

Publisher

Debra Anthony

Managing Editor

David Young

Associate Editor

Renee A. Weeks

Designer

Tanya Bäck

Phone

832-766-1546

Website

nbizmag.com

Corporate Address

PO Box 6352

Katy, TX

77491-6352

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AND YOUR FOCUS IS?

By Leanne Hoagland-Smith, M.S.

Human beings are indeed funny creatures. They have the ability to do so much and yet, due to past conditioning and current experiences, they limit their success.

Remember all those red marks back in elementary and high school? These marks focused on what you failed to do well. Believe it or not, you have carried that conditioned experience into your adult life.

Right now, think about your skills or talents. How much time do you invest in improving what you do not so well versus how much time you invest in improving what you do well? For the last 15 years, I have assessed hundreds of individuals and the supermajority focus on their weaknesses—what they don't do well—instead of their strengths. What is even more interesting, they will turn non-talents into weaknesses while ignoring their strengths.

One of the exercises I consistently share with my clients is the “Three Spheres of Control.” Take a sheet of paper and draw a small circle in the center. Then label that circle “What I can control.” Next draw a somewhat larger circle around that first small circle. Label this second circle “What I can influence.” Finally, draw a really large circle around the two smaller circles. This third and final circle is labeled “What I cannot control.”

Think about today's events and your reactions to those events. Were those events what you could control; what you could influence; or what you could not control? Most of my clients, based on my own observations for the last several

decades, waste a lot of time on what they cannot control.

These wasted efforts lead to everything from additional stress to reduced self-esteem, reduced emotional control and reduced internal self-control. Focusing one's energies on what he or she cannot control is much like the "hamster in the wheel." Imagine what would happen if you reversed all those wasted efforts on what you can't control? Learning to say "no" is one tactic to use to begin to focus on what you can control.

Possibly, you are wondering what does focus have to do with sales? My answer is everything.

In sales, one of the primary areas of focus is knowing what the buyers want in your particular industry. I just received some interesting statistics from the National Association of Realtors (NAR). Its research suggested 52% of buyers want help in finding the right house. The other 48% is split between negotiating terms, negotiating price, determining what comps sell for, helping with paperwork and other tasks.

If your focus as a realtor is negotiating, you are, as they say, leaving a lot of wasted opportunity on the table.

Another hot sales topic that requires focus is this word of "value." Personally, I don't believe any salesperson can create value because value is unique to each buyer. If value wasn't unique, we all would be eating at McDonalds, driving a Yugo and shopping at Walmart.

How often do we encounter salespeople who spew all their "stuff" in the first five to 10 minutes of speaking with you as a potential prospect? NAR revealed 97% of buyers want honesty and integrity.

In January of 2019, Forbes published a list of America's most and least trusted professions. The most trusted profession was nursing at 84%, a "very high/high" ranking, with only 2% ranking nurses as "very low/low."

Journalists had a 33% positive trust ranking with a 34% negative one. Bankers beat out real estate agents at 27% positive versus 25% for real estate agents. On the other hand, bankers scored 21% negative trust versus 19% for real estate agents. Business



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executives did not fare well with only a 17% positive trust and a 32% negative ranking, but they ranked higher than car salespeople at 8% positive and 44% negative. The U.S. public placed members of Congress at the bottom of this list with respect to being honest and ethical at 58% negative and 8% positive.

What does this say about so many professions? Realtors have a code of ethics and yet they are in the lowest one third of this list. Also, every two years, realtors must take a class focusing on their code of ethics.

Many professions have a code of ethics, including lawyers, doctors and even financial planners, depending upon their certification. So, what gives? Why do so many customers believe these professionals lack honesty and ethics?

If your focus as a salesperson, regardless of industry, is money, could that be part of the problem? Let us be 100% clear. All professions, including lawyers, doctors and nurses, are in sales. Everyone is selling something to someone else. The exchange medium can range from U.S. currency, bartering, a vote, parental support and even physical interactions.

In sales, it is important to have a focus on where your customers start their search. For those in the business to business (B2B) world, research suggests much of that search starts before you receive a call or an email.

For realtors or real estate agents, that search begins online through the various websites such as Zillow, Trulia or Realtor.com.

CSO Insights in 2018 suggested there are four behaviors buyers expect from salespeople:

First, buyers want salespeople to understand their business and to know the buyers before they engage with them. Years ago, my father, a professional salesman, shared these words of wisdom, "People buy from people they know and trust." No one wants a sales pitch out of the gate nor does that same person want unnecessary questions.

Second, buyers want to engage with excellent communicators. Mark Twain, among others, is quoted as saying, "*If the good Lord wanted us to talk more than to listen, he would have given us two mouths instead of two ears.*"

Excellent communicators understand they must actively listen. Their communication to the buyers must be crystal CLEAR. This communication, a five-step process, begins with "Clarity" where the seller separates the "tangibles" from the "intangibles" and the "knowns" from the "unknowns." The next step is to "Legitimize" where the salesperson listens for the real issues because many times perceived problems are really symptoms in disguise. The third step is "Emotion." Understanding the verbal words and

non-verbal gestures, along with the syntax (speed, pitch, volume and emphasis), is extremely essential. Here is where emotional intelligence determines the behaviors of good versus great sales leaders. Step number four is to listen for “Agreement” where you find common ground. This step works to build ongoing trust with the buyer. Listening for “Retention” is the fifth step. Good salespeople listen for critical information that may have been heard by others, but those other salespeople simply failed to listen. Active listening is all about truly hearing, and then remembering, what the other person has just shared with you. Never forget the goal of communication is to build a solid relationship of mutual trust and understanding.

The third behavior buyers want is follow-up. Today’s buyers want to know you have a vested interest in their ongoing success. Salespeople who, after the sale, go onto the next deal and fail to focus on the post-sale are losing out to those salespeople who have an ongoing follow-up process.

There is much discussion about the sales process. Much of this discussion complicates the process. I believe there are three phases in any sales process: (1) Marketing (attracting potential buyers); (2) Selling (interactions in securing a finalized purchase) and (3) Keeping (follow up, including asking for three referrals).

The fourth behavior buyers want is insights and perspective. This insight may include an alternative solution. Buyers look to the expertise of the salesperson. Remember, as a salesperson you bring outside eyes into the buyer’s world.

Bringing your outside insight can be highly emotionally and financially rewarding. This past month, I had a meeting, which my broker scheduled with some out-of-state buyers. Even though this meeting was short notice, I still had time to look for some alternative homes. One home had the acreage the buyers appeared to want but was “off-grid.” I shared it with them and this property turned out to be their preferred choice. They thanked me profusely for this additional property.

In over 40 years of sales, my focus has always been on the customer—the buyer. From selling popcorn at a movie theater, to now selling mostly rural real estate properties, that focus on the buyer remains 100% true. This focus is why I believe and coach that salespeople must be “bought” by the buyers and to stop “selling” themselves to the

buyers. Let your buyers “buy” you and the rewards will be incredible. **N**

Leanne Hoagland-Smith is a Clarity Strategist, solving people and process problems. As a thought leader who challenges the status quo, she turns tomorrow’s goals into today’s results. Follow her on Twitter @CoachLee.