

# The CEO Refresher

... brain food for business!

## Romancing the Clone

by Don McNamara

As everyone knows when you first get going in any new job, much less a career, you are for better or worse, subject to the influence of your immediate supervisor. Yet, without one who pays attention in guiding your activities properly, you can develop undesirable traits, which if left unchecked turn into career limiting habits. Years ago upon starting my professional sales career I was extremely fortunate to have as my first sales manager a superb teacher, mentor and coach. We'll spend some time discussing what made Bill (a pseudonym for the real person), so effective at what he did.

At the outset, let's be clear about it; Bill was there to make sales, no ifs ands or buts. While being a persuasive and diplomatic leader he also knew how to pull his sales team forward - individual-by-individual. On the surface, you could say so what's the big deal about that. However, underlying his enormous charismatic presence and management qualities, he also recognized that the future of his success was in many ways outside his control. It was in the hands of his sales force. If he had any control at all it was to ensure his sales team was well trained on their P's - products, processes, procedures, practices, policies, and prices. Then he saw it his responsibility to improve the sales staff skill set by setting an example in words and actions that they could emulate. He took great personal resolve in showing them how to do it. Then he ensured his sales force followed in skill building for themselves while monitoring each as they became more experienced in their role.

### The Big Differentiator

What is not so obvious is that the product line was changing every month with many products being obsoleted with more powerful and value effective products coming into the line simultaneously. The intangible dimension he added was how to sell consultatively, which transcended product features even as the products changed. He knew consultative selling would never go out of favor and he never lost sight of the significance of presenting himself and his sales team as consultative sales people.

Bill taught us whatever the product, system, service or solution, the sales person who understood the prospect (or potential customer) best was the one who actually was in the best position to influence the sales process. And how could the salesperson understand the prospects best? Simply stated, we learned to ask lots of intelligent leading questions.

### How It Works

When the information was fed back to the client, requesting correction or clarification, positive vibrations came out of the client. Listening, hearing and

feeding back data provided was just a few of the methods used to ensure client meaning was transferred by the customer and interpreted correctly by us.

So how does this relate to Bill? You see he had the incredible ability to focus with intensity on what the customer was telling him. He became totally involved in the business dialogue that before meeting end, he could outline a plan to get the prospect from where they were at present to where they wanted to be in the future. He could describe what actions would take place, when they would occur and why each activity made sense for the prospect to engage in and be committed to it. In other words, he sold the benefits of problem solving in a step function fashion that resulted in conclusive and consistent action be taken as he and the customer progressed to a logical conclusion.

Because Bill demonstrated how to take the clients interest first and build a scenario around the solution to the situation, he was able to get inside information about what it would take to make his proposal stand out from his competitors. He took the WIIFY - What's In It ForYou approach. Clients loved it - they didn't see him trying to sell anything. They saw him moving from the vendor side of the desk to the customer side - he was a partner in problem resolution. He achieved what he wanted, namely a purchase decision because he did the just the opposite than the competition, who more often than not took the WIIFM -What's In It For Me approach. Frankly, his relationships with customers grew stronger, confidence in him deepened and the customer trusted his motives because the goals of the prospect became his as well.

### **Is This New?**

Bill never needed to ask for customer commitment; the customer knew when it was time to move the discussion to concluding the business transaction with a commitment to him, namely an order. The prospect knew this because the plan to get them where they wanted to be had in it one of the remaining steps - commitment to a purchase order. Is this style and approach new when it comes to selling? After I distill down all the selling systems and techniques, I conclude that the one technique Bill used will never go out of style. Consultative selling will always be in vogue - it simply was lost in a whole host of other glamorous acronyms and sales systems to describe the selling process.

Here's why it is timeless. Should we take a product, service or system approach first, that is to say, the first things out of our mouth are benefits as we perceive them? If we do we run the risk of losing prospect interest because these benefits may be important to us (or a prior customer) but may mean nothing to the current client. Identifying what the prospect sees as the problem and we state the solutions are what assist the value proposition. Representatives who fail to feed back the client situation and then suggest an approach to solve it do not contribute to rapport or relationship building.

If we listen hard enough and with great attention, our prospective client will tell us what we need to know in order to inform them of how what we do solves a problem, fills a need and returns value for our services. Listening, clarifying and asking pertinent questions of your client are a timeless style of capturing the

prospects attention and garnering support for the eventual proposal.

**An earmark of the 21st century successful salesperson is that they ask more questions than they make declarative statements. They listen more intently, concentrate on the words, nuances in the speech and voice inflection of the prospect and customer. They are not judgmental. Instead, they demonstrate great empathy, endeavoring to appreciate the perspective and point of view of their prospect and customer. And when they do make an observation or comment, many times it is to clarify what they heard, making sure they understand the meaning of the words and requesting the client correct them if they heard the words incorrectly. Presented in this fashion the salesperson removes self-importance, arrogance and a know it all attitude. And the prospect or customer picks up on that immediately.**

In today's world highly effective company representatives for any number of products, systems or services are problem solvers and they sell consultatively. They endeavor to fully understand the clients situation and offer solutions which speak to resolving the customers issues, not their own. When the consultative problem solving approach is consistently used with a client (whether old or new) the client sees the consultative sales person as having the client interest come first. Then trust and confidence get developed in the buyer's mind. Over time this turns into a solid, mutually beneficial relationship.

### **Clone That Man!**

Bill was my career prototype. In fact, later after moving into a sales management role, I cloned many of his admirable and effective methods and techniques. Not only was he a teacher, he was a coach, mentor and above all a straight shooter. How could any sales team member reject the tutelage of a seasoned professional salesperson and manager who had the interest of the sales person and the customer at heart? I owe much to Bill, as his cordial, problem solving style commanded his clients and his sales teams respect. The bonus? He was not only respected, he was liked.

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