

What Business Are You In, Anyway? PART 1

How do you describe what you do for a living? For anyone involved in sales, the answer is usually something like this: "I'm a broker, or agent, or General Agent or Manager." This is an accurate but incomplete answer. It's incomplete because it only describes one of the three important parts of a sales position. I'd suggest that what we do really involves 3 important elements:

- Marketing
- Sales
- Administration

In this article, the first of a 3-part series, I'm going to share what I've learned from talking to, and working with hundreds of agents. Today's subject is perhaps the least glamorous of the three: Administration.

The Biggest Problem

Outside of prospecting, the most vexing issue sales people face is the issue of personnel or staffing. For over 30 years I've heard (and sometimes uttered myself) the following complaints or frustrations about employees:

- People today just don't have a good work ethic.
- It's impossible to find good help.
- All people want is more money.
- There's no loyalty anymore.
- You've got to be really lucky to find a good employee.

My responses:

- On the assumption that human nature has not changed in the last several hundred years, then the percentage of good people in the workforce is about the same as it's always been.
- Therefore, good help is no easier or harder to find than it's ever been.
- Studies have consistently shown that money is usually just a negative motivator. In other words, the absence of a reasonable wage is a deterrent to employees' satisfaction. The presence of a higher than average wage (for the job in question) usually does not enhance the job performance. In his book, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins says specifically that money is almost never a motivating factor in excellent employee performance.
- Loyalty is a two-way street. When employees are treated well and with respect, they stay. For example, my secretary has been with me for 24 years.

- Luck, as it's been said, is the residue of design. Finding and retaining good employees definitely is the result of anything but luck.

The complaints we hear about employees reveal something else altogether: frustration about the inability to deal effectively with finding good employees. The reason that the complaints listed above are off the mark is that they do not describe the root cause of the problem and therefore offer no solution to the problem.

Teaching Point: Don't confuse symptoms with an accurate description of the problem. If the symptoms don't lead to a solution, then you haven't described the real problem.

Okay, so what is the problem?

The first issue is that there is often no well-defined and carefully thought out job description. Ask yourself this question: *Can you define and describe the ideal employee for the job that needs filling?* If you can't define who you're looking for, how would you know if you've found the right person?

Next, *do you settle for someone you hope will work out?* (I bet somewhere inside you know the person won't make the grade.) The Gallup Organization research has conclusively shown that people don't change. (When was the last time a poor prospect turned into a great prospect?) The moral: keep looking.

Third, *there is uneven or non-existent communication between staff and employer.* If you don't consistently meet and require performance excellence, what message are you sending? Having good employees means that they have clear guidelines for excellent job performance. Poorly trained employees are usually a reflection of poorly trained employers.

Fourth, *there is reliance upon annual reviews.* Annual reviews usually don't work because:

- Feedback is delayed for too long. If corrective action is needed – do it now. Waiting for a quarterly review (or longer) is completely ineffective.
- Reviews often focus on “areas of improvement” or “opportunities for growth.” This is a polite way of saying that the employee needs to improve on weaknesses. Forget it – this is a waste of time. Instead, find the strengths of the person involved, and leverage those strengths. You'll both be happier.

Finally, *relying on really close supervision.* Great employees don't need really close supervision to produce great job performance. If you feel you have to do this, then you probably have the person in the wrong job, or the wrong person for the job.

continued

Evaluate Your Own Performance:

	1	3	5	7	10
SCORE:	NEVER	SOMETIMES		USUALLY	ALWAYS
_____	1. I have an "ideal employee" job description.				
_____	2. I have settled for a less than ideal employee.				
_____	3. I have kept a less than ideal employee.				
_____	4. I deal with issues when they arise.				
_____	5. I use annual reviews to motivate job performance.				
_____	6. I expect employees to improve on their weaknesses.				
_____	7. I believe employees only do good work when closely supervised.				

It takes courage to stop complaining and to start working more realistically and courageously. This means that you must have an overall plan when dealing with hiring and training employees. If we fail to change our behavior, then here is what happens:

*"If we always do what we've always done
we'll always get what we've always gotten."*

This article is Part 1 of a 3-part series.

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