

Marketing with Integrity

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With all the uncertainty occurring in today's market, combined with the pervasive "what's in it for me" mentality, many people around the country have lost their trust in businesses and organizations. The marketing strategies hyped by many promoters to ensure a large customer base, are no longer relevant. Enduring success will be created by operating from integrity and respect for others.

We have all witnessed businesses crumbling from within. We have watched CEOs being arrested and observed organization after organization being investigated for accounting frauds and illegal insider tradings. We are stunned as we witness the largest financial institutions fall and the three top auto manufacturers approach bankruptcy and require government bailouts. The exposure of companies reveals the core of dysfunction and levels of deception that can occur in an organization. These incidents demonstrate the intensity of the greed, competition and lack of integrity that has been occurring in companies. What can we learn from this?

Unfortunately, what is dominating management today is what I call "ego-driven" leadership. But what is not clearly evident to most people is that ego-driven leaders are actually operating from insecurity and fear, including those at the top. They may appear powerful but they are not. And they actually limit the potential of the employees.

The leaders' desire to create wealth and power, of ten at the expense of others, stems from their own deep inadequacies. The schemes, ultimately, do not work as the recent debacles illustrates. Leaders operating from this "artificial power" will never achieve long-lasting success.

The new powerful marketing is really about reassuring your customers that you are a company that can be trusted. Genuinely meeting the needs of customers means showing them respect and a sincere interest in their welfare. Marketing with integrity begins with communicating from authenticity. You must clearly listen to the desires and needs of the potential customers. And then it is essential that you provide the service you promise. That takes teamwork and cooperation of all employees.

John was a successful sales executive in the commercial loan department of a highly recognized bank. He was good at listening and relating to the prospects. He was able to hear their needs and find a way to reassure them that he would be able to provide the best solution for them. However, more and more, new

programs with complications and limitations were continually being given to the mortgage department. Additional fees and unusual requirements were making the various options confusing for his prospects. New customers began experiencing small service problems, at the least, and unfulfilled promises and disappointments in other cases. John found himself feeling less and less sincere in his presentations and his personal sales began to drop.

Management was interested in increasing revenues and decreasing expenses. They forgot that the employees were the fuel which ran the organization. They pushed for more sales and cut back on expenses. Their attitude toward the employees was one of superiority. They didn't listen and didn't understand that many employees were feeling a lack of integrity in the bank. This did little to elevate motivation and actually increased the fear and emotional drama.

Individual employees processing various services were also having problems. Gossip and power struggles were occurring and the sense of teamwork had diminished. People were feeling insecure, and rather than working cooperatively, they were feeling competitive with each other. Energy was being drained and this directly affected their productivity and creativity. The beautiful brochures and TV ads that described a bank that cared about relationships seemed to be a facade.

Great leaders understand that it is the potential of all people that make up a successful organization. Ego-driven leaders limit the potential by dousing the spark of creativity in those they lead. It is as though someone is shooting a hole in the fuel tank and then wondering why they aren't getting better mileage.

How could this picture be changed? It starts within the organization. Relating to customers must start first with cooperative relationships in the workplace. Healthy workplace environments result in happy, productive and caring employees. Employees are the service you are selling.

People who feel respected and valued have feelings of loyalty and pride in their organization. Satisfied and empowered employees provide good customer service, one of the most important aspects of marketing. Studies indicate that dissatisfied employees do not give good service, do not refer business to the organization, are not productive and would not recommend others to work there.

There are other unrecognized costs when employees are unhappy. Replacing even one employee will cost between 30% to 200% of their annual salary, according to extensive research. The time wasted in the emotional conflicts is immeasurable.

So it is clear that creating a workplace environment that fosters healthy relationships is important to the overall selling process. Replacing fear and greed with trust and compassion is the first step to generating good marketing

and customer service. An organization is a whole system and you cannot simply market with slick strategies. A break down will occur when the organization does not have the teamwork, cooperation and synchronization to provide good service.

Leaders can market with integrity by incorporating the following steps:

1. Taking a hard look at their own egos and giving up their need to be superior.
2. Learning to listen and create opportunities for employees to contribute.
3. Treating employees and prospects with honesty and respect.
4. Making decisions that benefit all people, not just those at the top.
5. Making commitments to employees, customers and prospects; and keeping them.
6. Empowering employees at every level to use their full potential.
7. Identifying ego driven managers that drain resources and limit creativity.
8. Showing a public willingness to be wrong and to be willing to make changes.
9. Establishing broad two-way employee/management communications systems, including the opportunity for confidential expressions of concerns and fears.
10. Understanding the source of ego dramas, and taking steps to unravel them.
11. Shining a light on cliques, gossip and personal agendas so they are diminished.
12. Providing training for marketing, communications, management and customer service.

Marketing with integrity starts with each individual honoring themselves and others. What you invest in employees will come back in immeasurable ways. According to Mother Teresa, the greatest disease is not heart disease, tuberculosis or any other physical ailment; it is feeling unwanted, uncared for or meaningless. That is true for all individuals. When organizations can operate from compassion for each other and to those whom they market, success will be inevitable. The synergism that occurs as employees work together is more powerful than any marketing strategy you can devise.

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