

When times get a little tough in selling, we often hear of some people (myself included) stating that they “refuse to participate in a recession.” As a matter of fact, this has been said so often that it is becoming a bit cliché.

However, we do need to REFUSE some of the things that hold us back during tougher economic times. We do need to REFUSE to suffer mediocrity from ourselves or our people. We do need to REFUSE to drop our prices but instead *raise the bar* on our value. We need to REFUSE to let our customers get a better experience buying from a competitor. We need to REFUSE to lose! It is in this vein that I thought I would lay it out, as I often do, in an acronym that I designed for a recent keynote address in Phoenix:

REFUSE to Lose!

R—Re-Engage!

When times get tough, it is often easier for salespeople and sales leaders to pull-back from relationships and instead focus on the tasks at hand. As salespeople, they chase more leads, send more proposals, push harder and run faster. The result is a lack of connection with their existing clientele. As leaders, they focus more on the sales numbers and pricing than they do on the process and the people involved. As a result, they lose connection with their salespeople.

In tougher economic times, we need to **re-engage!** Often times we like to say that we have to “Dance with the one that brung ya!” In every sales organization, the true value of the organization lies in the relationships that exist between the leaders and the sales reps and between the reps and the customers. Turn your focus back to the people and the processes necessary to further those relationships—especially when economic times are more challenging. Remember, you get out of the relationship what you put into it!

E---Excitement!

Listen to the conversations going on around you today. How many are about business being down? How many center on the current economic state of affairs? How many people focus on the stock market’s roller coaster ride? How many are negative?

In tough economic times, the *culture* that exists in your organization and the attitude of your sales team is of utmost importance. Is your sales team crating a culture that is exciting and supportive or overbearing and taxing? Do I *get* to go to work or have to *go* to work? There needs to be a solution based—EXCITING—element to your team. The conversations and meetings need to be about WHAT TO DO today to change things instead of WHAT HAPPENED yesterday to cause problems.

So today-right now-come up with no less than 10 ways to inject some EXCITEMENT back into your sales team environment. Design and run a series of exciting, fun, growth-oriented sales meetings and leave the numbers OUT of the meeting. Invite some outside resources such as customers, partners, or vendors to work with or address your team and make the purpose of the meeting to re-connect, re-engage, and have fun! Have a red-shirt Wednesday with prizes for the best red shirt! Design a new contest to drive action and

activity. Spend more time creating excitement and less time wallowing in misery and uncertainty. Your customers will “smell the excitement” on you!

F---FOCUS

Too often during tougher selling environments, we have a tendency to lose our focus. We confuse activity with productivity and busy-ness with business! Below is a list of five areas in which you need to remain FOCUSED to continue to grow regardless of what the marketplace throws at you:

1. Your Goals—What are you aiming for and why are you “in the game.” When you are focused on *WHY* you “enter the battle” every day, you will find that you can put up with almost any of the *WHAT* you have to do.
2. The Customer—Make sure that your customer and their needs are not lost in your need to continue to drive revenues. Reconnect with your customers and their needs of *today!* Their needs today may be different than their needs of yesterday.
3. Pre-Call Preparation—Make a conscious effort to spend more dedicated time, prior to every sales call, in preparation for the call. Understand the purpose of the call and what needs to be uncovered, discovered, or communicated.
4. Contact---Make sure that, in your effort to keep driving revenue, you don't lose contact with your customers and clients. Remember that selling is a contact sport and continue to develop and roll-out new ways to add value and stay in the top of their consciousness. If you're not visible, you are in-visible!
5. Training-Growth---If you're not training, you're not gaining. Stay focused on sharpening the axe and continually developing ways to add to your personal and professional growth. Read, listen to audio programs, and attend workshops. Turn off the TV and turn on the brain!

U---Understand

There are several things that you need to better understand in a down economy. The fact that you do so will increase your ability and potential to stand out, add value, and become a *partner* in the mind of your customers. Here are a few:

- Understand your customer's needs of today. They don't need to buy from you! What they do need, however, is to use your product or service to help them accomplish something. What is *that* today and is it possible that the reason they need to buy today is not as pressing as it was in the past?
- Understand your value. What is it that you add to your customer's business today and do *they* know it. If all you bring to their business is your product, don't be mad if all they want to do is talk about your price!
- Understand what's coming. The current challenges of our real estate and financial markets are the result of things that have occurred for many years. The new reality will be tough to deal with and will require an adjustment in thinking and thus, behavior. The same is true of your sales efforts. The fruit is no longer hanging low in the tree so you need to understand (or learn) how to climb!

S---Service (Plus ONE)

Meeting the customer's needs today is, quite frankly, the bare minimum to simply be invited to the game. Too many companies throw around the word “service” so much that

we have become numb to it. In fact, when companies are forced to “tighten their belts a bit,” it is often the little extras that get pushed to the backburner *exactly* when we need to be offering them.

We need to focus strongly now on every touch point that our customer’s experience when doing (or trying to do) business with our companies. We need to offer a *Nordstroms level* of experience that gets our customers saying WOW! We need to *earn the right* to expect them to come back and continue to show us their loyalty. To get that, we cannot be a little better than our competition, we have to be head and shoulders above the competition!

Today, not tomorrow, make an inventory of every customer touch point in your organization. At every one of these points, does the customer feel important? Do they feel loved and appreciated? Do they feel like they matter? Sharpen up EVERY customer experience by paying attention to every customer interaction. Focus on PEOPLE, PROCESS, and POLICY!

E---Earn It!

Remember, unless you actually work for the US Mint, you do not MAKE money! You have to EARN profits, EARN margins, and EARN commissions. The work that you put in yesterday may not be enough to get you where it is that you want to go today. It may take a little more effort but it may not require working (selling) harder, but rather working (selling) *smarter!*

I often challenge you to look in the mirror and be truthful with yourself. Today, more than in the past several years, this is absolutely imperative. As our customers and clients face challenges today that are causing them problems, do you truly ADD VALUE to their lives or do you simply TAKE from their lives? (Take their time, take their orders, take their money.....)

I’ll pose a question that you may wish to consider: “If you had to sell for 20% more tomorrow, what would you do differently to *earn it?*”

You see, I do believe that we need to REFUSE to LOSE as we head into this new year. We need to refocus our attention on offering more and better things in the marketplace if we are to continue to survive and grow. Hopefully when things start to get tough for you and your team, you can turn to the above list and together decide to:

Refuse to Lose!