



Who Is Your Enemy?

By Leanne Hoagland-Smith, M.S.

“We met the enemy, and they are us.” In 1972, cartoon fans read those words in the very popular *Pogo* cartoon strip. Small businesses and even Fortune 100 firms are always keeping watch for their enemies, their competition. Yet given the business research from workforce engagement to employee turnover, maybe they should be accepting the words of Pogo instead of worrying about everyone else.

The year is quickly coming to an end, and probably for the majority of mid-size to small businesses, these actions are happening: sales goals or quotas are being reviewed, profit loss statements are being analyzed, and business

growth forecasts for next year are being computed.

Before all this number crunching, it is time for each of us to look in the mirror and ask this question: Mirror, mirror on the wall, have I truly been the most authentic one of all? Additionally, each of us may wish to answer these other four questions: What I have failed to do this last year to move closer to where I want to be? Where have I failed to be the best I could be? Why didn't I get the results I wanted? How could I have lived a more authentic life?

Each of these questions is about “I” and not the competition. Until we examine ourselves, from our own successes to our shortcomings, we cannot afford to look

beyond the mirror to everyone else. Franklin D. Roosevelt said, “The greatest fear is fear itself.” These words probably haunt many business professionals because acknowledging those words is potentially opening up a Pandora’s Box of fears.

The Fear of Change

“We have always done it that way,” or “If the wheel ain’t broke, why fix it?” or “Change is good, you go first,” are probably three of the best examples of the fear of change.

Today, change is happening at what seems like the speed of light. The world’s information is doubling every two years, and 2020 projections suggest that 50 times more information will exist than today. We are swimming and potentially drowning in change.

To put this in another context, we experience more change in one year than our grandparents experienced in their entire lifetimes. Fearing change is no longer an option for any business leader. What I have observed is that sometimes the fear of failure is the shadow behind this fear of change.

The Fear of Failure

Business failure appears to be epidemic. If what Bloomberg.com suggests is really true, 8 out of 10 entrepreneurs fail in the first 18 months. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there appears to be a business failure rate that ranges from 48.7 percent for mining to 63.6 percent for construction. Per the Small Business Administration, after 10 years, the rate of business failures averages around two-thirds. Regardless of which statistics one believes, there is some rational basis for having this fear of failure.

History has provided us with a plethora of examples of people who failed time after time and finally achieved success. Many have read about Thomas Edison, who failed 1,000 to 10,000 times (depending upon the source) in his efforts to invent the light bulb. Then there was Abraham Lincoln, who failed numerous times in business and failed political runs. Today, Vera Wang built a billion dollar industry after failing to make the U.S.

Olympic figure-skating team, not to mention being passed over for the editor-in-chief position for *Vogue*.

The Fear of Selling

One correlation I have observed with this fear of failure is the fear of selling. Many small business owners and entrepreneurs truly are passionate about the solutions they bring to the table. Some believe those viable, results-producing offerings will somehow magically sell themselves, allowing these industrious and risk-taking leaders to focus more on the delivery of the solutions and other internal business operations. Having the belief that the product or service will sell itself contributes to business failures.

Unfortunately, one of the greatest fears is selling. After 17 years of working with small business owners, sales professionals, and even some

senior leadership executives, the fear of selling still immobilizes far too many. This fear of selling exists because of several reasons.

From our youngest childhood memories, we were told not to talk to strangers as well as to not go where we were not invited. We have taken this negative conditioning into our adult roles. Selling, or sales, is all about talking to strangers (prospects) and going where we were not invited (cold calling).

Next, there is the ever-present memory of the “used car salesman” persona. Those slick, fast-talking sales professionals, akin to horse traders of yesteryear, are viewed suspiciously.

An honesty and ethical poll conducted by Gallup in 2012 ranked ethical and honest car sales people at 8 percent (high or very high) closely followed by Congress at 10 percent. Those rankings suggest 90 percent of



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car sales people and Congressional politicians are unethical or not to be trusted. These statistics reaffirm a pretty sad state of affairs.

Also, there is a lack of clarity specific to the solutions small business salespeople and entrepreneurs bring to the marketplace. How many times have we attended a business networking event and met a small business professional who could not clearly articulate what he or she does beyond “I’m a banker, a realtor, a business coach, etc.”?

Finally, some of the fear for selling rests on the shoulders of sales trainers, coaches, and experts who overwhelm small business professionals with the latest and greatest sales techniques. What is forgotten are the simple words of Zig Ziglar: “Sales is the transference of feelings.”

The Fear of Not Being Liked

Years ago my father, a very wise and experienced salesperson, shared with me that people buy from people they know and trust. He said being liked was just gravy on the meat (knowledge) and potatoes (trust), but being liked was not the top buying criteria.

In business and in life, no one is liked by everyone. This is reality. Human beings are unique with different experiences and beliefs. Yet, there are many sales experts who include “being liked” into the buying criteria. This desire to be liked may have the small business person or sales professional engaging in questionable behaviors.

Suddenly, business people take orders or engagements even though they know their solutions might not be the best fit. Who wants to tell a

potential customer, “I can’t help you,” especially with sales quotas always looming in the background?

In my own executive coaching and talent management practice, I have learned to turn down business because of a poor fit or a client who expects me to “change” his or her behaviors. I have accepted that turning down business may have these individuals not liking me, and that is okay.

Also, selling has returned full circle to the olden times of the merchant economy—think local small business. Small businesses with fewer than 20 employees make up over 93 percent of the U.S. economy. Local economies are exploding with people buying from people they know and trust. Yes, some specific sales skills are required. In many instances, if people buy you because they know and trust you, selling becomes almost effortless.

The Fear of Reflection

This fear is usually not articulated. Unless someone takes the time to reflect, to think about today first, tomorrow second, and yesterday third, the same lost opportunities will continue. Strategic planning, goal setting, and even professional development all evolve from reflection.

When you began reading this article, I raised five reflection-based questions that need to be asked each and every day. Some might say they do not have time, but not having time is a non-issue because everyone I have surveyed over the last 17 years admits to wasting 12 minutes a day, which is plenty enough time to reflect upon those questions.

Yes, it takes courage and vulnerability to admit that “we met the enemy and they are us.” If you want 2015 to be better than 2014—and who doesn’t—maybe now is the time to grab the Queen’s mirror and face your own fears. **N**

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