

# Sales and Service Excellence

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MARKETING/BRANDING

## Culture and Brand

*Make and keep brand promises.*



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IT'S ONE THING TO MAKE A PROMISE—quite another to keep it. Yet, people make promises every day. Some keep them. Some companies like AT&T, Bank of America and US Airways have good intentions, but can't keep them because their strong culture and strong brand are misaligned. And, some businesses have no sincere intention of keeping them at all, regardless of what they say.

How are you and your business at keeping your promises? Well, how you answered this question just defined your brand and your culture. The two are connected, and this connection can be either: *Strong and reinforcing*—they are in alignment; *Strong but negatively reinforcing*—they are competing or dissonant, weak because they have not been defined and developed.

### Creating the Promise—Your Brand

To grow your business, you must identify your target market—the market niche you want to focus on and the position you want to hold within that market. You need to know: What prod-

ucts or services you want to provide to your market; what you can do and what you do not want to do; and your competition and why you are different. This provides the essential elements for branding your company.

*Branding presents you to the marketplace.* It defines you in the mind of your customers and prospects. It creates the promise: what your clients can expect from you when they do business with you. Think of Apple, Google, Zappos,



Amazon.com, Nordstrom—we know what to expect from them, and we are rarely disappointed.

Branding expresses this promise in the: logo, Website concept and content, tag line, ads, marketing materials, and all forms of internal and external expression/communication about the company. There is a consistency that

should carry over to all methods of interacting with the customer and the prospect. Regardless of how your prospect and customers enter your sales cycle, they should see, feel, and interpret who you are, what you stand for and what they can expect based on your branding.

So, you have their attention with relevant and compelling branding. But you're not done.

### Creating the Culture

Now it's time to deliver: to keep the promise made in your branding.

*Culture is the way work is done* in the company—how people work together, how you build your teams and processes to deliver on your promise. It represents how strongly you believe in your promise and builds your reputation.

Culture is grounded in the understanding and practices around *Purpose/Mission, Vision and Guiding Values*. It drives how decisions are made, how responsibility is assumed, and your behavior in front of customers and your team. It should be reflected in the standards and consistency with which you deliver your product/service.

Are organizations with a strong positive culture and good brand expression perfect? Far from it. They are just

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much better than their competition, as they know how to course correct when required, and they know why they exist as a business.

## Brand + Culture = Growth

Without a strong base (your culture and brand) it is nearly impossible to deliver high quality products and services to your market (you end up delivering excuses).

Companies with a strong brand and culture are market leaders, local or international. A positive brand and cultural alignment is a powerful competitive strategy!

To boost performance and growth, concentrate on building a *strong brand expression* (the promise) and focusing your culture in delivering on that promise. Identifying your market and building a strong base (culture and brand) to deliver to that market is a *competitive differentiator*. Many of your competitors (and could-be competitors) will not take the time to do this. And your clients and customers will notice and will reward your efforts.

**To improve your sales, improve your influence.** Sales are about *relationships*. If you want to increase your sales, you must increase your *influence*—the ability to achieve your objective (sales) when you have neither the control nor the authority to achieve your goal alone. This is the place where the salesperson resides. The challenge is how to do it.



**All salespeople need certain basics:** a good product or service that provides value to the customer; a clear idea of why your product or service is *the best solution for the customer*—your differentiator; a clear value proposition—why is the customer better off buying from you, now; and a promise that you can back it up—drives customer satisfaction.

Many people make the mistake of defining *influence* as a form of *manipulation*. Not so. Influence is not about manipulation; it's about mutuality. And mutuality drives off the *Law of Reciprocity*: if I provide something of value to you first, you are likely to provide something of value to me. The caveat—as long as what you provide me is something that I value and my company values.

## 10 Barriers to Influence

We see the potential to gain influence in a sales situation squandered away—for 10 reasons we call the *Barriers to Gaining Influence*:

**1. Fear.** Fear stops you from using influence in a sales situation. And fear appears in many forms. It can be the fear of failure, fear of being rejected, fear of appearing foolish, fear that you are not good enough. Regardless of what you are afraid of, fear stops you dead in your tracks. You don't succeed, you don't exert influence because you're con-

vinced *before you start* that you may not succeed.

**2. Inability to develop real relationships.** People work with, buy from, and support people they like. You can't influence people to buy from you if you haven't developed a positive relationship—unless they buy on price alone.

**3. Poor responsiveness.** The faster you respond, the more responsive you appear. And if response matters to the person you want to influence, you make a positive impression.

**4. Overselling.** Overselling is annoying, and it communicates uncertainty in your position. When a person says *yes*, and you keep trying to convince them, *what are you communicating?*

**5. Quitting at No.** Nobody likes rejection. Yet in sales, *no* is often the response we hear. Sure, *no* can mean *no*, but it can also mean: *no, not right now*; or *no, I'm not yet convinced—I need more information*. Often, an objection is not a rejection—it's a request for more information. Don't let *no* be a lost opportunity.

**6. Perfectionism.** You may think that unless your proposal or request for information is perfectly framed, it can't move forward. Wrong. *Perfection sends an unintended message that you are indecisive*, and can create immobilization. While you may believe you are striving for perfection, the prospect wonders what's taking you so long.

**7. Over-expressing personal beliefs.** When you express a personal, political, or social belief when you are selling, people find it annoying. Expressing personal beliefs compromises the very relationships you want most to build.

**8. Lack of focus.** It's difficult to make a sale or to garner much respect if you go from one prospect to another; one idea to another; one sales strategy to another and finish nothing. Often your buyer will just give up, quit listening or no longer support your efforts.

**9. Poor impression management (lack of executive presence).** This isn't just about *looking* the part—it's about *being* the part, managing your image. Unsuitably presented, tired, poorly poised, uninformed and, sloppy you present a poor and unconvincing image.

**10. Ingratitude.** People like recognition and appreciation; they like to be noticed in a positive way. If you don't recognize and express appreciation for others, your chance of influencing them is remote.

**Is one of the Top 10 Barriers holding you back from influencing others and gaining more sales?** These behaviors inhibit sales performance. If you see these in yourself and refuse to address them, you won't exert the influence necessary to advance sales. **SSE**

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**ACTION: Eliminate barriers to gaining influence.**

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