

Simple Sales Strategies That Always Work

By: John M. Brown

One of the most talked about and most maligned subjects in the club industry today is, "How do we get more sales"? Espousing brave new ideas and strategies is easy to talk about, but not easy, or practical to make work. I'm all for innovation. New better ways of doing things! But just because I have an idea doesn't mean I should do it. I read the Harvard Business Review every month too, but the knowledge doesn't always transfer. Instead of taxing my limited intelligence with unbridled creativity, I've decided to review the simple things: actions that any of you can do but may not be practicing. I talk to a lot of "experienced" people out there who always tell me, "I know that" or "We already do that" or "We tried that and it doesn't work". In my experience, the simple things are what many neglect, discount or *assume* are being done—even though they are not.

1. Practice, Practice, Practice. If professional athletes have to practice everyday, then why would we think professional sales people don't need to practice daily? Our season lasts 365 days a year. We play every day. In essence, by not practicing on a regular basis our people might as well be practicing with "live ammunition". Every prospect represents a "live fire" exercise: hence we should be trained and ready when these people come in, not use them as "cannon fodder".

Many people go about the job of selling our product with the "I know that" attitude. That may be, but can they do it? People who pay the highest price for this attitude are the prospects, the club and its owners. Practicing everyday may not be practical, but some *form* of practice and skill development can be done at any club level or size. Don't make the mistake of thinking that once you trained your staff that "they've gotten it". Most training is *forgotten within 30 days*. After this, people tend to make their own way of doing things instead of what they are trained to do. It's a really simple job that gets complicated by people. You have to keep working on it to keep it as simple as it should be.

2. Do the Work! Day in and day out, success in the club business is directly tied to the amount and consistency of your production efforts. Strong, consistent sales are the result of the proper strategy, trained staff, a focused work ethic and the proper execution. You need to "look under every rock" and be able to reconcile what happened to every prospect, opportunity and inquiry. It's not glamorous, nor always fun. But it is the *bedrock* of consistent sales.

3. Look for more sales inside the club first! Upon further review, you can find direct sales opportunities which have slipped through your fingers and can be created internally. In fact, if you don't think you have your internal sales, systems and opportunities where they need to be, then it's probably a waste of money to bring new people in, if you are not able to convert what you already have. An example is, can you really sit down and go through every guest record? Do you *know* who didn't join, calls that didn't appoint or show, appointments that didn't show, along with any and all internal upgrade and renewal opportunities? If you can't get definitive answers to these important questions on each question above, then something is wrong. Sound like too much work? Staff can't provide you with the details? I rest my case.

4. If you're not getting member referrals, you're not in the club business! Are you really getting referrals? Or is that what the staff tells you? Can it be proved by your staff? If not, then you are being duped into thinking your members are helping you. I know there are many bright ideas you are chasing to bring in more members. But this one is immutable. Basic. Club business 101. Here are just a few of the problems I have experienced, when working with clubs on this particular issue:

- "Auto-Referral". Many clubs and salespeople casually conclude that every sale produced is from a referral, especially when that's what the boss wants to hear. Many times we find that they don't know for sure. Or, we find that the prospect was a walk-in or telephone inquiry but was incorrectly classified as a referral. Make them *prove* it. Ask for

details: name of new member, when did they get the referral and how did they get the referral?

- "We get all our new sales from referrals" Please. Do you mean to tell me that of all or most were from referrals? You didn't get any walk-ins? You didn't get any telephone inquiries? There is a difference between getting referrals and order taking. You need to find out and know the difference.

5. Make sure all leads are being administered thoroughly! Can you look and *prove* that each lead has been followed up on from A-Z? If you can't, then there is gold in those hills. Don't you ever wonder, "What happened to all those people who didn't join our club"? If you don't know or can't find out, then you can assume they fell through the cracks. At least follow up and give the prospects a chance to tell you conclusively, "I don't want to join your club".

6. Plan for what you need, and demand you get it! In simple terms, you need a plan. In advance, for the number of, type of and amount of sales you need every month in order to produce a "net gain" in your growth every month. You need to have monthly membership units, cash targets, and goals. You need to be tracking, day by day to ensure that you are 'on pace' to reach or surpass your targets and goals that you've set. Put them in *writing*. Make *sure* the whole production staff knows and understands. Then *make sure* all are pulling their share of the load.

7. Analyze your current membership base and identify people who can help bring you more members! Many of your members own their own businesses. Or they are in a position at their place of employment to help you promote your club through their business. You can also go back and look through usage reports. There you can identify high use members and high profile members that are most likely to be willing to help you. Don't be afraid to ask them to help you. If they are happy with your club most will be more than willing to help you.

8. Have some form of internal promotion, running every month! Not on again, off again. But pre-planned promotions that the members may look forward to and become "involved" in. Remember most

people respond to WITFM (What's in it for me?).

9. Fall back & regroup! At least once a month, you and your staff need to meet and gather together all the club leads, prospects and opportunities. Then review them carefully. There are *always* many loose ends left undone. By bringing everyone together you will come up with other avenues or angles to work the current and future customers. When you meet the demand that everyone who attends shows up with at least one original idea for building business, you are winning.

10. Let the members know you want them to bring their friends! Many times we find that the current members *don't even know they can bring guests!* Make *sure* it's part of your after-sale presentation to explain your club's guest policy with each new member. Explain to the new member that your staff is

regularly "engaging" the members in "meaningful" conversations that you have plenty of "In your face can't miss it" banners and reminders. It's much like frequency in advertising. Many people have to hear/see a message *seven times* before they *may notice* or respond to it!

The above are all simple ways to keep sales strong and steady. Many times these basics are overlooked or discounted for their value. Remember the *race is not usually won by the "glamorous"* but instead by doing the same basic fundamentals over and over and well everyday.

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