and expand on the information on each slide in a manner that resembles an ad lib routine. It is entertaining and gives people the impression you are in command of your material (of course, your ad lib routine is well rehearsed).

9. Move Around

Another way to bore the life out of your audience is to stand behind a podium as if you are hiding behind it. Unless you forgot your pants and need to stay behind the podium to hide your nakedness, move around. It forces the audience to move with you, keeping their attention. This does not mean you move like a quarterback avoiding a sack, but it does mean that you move freely and in an unforced manner.

10. Smile

Your presence will be appreciated and you will be more likeable if you smile. You need not appear like an extra from a toothpaste commercial, but you do need to appear that you are pleased to be there and pleased to be addressing the people before you.

Speaking can be stressful, but it can also be fun. It is a good feeling when you connect with people and share with them information that they did not have prior to meeting you. You can enjoy the opportunity to speak publicly if you come fully prepared and comfortable. The attention you get and the expertise assigned to you makes publicly speaking a worthwhile and useful chore. Get good at it and it will be good to you too.

Ilan Sarid works with Tudog in Canada.



DESIGNING THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

By David Feingersch

The old saying, “you can’t judge a book by its cover”, is really only partially true. In today’s marketing environment, in many cases you can judge a book by its cover because the publishers are using the cover to communicate something about the book. Of course, this does not mean that all the hype on the cover isn’t just that – hype. But it does mean that the outside is designed to tell the buyer what he/she can expect on the inside.

The trend in recent years among marketers has been to integrate product design and packaging into the segment that has been known as “customer experience”. The intent is to establish a deeper and more loyal relationship with a customer based on a broader and more satisfying experience.

Certainly there are many examples that support this approach. Apple is perhaps the premier example of a company that incorporates design into its customer experience strategies. The ipod, for example, comes in an attractive box that makes the experience of opening it and interacting with the new ipod exciting. The product itself – the ipod – with its now-famous navigation wheel, was initially all about design. The wheel changed the way people interacted with the product – thereby changing the experience people had with the product.

The centrality of design has permeated almost every sector, from health and beauty and electronics, to pharmaceuticals and financial services. The use of design as one of the primary factors that engage and sustain the customer relationship – because it enhances or defines the customer experience – is redefining marketing.

Of course, design has always been part of the marketing process. Packaging, for example, has always been used as a way to communicate perceived value. But the actual design of the product has always been in the hands of the engineers whose primary responsibility and concern was the functionality of the product. Today, the design of the product is established at the product development stage, while the functionality is evolving. Today, the assumption is that the design of the product is no less important than its functionality. It is recognized as being an integral part of the experience the user has with the product.

Perhaps the driver for this focus on design is the new way we live our lives – always communicating and constantly engaging media. We are interacting more often with so many of the devices that touch our daily lives that it is as important to us how they look and how they function, as which functions they deliver.

Cell phones, for example, have become almost a fashion accessory, as people are driven as much by how the phone looks as they are what the phone enables them to do. Ease of use is critical, but in many cases not as essential as physical design. Collectively, the design and the function become our experience with the product and we evaluate the product and consider our purchase based on the sum total of this dual calculation.

Another potential driver for this focus on design is competition. As new, particularly foreign, competitors enter the marketplace, companies are in need of new ways to establish their points of difference. Insofar as most manufacturers are able to produce products with similar functions, the design element became the only remaining way to distinguish a product. The use of design – not only in packaging but on the actual product – became central to the company's capacity to compete.

Certainly in today's global economy many companies are approaching design from an international perspective, using designers from a variety of cultures to influence how products look. This could be similar to the way multi-national teams of engineers have been gathered by great companies to produce innovative products.

The placement of the design team at the beginning of the process, instead of at the packaging stage, is also a major change that has led to improvements in customer experience. The designers have a sense of how things should look, and also how they should be interacted with. By approaching the product from the complete experience perspective, as opposed to a more narrow functional perspective, the designers at the development level have been able to add beauty to function.

The customer experience is more than just what a product does. More and more companies are coming to realize that it is also how a product looks, how the user interacts with the product, how the product is packaged, and even how the consumer acquires the product. All of these elements are combining to make for a new approach to marketing that incorporates many aspects in order to build a relationship with customers. The design aspect – because of its visual appeal and “fashion” power – is becoming one of the most critical aspects of the customer experience. It can no longer be ignored. In today's crowded and hyper competitive market you need to pay attention to design and make certain you look good enough to compete.

David works with Tudog in Florida.



PLANNING YOUR CAREER

By Howard Chusid

There are many circumstances where a person is faced with the task of considering their career path. Certainly students coming out of college – and even high school students considering which college to attend – have to think about their careers. So too do women who have spent years raising their children and now wish to re-enter the workforce. Many times these women feel lost because they do not wish or cannot resume the careers they had prior to their homemaking years. Consider also the man or woman who, after a full career at a company, retires or is laid off and now needs to find his/her way to a new, second career. All of these people have something in common – they need assistance in identifying where their strengths are and what kind of employment will provide them with both a sufficient income and job satisfaction.

Planning a career can seem like a huge undertaking. It's understandable that you don't want to make a mistake but it is essential to recognize that planning a career is full of trials and tribulations. The way to hedge some of the risk is to consider likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, and goals up front. With these critical factors considered, you can head in a direction and make adjustments in your career when you need to. The way positions and careers are changing, you may need to readjust, change direction and re-evaluate the market. Knowing what you want and where your skills lie is key to navigating change as it occurs.

Planning your career needs to be reflected in these initiatives. The following steps can aid in your making decisions that are right for you. Consider:

- Your strengths, weaknesses and interests.
- What can help you achieve your goals and what obstacles could get in your way?
- What types of work and activities appeal to you and what interests you?
- What do you do well now, and what skills have you gained through experience?
- What is your work ethic?

Another temptation to resist is the urge to rush the process. It is natural to want to come to a conclusion quickly, but it is important to be certain you become aware of all your possibilities. Career information can be found in a number of places, including:

- Using assessment inventories.
- Talking to people who work in fields of interest.
- Spending time with people whose activities intrigue you.

- Volunteering or working in a job that interests you.
- Discussing your career and educational plans with a Career Counselor and other interested parties.

The planning of your career takes organization and discipline. It is important to reflect on issues that can influence your strategy and act on achieving your goals. Think about the activities that need to coexist with your career, such as studies or family. Make certain that you pursue a career that allows you to balance everything that is important to you.

Putting your career on track is often a critical step in putting your life on track. The satisfaction and financial reward the right career can afford you will bring joy to many other aspects of your life.

Howard Chusid, M.S. Ed. is an experienced Career Counselor and leads the Florida based firm Professional Career Strategies (PCS). He has the training and experience to give Career Assessments such as the Strong, MBTI, SDS and others. He is also a Registered Mental Health Intern and a member of the National Career Development Association, American Counseling Association and the American Psychological Association. Visit the PCS website at www.professionalcareerstrategiesfl.com