

Have you ever thought about...

... things to tweet besides your brand?

GOT NOTHING TO SAY ? Think again; engaging your followers takes many forms.

I was recently asked for ideas on how brands can participate in social media without new product announcements or company news to tout.

It's a good question that keeps some brands away from social media. But it shouldn't. Social media is more than a way to distribute news releases.

Here are three ideas to jump-start your tweets.

Loosely related content. Tweet about the big picture/end benefit of your brand or product. Is it: Relief? Joy? Knowledge? Confidence? Health? Bringing people together? Once you've identified your end benefit, share anything that delivers that to your audience, even if it's momentarily.

For example, SunTrust Bank provides tools and tips to make solid, confident financial decisions. The company is starting Facebook and Twitter discussions around everyday ways to Live Solid. If I worked with a baby products brand, I'd spend a little time every day scouring YouTube and other places to find short baby videos and stories that remind parents why they love being parents.

Industry news. Don't just share your news. Share news that is related to your industry and that your customers might find interesting. It's a way to keep them informed without making it all about your company.

For example, if you're in a regulated industry, share updates on proposed, pending and new regulations. If something is proposed that would have a negative impact on the ability of you and your competitors to run profitable businesses, share your concerns with your social media connections. If appropriate, try to inspire and mobilize them to share their thoughts with regulators.

Your personal side. People want to do business with people. Actually, they want to do business with people they like. Empower your social media community managers to be human and share tidbits about their daily lives. Ask questions and implement the answers from people who take the time to respond. This helps humanise your brand and create personal connections with current and potential customers. ■

SOURCENOTE: by DAVID MULLEN, an account supervisor at Mullen, where he focuses on developing and executing integrated marketing communications for clients.

BUSINESS

ALERT!

Hands-on help that works Vol 11 No 2

Managing

The cowardly manager's guide to dealing with poor performers

Dealing with a poor performer has to be one of the hardest responsibilities of a leader.

GREAT LEADERS CONFRONT performance issues head on. They provide feedback, coaching, counselling and, if all else fails, real leaders fire underperformers. It's all part of earning your scars as a leader.

Cowardly managers come up with all kinds of creative ways to avoid dealing with performance issues. Here is a summary of many of the actual methods I've encountered:

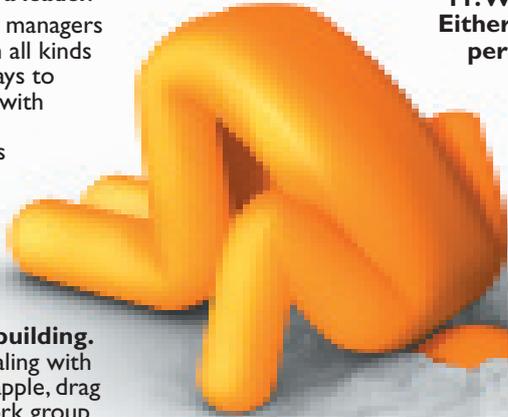
- 1. Teambuilding.** Instead of dealing with the one bad apple, drag the entire work group through "teambuilding" sessions with the hope that the poor performer will be "outed" and fixed.
- 2. Assessments.** Instead of simply confronting the employee, have the employee take a battery of assessments in the hope that they will figure it out for themselves.
- 3. Call HR.** Hire an HR person to take care of all employee disciplinary problems so managers don't have to bother.
- 4. Transfer the poor performer.** Pass the poor performer off to some other sucker.
- 5. Training.** Ask the training department to fix the poor performer.
- 6. Hire someone else to do their job.** I'm not making this up – It happens all the time. But wait, there's even a more ludicrous option, you can...
- 7. Promote them.** Really. It happens. Shocker.
- 8. Delegate it to another employee.** Ask someone else on your team to "mentor" the problem performer. It would be a good "development opportunity", thus killing two birds with one stone.
- 9. Delegate up.** Have the boss deal with it.

10. Work around the performance issues. Otherwise known as "playing to their strengths". In other words, strip all the hard parts of the job away until the poor performer can handle it.

11. Wait for retirement. Either yours or the poor performers.

And when all else fails, just stick your head in the sand and hope it all goes away. It won't, but while you're waiting, the morale and performance of your entire team will be dragged down like an anchor.

When that happens, give a copy of this guide to your own manager — and hope you have a coward for a manager and not a real leader. ■



One-minute tip

You have heard the saying that, "You can have anything you want in life, if you will help enough other people get what they want in life." I think this quote is incomplete. The complete version of the quote should go like this: you can have anything you want in life, IF you will help enough other people get what they want in life, IF you will get very good at it, and IF you sustain it for the long haul. All three "if's" are essential! Leave one of them out and you're missing an essential ingredient in the formula for success.

SMALL BUSINESSES NEED to offer better means of online communication to meet growing customer demand, according to new research on customer service

The most irritating trait a company can display is failing to have its contact details on its website, according to new research.

The study by I&I Internet found that 77% of people listed this as their biggest customer service bugbear, followed by being held in a telephone queue (also 77%), speaking to staff with heavy accents (56%), poor on-hold music (42%) and inflexible office hours (40%).

The poll also found 90% of consumers wanted the ability to interact with companies through live-chat, forums or call-me-back facilities, with one in three requiring it from a business they currently use.

But the vast majority of small companies (92%) do not offer such facilities and 42% had no plans to introduce them, the survey found. One in three businesses (35%) even said they felt there was no need to provide further online communication options.

"Our research clearly shows that struggling to contact a business from its website is a major cause of concern for consumers," said Andreas Gauger, chief executive of I&I Internet.

"There is also a clear discrepancy between how consumers and businesses value internet-based customer service," he added.

"Consumers now place a high value on the ability to talk to businesses in real-time online and businesses of all sizes need to respond to this trend or risk losing sales."

Despite the fact that 42% of customers would choose real-time online dialogue as their preferred contact method, 44% of companies believed there was no link between online customer support and sales revenue and almost half (47%) felt providing such facilities would not increase customer retention. ■



Ian McFarlane-Toms

The way I see it...

How to be human

A SAMPLING OF PRODUCTS from my kitchen shelf: *USE BY 28 MAY; Best before end OCT 2009; Do not use after the best before end date (EXP) on base; Best Before 31-12-2009; Best before end: see lid; Use by 04 JUN Q.*

But "Enjoy By 26 MAY"!

What a difference two "teeny" words make! The main body of Tom Peters' 1992 article is about an insanely bad customer experience he had with US phone firm GTE, now part of Verizon. His argument: (1) mostly we dehumanise, demean and demoralise our

customers; and (2) this sorry mess makes the teeniest good deed stand out in bold relief.

18 years on, it's an even sorer mess.

Inarguably, customer experience is more dehumanised now than in 1992. But, of course, that means that the smallest show of humanness carries even more kudos. This can mean anything from printing poems on your receipts to replacing canned photos of paid models with real photos of paying customers. It boils down to this: if you humanise your customer's experience, you stand out an extra mile. ■

SOURCENOTE: Matt Weston, BusinessBricks

Honesty

When pressures mount, ethics can falter

by Tom Armstrong

HERE'S SOMETHING that's not surprising: job insecurity and financial stress put pressure on employees' ethics.

What is surprising, and unnerving, is the high percentage of employees who say they would do something they know is dishonest to keep their jobs.

According to Bernadette Kenny, chief career officer of recruiter Adecco Group North America, 28 percent of the workers responding to an Adecco survey said that "they would do something dishonest" to remain employed.

If that stat is anywhere near true, managers have a lot of watching out to do. Here are some typical dishonest acts to be aware of:

- **Taking undeserved credit.** To prevent rivals from succeeding, employees may not mention, or may minimise, their contributions. For example, suppose you assign two employees to work together on a task. Later you ask one of them how it went. The employee says, "Oh, pretty well. I called up 10 people, gathered the information and organised it for review. Then Jenny took a quick look at it and I finished it up." If you're not listening closely, you may miss the fact that Jenny did so little, even though she usually pulls her weight.

Listen for these little anomalies and don't let them slide. Ask this employee specifically what Jenny did and then ask Jenny herself.

- **Blaming others.** Here the worker minimises his or her part in an error or lack of progress and charges a co-worker. Again, the best response to anything that sounds one-sided is to follow up with questions about who did what and address them to all parties involved.

- **Withholding or falsifying information.** To sabotage competitors, an employee may supply inaccurate or incomplete information. If results look wrong to you and the worker who received the information says that he or she followed the usual procedures,

look at the original information.

If it's faulty, start your investigation with the employee who provided it.

- **Delaying action.** Workers can also sabotage one another by deliberately slowing down the flow of work. A common trick is to go strictly by the book, demanding nuisance changes and superfluous approvals. If workers complain that this is being done to them, don't automatically reply that "rules are rules."

Look into who's abusing those rules and why.

Overall, then, two tactics can help when you suspect that workers are undercutting each other. First, stay involved in your group's day-to-day work, not to micromanage but to monitor consistently. Second, as Bernadette Kenny says, "Be very clear regarding honesty and integrity at work."

When workers know that cheating will be detected, it becomes too risky and the pressure to do it lessens. ■

SOURCENOTE: Ragan eNewsletters

One-minute tip

People say they can't have a perfect eco-system because they can't afford it or don't have time, or their family or friends won't allow it. Nonsense! Creating a great life is not hard — living with frustration is "hard!" Creating a perfect life may involve some investment or learning new habits, but living well is not nearly as hard as living with problems!

DESPITE A PERCEIVED trend towards dressing down, the majority of office workers still believe dressing smartly helps win promotions, according to a survey from recruiter Reed Employment.

Some 51 per cent see a slick appearance as key to climbing the corporate ladder, while 87 per cent would always wear a suit to an interview.

These beliefs are reflected in the clothes worn to work every day. Only 13 per cent of workers dress down, while 47 per cent follow a 'smart casual' code and 40 per cent wear a suit.

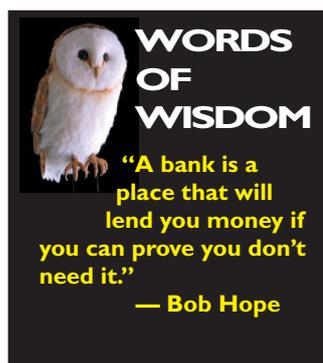
Despite these formal leanings, wearing a tie is no longer the norm in most offices. Three-in-five men state that they never wear ties, while only one-in-five wears one every day.

However, comedy ties, along with jeans, short skirts, flip-flops, trainers and sportswear are deemed unacceptable by the majority of businesses.

The survey also canvassed attitudes to work wear. It appears that most workers are a conformist lot, with nine-in-ten respondents strictly adhering to their dress code every day, and only one per cent feeling uncomfortable doing so.

Lewis Woodward, head of network marketing at Reed, comments: 'The old adage "dress for success" clearly rings true, with the majority of office workers happily embracing their company's dress code and feeling proud to represent their brand.'

Reed surveyed 3,200 white-collar workers registered on its database. ■



Checklist for telesales success

Eight routes to better telesales

When selling, it is your job to make the customer aware of her needs and to reinforce her desire to make the decision to purchase from you!

SELLING IS A PROCEDURE and, therefore, it's a discipline that any small business owner can master.

Learn and practise the following steps and they will help you on the way to being a better salesperson;

Preparation: unsuccessful selling is generally the result of too little thinking and planning.

- Always prepare — including mental/emotional preparation;
- List points and questions that need to be asked to identify:
 - Right people — decision-makers/influencers/buying process;
 - Business problem/opportunity;
 - The decision-making process;
 - Opposition/competition.

Attention: always check before you start the selling process that you are presenting to the right person i.e. one who can make the decision to buy, or influence the decision in some way.

Interest: Establish needs by asking open and probing questions — how, what, why, where, when, who.

Desire: Heighten the prospect's reason to buy based on the need, give benefits and gain agreement on each.

Action: Firm close on a next action; or order, price and delivery.

Handling resistance: Objections do not always mean 'No'. An objection is an opportunity to sell.

Is it an objection or an excuse? If an objection arises:

• question it, e.g. "I'm sure you have a very good reason for saying that. Do you mind if I ask you what it is?";

- confirm it is the only objection;
- if it is true — he will restate and clarify it;
- he may even answer it himself;
- when you have the true objection, commit to the way forward;
 - "so, if I can answer your concern about... you will be happy to buy?" *Wait for the commitment;*
 - answer the objection.

When handling objections make it less personal e.g.: "Other customers have found it useful because...".

Closing: If you do not ask for a 'next action' it has all been a waste of time.

Easiest closing techniques:

- direct — just ask!
- "you appear to like our product; how many would you like to order?"
- assumptive — assume she will purchase. "May I go ahead and send you one today?"
- Alternative — a choice of doing this or that, but not if! "When would you like it delivered, Thursday or Friday?";

Thank the customer for the order.

Finally: Be positive and enthusiastic

Be patient — You may have many conversations to achieve a 'yes'. ■

SOURCENOTE: Brenda Spiller, the author of, PERFECTING THE ART OF TELESALES SPICED WITH MAGIC OF NEURO-LINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING — A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO THE ART OF OBJECTION HANDLING.

Improvement

Bad news by email, good news by mail

JOHANN RUPERT, head of the Richmond luxury group, owners of Alfred Dunhill, Cartier and other successful brands, tells people to send him bad news by email (i.e. immediately) and good news by mail (i.e. take your time).

Rupert doesn't want to hear every positive bulletin, says author Mark McCormack. He isn't concerned how quickly he learns that things are going according to plan (or even better).

But he knows bad news requires a swift reaction.

Even with this request Rupert sees people eager only to convey good news to him. With bad news, they hesitate. And every hour of hesitation can be costly.

He promotes his "bad news by email and good news by mail" policy to encourage frank feedback.

It's also important to note that the way the boss reacts to bad news influences how readily it's confided.

Shouting and blaming are self-defeating.

"The bigger the disaster, the calmer I have to be," is the rule of thumb used by McCormack in his role as chair of International Management Group, the world's leading sports marketing and athlete management organisation.

He doesn't want his employees to see him worried. He finds they take their cue from him. If he seems depressed, they will become even more depressed and depressed employees rarely perform at their best.

A calm, good-humoured approach helps maintain perspective.

McCormack is in business to take risks. When a project fails, lives are not lost. He's not curing cancer. So he helps people put disasters behind them and move on. ■

SOURCENOTE: Mark McCormack, MARK MCCORMACK ON MANAGING,

The Institute for Independent Business

FOUNDED IN 1984 in the UK, the Institute for Independent Business (IIB) is now one of the world's largest international networks of business advice providers.

As of 1 May 2010, over 5,000 carefully-selected men and women have been accredited worldwide as IIB Associates.

Experienced professionals

Experienced senior business people in their own right, who have elected to become self-employed business advisers, Associates and Fellows of the IIB have received additional training to enable them to focus accurately and cost-effectively on the needs of clients and prospects.

This ensures that Associates' clients receive the "practical advice that works"—the Institute's motto in every country in which the Institute operates. ■

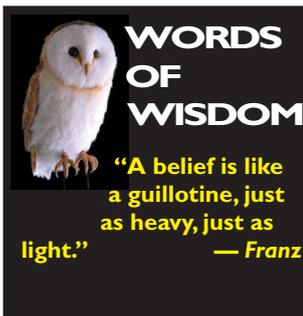
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Managing

The 'proper' way to run your business

You will almost certainly have heard the expression, or seen it first-hand, that "all's fair in love and war" and, for a lot of people, that applies to running their business as well.

YOU MIGHT EVEN have come across some of those ruthless entrepreneurs who are amongst the meanest, most devious so-and-sos you're ever likely to meet. Nothing will stand in their way as they seek to build a business at whoever's expense — whether it's their competitors, critics, customers or sometimes even their friends and family.

Single-minded, determined and focused on getting what they want is how they are often described, and how they will usually describe themselves. *These are admirable virtues.*

But cut-throat, cold-hearted, tactless, disrespectful and insensitive are often more accurate ways to describe them.

Now it's certainly true that many people do very well in business by behaving in this way, or because that is what they're really like in person. However the reality is that successful entrepreneurs who take this approach are few and far between.

Why? Because, in most circumstances, building a successful business means running a business that other people like and enjoy doing business with. In other words, they like you, and they trust you and the people that you employ.

The problem with the heartless, hard-nosed, cut-throat approach to entrepreneurship is that the people you try to do business with can end up regarding **YOU** as devious, shady, unscrupulous and possibly even unlawful. You wipe out a whole host of prospects who will never deal with your firm simply because they don't like you and the way you run it.

Look at who you currently like doing business with and buying from the most. The corner shop, the computer repair service, the local car dealer, the plumber, the insurance broker. Why do you keep on dealing with or shop with the people that you do?

Because you feel more comfortable with — and prefer to spend your money with — people that you trust and like.

People that you feel are above board, moral, principled, trustworthy, friendly, sympathetic and considerate are more likely to see the contents of your wallet than people that you feel are not.

So when it comes to trying to persuade prospects to buy from you, or your customers to buy again and recommend you to someone else, your level of tact, good manners, respect or empathy with these buyers will need to shine through. ■

Impressing the angels

HERE ARE SOME TIPS on what business owners should do to impress potential investors.

Valuing your idea. Don't assume a business angel will be as interested in your idea as you are. Small business owners are notorious for catching 'cabin fever' and valuing their business idea at ridiculous multiples of its real value on the outside world.

Identify your skills. Successful entrepreneurs know their strengths... but they also recognise their weaknesses. When pitching for investment, be clear on what skills your bring to your table, what the strengths of your team members are, and what outside expertise you are seeking to make your plans succeed.

Make a good impression. Not all investors will be as taken with the "new media" look so many would-be entrepreneurs go for. A clean, simple, professional look is always worth adopting when meeting business angels. When you're a successful entrepreneur, you can wear as much designer stubble as you like and never need to wear a tie again!

Presentation. Make sure you commit any background information, plans and forecasts to paper. Have a copywriter go through your plans if necessary and don't be frugal when spending money on presentation.

Exciting the angels. The vast majority of angel investors are not looking for a 'safe investment', they are looking for a business idea which will be exciting to get involved in as well as successful. ■

Have your say!



Add your voice to those of other business people on important business issues. Each issue of Business Alert will feature a statement on which you can voice an opinion. Simply select the view that reflects your opinion and email it to me. Your opinion will be submitted to the Institute for Independent Business for inclusion in its continuing business research.

The Statement:

"The biggest problem I face is lack of bank funding"

Please email me with the letter (A-E) expressing your opinion from the following choices:

- A. Strongly agree
- B. Agree
- C. Unsure
- D. Disagree
- E. Strongly disagree

MY EMAIL ADDRESS IS

For more information, please call Ian McFarlane-Toms on +44 (0)844 778 8888