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# The People Factor

By Leanne Hoagland-Smith, M.S.

**P**eople. Each day, we encounter a lot of people. From our professional to our personal lives, we are surrounded by and connected to people. Some of these people make us smile while others cause our tempers to explode like a short fuse on a stick of dynamite.

In business, people are what make the merry or not-so-merry sales carousel go 'round. We buy from people. We sell to people. We work with people.

Of course, when things go wrong, we blame other people and rarely acknowledge our contribution to the mess. Yes, isn't it sad? After all, we are people too!

Even this business magazine is read by people. Six times a year, there are articles written by other people to create interest, to educate, and, hopefully, to develop loyal readers. All the articles—in some way—are connected to people.

Here in the United States, on the first Monday of September, we celebrate the work of people. Labor Day is a day to appreciate the work results of people. If people are so important to our daily lives, then why do we sometimes appear to limit their productivity, their generosity, and their desire to be better?

## People Got to Be Free

Why do we still have confusion about how to work with people? Maybe the answer lies within us. We have confusion about who we are, and this confusion then transfers to others.

From my experiences of the last 18 years, I can state with 100 percent conviction that 99 percent of the people I have worked with do not know what they truly do well. If they do not know what they truly do well, then they also probably do not know what others around them do well.

There are so many lost opportunities by this lack of clarity. People have far greater confidence in what they do not do well. They focus on improving their weaknesses. Yet my question is always, "Why do winning teams win?"

Is it because of their weaknesses or because of their talents?"

This people behavior of focusing on weaknesses is such a waste. So much energy, time, money, and emotions are pointed in the wrong direction. Yet read any leadership, management, or sales training program, and more often than not, there is an entire chapter or module devoted to improving weaknesses.

I also know people have the consistent behavior of turning non-talents into weaknesses. This people behavior is a result of negative conditioning from childhood. People, by their own behaviors, limit their own potential and, consequently, the potential of other people.

Think about sales for a moment. Zig Ziglar recognized the people factor in sales. He defined sales as "the transference of feelings." One needs at least two people to make a sale. For this sale to happen, the buyer must know and trust the seller, whether it is business to business (B2B) or business to consumer (B2C). This transference of feelings sometimes happens subconsciously with the first handshake or eye contact.

## Just Can't Make No Connection

Today, in the B2B sales world, much of the buying decision is made before the buyer makes outreach to



the seller. This revelation is not just an opinion but has been confirmed by the Corporate Executive Board. This sales research suggests buyers are 57 percent of the way through the buying decision before they even reach out to communicate with a sales representative.

Social media, especially content marketing, seems to have played a significant role in the education of today's B2B buyers and probably B2C buyers as well. Look at LinkedIn Pulse, where 130,000 new posts are generated weekly.

The people factor may also help to explain why so few sales leads convert, according to Forrester and LinkedIn. Forrester notes that people who can help other people turn their vision into a clear path are more likely by three out of four, to be successful in earning the sale. More people buy solutions to problems because those problems keep their vision from materializing into reality.

People write and deliver the messages to other people. With today's buyers being far better educated, they have upped the sales game. These people want sellers to clearly articulate the value of their solutions. Unfortunately, according to SiriusDecision, only one third of salespeople can demonstrate value articulation within their sales conversations.

More research from DemandGen revealed the far-reaching impact of education-based (content) marketing. B2B decision makers review a minimum of three pieces of content in any buying situation. Sixty-five percent of the buyers indicated the winning vendor's content had a significant impact on their buying decision.

Then there are all those people meetings in business. Too bad executive buyers believe 80 percent of most sales meetings are worthless according to additional research from Forrester. Some of this perception

again may be attributed to people. Sellers believe sales meetings add 70 percent to the sales conversation while buyers believe this to be true in only 50 percent of the encounters.

### A Matter of Trust

Trust is another people factor. People buy from people they know and trust. Here in the U.S., trust is on a downward spiral. The Gallup Poll on trust in government is the lowest since 1993. Currently, only 19 percent of the electorate trust the government just about always or most of the time.

When looking at business, trust is still low, according to Interaction Associates and the Edelman Trust Barometer. If we throw in the Gallup Workplace Engagement findings where 66 percent of employees are not actively engaged, people appear to continue to distrust other people.

With the economy still sputtering along, one would think small to

medium business owners and salespeople would be going above and beyond to develop trust. However, this does not appear to be the case.

New Voice revealed numerous symptoms related to trust, including the fact that 25 percent of customers switch service providers because of being kept on hold while another 42 percent switched because of rude or unhelpful staff. From my own experience of making local, small business sales referrals, over 50 percent of the small businesses I have referred have failed to communicate with the sales referral.

Additionally, many of these supposedly hungry sales professionals do not return promised phone calls or make actual meetings. And when meetings are kept, the sales referral is late without any communication. Is it a wonder people do not trust other people?

This leads to the age-old question, “How do I deal with the people factor, especially if I wish to grow my business or expand influence in my community?”

### When You Find Yourself

Possibly the first step is to look within. How do you believe people perceive you? Maybe have a few discussions with those who are close to you. Ask for their honest feedback and do not be offended by their responses.

Another step might be assessing one’s own emotional intelligence. Effective business owners and sales leaders have this capacity. Speaking with current loyal clients might be another forward step. Ask why they buy from you. You will discover some facts that may surprise you.

Of course, if you have employees, having emotionally-intelligent conversations with them is essential. Then consider reviewing your strategies, people, and processes to ensure alignment. Misalignment, in many instances, only worsens the people factor.

### How Will I Know?

Finally, take heed to Dan Pink’s three questions provided in his book,

*To Sell Is Human*. These questions are relative to your sales pitch, but I believe they travel far deeper into the purpose of your business.

1. What do you want your sales leads, prospects, or ideal potential customers to feel?
2. What do you want them to know?
3. What do you want them to do?

Usually, the focus is on the second question, and there is complete avoidance of the first and third questions.

Until people buy, work, and interact with robots, the people factor will always be present. Possibly, instead of fighting people, learn to work with them and watch your business, your professional, and personal lives flourish. **N**

*Leanne Hoagland-Smith is THE People and Process Problem Solver. As a thought leader who challenges the status quo, she earned the position of judge for the 1st 2015 North American Women in Sales Awards. Follow her on Twitter @CoachLee.*