

Auto Focus

By Karel Murray

The phone has stopped ringing... It's been a week... 2 weeks... business is unusually slow. Do you over react?

I've discovered a growing phenomenon of sales professionals who seem to have "lost their way" as a result of a changing economy. At one point, vision is clear and the path to success stretches on to a predictable future. Then, for no apparent reason, when the phone stops ringing... nothing feels or appears normal. The unexpected down time disrupts the energy and brows crease in concern. Surely, there is something to blame - a cause that created this unnatural effect.

A typical response to the stress may be the impulse to "change" everything... update the web site, revise the logo, streamline services, add benefits, expand ad copy, buy better equipment, hire or fire staff... the list goes on. The sense of "losing the market" grips firmly onto the salesperson's perspective creating an unfocused, sporadic knee jerk reaction to what might be a simple issue.

The level of self imposed panic increases in direct relationship to the percentage of income earned from commission sales. The number of phone calls symbolizes the business barometer. When it flat lines – there's trouble on the horizon.

Well...not necessarily.

Consider how a complex camera assembly works. Professional photographers understand the image needs to be isolated and brought efficiently into focus by the maneuvering of levers and dials. A non-professional usually purchases a camera that has "auto focus" where the camera is programmed to zero in on the image and like magic; the camera adjusts and clarifies the field. Simplicity at it's best. That's because a set of instructions and logical processes are already programmed in the camera.

Auto focus is a concept you can apply to your business process by understanding that shifts in the market are bound to occur. Learn to adjust smoothly and effectively.

Evaluate Your Delivery Systems

Internal decline in processes often cause disruption in business. Are you delivering your product or service at the level of quality demanded by your

market? Review your last ten to fifteen sales and evaluate the delivery system... does it duplicate your "promise" to the public? If at first review, it is at the level you want, consider calling the last five clients and conduct a short interview to see if the perceived disruption is non system oriented.

For example: Your call prompts this client response, "Well, Mark, you always sounded so busy and rushed that I didn't want to bother you with little questions." Light bulb time. This could reveal you how your tight schedule and elevated stress energy translates to the client as "you're too busy to bother" with their concerns.

A sad fact is customers will gravitate to business professionals who only have eyes for them. They must be convinced of your total concentration and know you aren't thinking about the next deal, but are focused on them. Period.

If, however, the responses from your inquiries are positive and in line with your expectations, move on.

Gain Perspective

Speak openly and honestly with other business professional in your field. It will not only expand your knowledge and expertise, it will open doors to future referrals. Consider establishing a Mastermind mentoring group which consists of people in your industry who:

- a) Are successful in what they do
- b) Have a competence and expertise in areas you need to develop
- c) Are ethical and trustworthy
- d) Will also benefit from the association of other group members.

Assemble under ten members while establishing quarterly meetings designed to address industry issues, personal development, and feedback on projects. I'd encourage a broad cross section of participants from different parts of the country – remember, it's about perspective and expanding the focus field.

If this isn't practical, then read – a lot! Dedicate 30 minutes a day to personal development. This practice could dramatically impact your overall ability to anticipate future trends and probable growth or decline issues to address for your business.

Research Outside Influences

Have legislative changes created a tidal wave of panic? Access the internet and analyze legislative recommendations. Are your sales declining due to lack of consumer confidence in your industry? Is new legislation detrimental to the growth of your business?

Don't hesitate to establish a dialog with your state representative or senator. They are serving you. Have your thoughts and concerns concisely outlined, then make the call or send the email. Your perspective may be more valuable than you know.

Look Inside

Careers are not necessarily easily matched to emotional temperament. If your first reaction to business slumps is despair and excess worry, you probably won't last long as a commissioned real estate sales person as your body and brain fail to assimilate the assault of extreme ups and downs. You may have always dreamed of a sales profession, but if the consequence of living your dream is destroying your health, perhaps a reevaluation is necessary.

Career choice does matter.

Analyze The Need

The public rules... if your service or product is deemed a "luxury item" in a down-turning economy, your business may be the first to be negatively impacted. Create a list of benefit statements that will re-establish need as defined by the current environment. Determine how the services or products you offer can become a "must have" in the marketplace. Remember, it's all in how to you present it in relation to the current public concern.

Update Your Business Plan

Revisit the goals, objectives and input you have gained as a result of your investigation and update your business plan accordingly. Establish a budget that accommodates changes and remember to build in flexibility. When you are prepared financially to cover the natural "slumps" in production, you will be less likely to negatively over react. Following a well built, consistent plan enhances the sense of personal control and minimizes the impact of a slowing marketplace.

In this day and age of rapidly shifting attitudes, loyalties, and expectations, you need to establish your business identity as “solid ground” - like the light house beam which guides fog bound ships to safe harbor. World changes may speed by for the public, but you and your business should always remain in their line of sight. Stop flailing around in a self imposed fog. Set up your equipment, take aim and click...

Auto focus - it is not just a technique; it's an attitude of confidence and tenacity.

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