

Winning Business “Belly to Belly”

By Leanne Hoagland-Smith, M.S.

With technology making further inroads into American business and connecting U.S. businesses to the global marketplace, the tendency to rely on technology from emails to Web sites to develop business may be creating some false senses of security. Yes, online purchasing is increasing, but research still suggests that business building is still about people connecting with people even if it is only through the telephone.

Have you ever heard about all the big business deals “made” via email? I doubt it. However, listen to any executive at a local chamber meeting or other networking event and you may hear about all the business conducted on the golf course.



As technology has increased its foothold in the business world, new terms have emerged and old terms have re-emerged. “Face to face” surfaced in the late 1900’s to replace the earlier term of “belly to belly.” Yet, technology is just a tool to expedite specific steps as business owners and executives build their businesses. For business yesterday, today and tomorrow will still be all about people connecting with people, “face to face” and “belly to belly.”

So if business is truly about people meeting and connecting with people “belly to belly,” then how can you leverage this knowledge to grow and increase your bottom line? Possibly, these seven strategies may help you win more business. Additionally, some of these strategies may assist you to work smarter not harder by leveraging your limited resources of energy, time and dollars.

First, recognize that technology is both a strategy and a tool as you build your business. Technology will never replace “belly to belly” interactions. If this was true, then why are there still brick and mortar stores? Years ago some believed that mail order catalogs would be the death of the retail stores. Other doomsayers advocated that the emergence of prepackaged foods especially frozen foods would negatively impact restaurants. In the late 20th century, technology created VHS tapes that were later replaced by DVD’s specifically for renting or owning movies that had only been shown at movie theaters. Again, the belief was that these videos would destroy movie theaters.

Even in the early years of the 21st high tech society, we still have thousands of stores to visit and spend our dollars. New eatery franchises continue to spring up throughout each year. New movie theaters are being built offering six to 15 screens and in some cases including an I-Max theater to showcase new movie releases.

Second, return to your strategic plan and revisit your values statement. Both employees and customers easily identify the absence of united values within a business. Enron and Arthur Anderson are just two examples of corporations whose corruption began because of a lack of demonstrated core values by senior management.

Third, align your business from the top down throughout your company. When businesses fail to align their actions, miss steps are made. Symptoms of this misalignment surface when the employees meet the customers “belly to belly.” For example, your business goal is for outstanding one on one customer service. However, your policy to service as many customers as possible mandates not to spend

more than two minutes with each client. This is a simple example of misalignment between the goals and the actions necessary to achieve those goals.

Fourth, assess the ability of your people to effectively communicate corporate values to your customers both internal and external through their behaviors. With all the media attention to corruption in business to government, having employees who truly are highly ethical in their actions when “belly to belly” with your customers will definitely grow your business.

Fifth, develop your people to be both consistent efficient and effective communicators. Your people should do “things right” by being efficient and “do the right thing” by being effective. Again, a highly communicated values statement helps to reinforce consistency of everyone's behaviors.

In the 1960's a researcher by the name of Dr. Albert Mehrabian developed a model of communication. This model looks at the effectiveness of the spoken word and suggests that:

- **55 percent** of communication's meaning is non-verbal through physical actions from facial expressions to body posture
- **38 percent** of communication's meaning is para-verbal through syntax or the way that the words are said and
- **7 percent** of communication's meaning is verbal

What Dr. Mehrabian realized is that communication goes beyond the spoken word. Since business is all about people connecting with other people, understanding how to maximize this experience is critical to take any business to the next level.

Sixth, listen to your customers when you have the opportunity to be “belly to belly” with them. Centuries ago, the Greek philosopher Epictetus said: “We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak.” Focus on truly being present and listening to your customers when you have the opportunity because you may never have another one.

Seventh and most importantly be authentic when connecting with people. All individuals carry an “intuitive sense” within them. This gut brain as identified Dr. Robert Cooper in his book *Get Out of Your Own Way* is the processing center for when we sense that something isn't right.

For example, have you ever met someone and sensed that something wasn't quite right? Your thoughts told you that you really didn't want to do business with that person. When you are authentic, people sense your values and begin to trust you as your interactions increase. As the old adage goes, “First, people buy you, then and only then do they buy your products or services.”

Without a doubt, technology can bring more people to the front door of your business. Yet, to win more business demands that you maximize every “belly to belly” moment. By truly interacting with people, seeing and listening to their body language, allows us to truly share and expand our business potential and more importantly our own potential. **N**

With over 25 years experience in both private and public sectors, Leanne Hoagland-Smith writes, coaches and speaks on sustainable performance improvement. She helps organizations to multiply results by creating executable strategic plans along with the people to business skills necessary to “pull it off.” Visit www.processspecialist.com or email leanne@processspecialist.com.

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