

Sales and Closing Are Not Dirty Words!

By John M. Brown
President - Professional
Club Management, Inc.

You know what? I feel guilty. I cannot seem to do enough to change the way people in this industry think, act and work. I don't think any of us so called experts are getting through to the masses who make this industry their second home.

My opinion, for what it's worth, is that it's our fault more people aren't members or remain members. Including me. I'd like to have the statistics from the past few

years regarding, not the people who have joined, but the people who have not joined. It would be a discovery beyond belief if we actually surveyed these people to find out really why they didn't become members. I understand there is some data out that suggests some reasons why people don't join. But to me it's meaningless. My way of thinking tells me to lump them all together and call it industry incompetence. It's for sure not the prospects' fault they didn't join.

The first problem, at the core of the whole epidemic, is that our people who are selling our product don't believe to the

very core of their souls that these prospects have full intentions of joining and more importantly, starting a workout program. Want to change the industry? Just effectively communicate to and with the people who come to us and start with the belief they are there to start and it's absolutely life changing for them to do so now. If I could instill the concept and belief of being assumptive into the people selling the product, we could all be rich off the people who come to us and we talk them out of it! I sit and fantasize about the 90% of the population out there who are not our customers. Then it hits me. What would we do with them even if they all came? Currently, the trend would indicate we would somehow convince them this is not the thing to do and ineptly handle them even if they showed up! Here's a frightening example of what I mean.

I consider myself pretty astute at the club business and the operations of clubs. After all, I have been doing it for 23 years now; you would think after all that time I would have it down. I must be some kind of expert; after all they let me write articles. Anyway, I'm standing at my front desk of one of my brand new, 45,000 sq. ft. facilities, prime time, like I always do, when I start feeling really good about myself. Well, after about an hour of just observing, taking notes and listening I was compelled to come down from my ivory tower and dive into the fray. In a little less than an hour, I counted 19 legitimate sales opportunities either missed or mishandled! I basically took over every interaction that occurred for the next hour and a half, and we converted more than 70% of all the opportunities that occurred during that time. Genius you think? Nope. Stupid. You see what happens to us in operations, and especially sales management, is what we let happen. We can control much of what occurs and the results if we are vigilant in managing the opportunities. Needless to say, we made immediate changes the next evening and during any other prime times by placing a management or ownership level person at the front check in area to monitor, manage, access, control and convert more opportunities that exist right under our noses. I can hear you saying, "That doesn't happen at my club", or "We already do that", or "We have that down". Every time I hear that I begin to correlate that to when people tell me "Money's No Problem"! Every time someone has said that to me, it's a problem. Here's the important point. If it can happen to me it can

happen to you. I'm not any better, smarter or probably more expert than any of you. I've been called a lot of things, most of them true, as my mother used to say, "A skunk is a skunk no matter how you dress them", but rarely has anyone called me unobservant. Please take this in the spirit I am truly giving it. WAKE UP! There are more opportunities going in and out of your club than you have time to handle. But you have to be looking, watching, observant, and most of all understand how to recognize these opportunities and better yet, how to manage them. Learn that part of the business and teach it to everybody else on your staff, and you will never be hungry.

It's about time to get to the lead in this article. In our efforts to not high-pressure people (which I'm totally against and won't do) we, in many cases, have become so passive we can't convince the majority of people to join. I believe we need what I call "Positive Enthusiasm" In other words, let's not let the "undecided" prospects sell us on why they should wait to begin a healthy lifestyle. I don't know about you, but I'm proud of what I sell and I'm not ashamed to tell anyone about the benefits of our product. Sales and closing are not dirty words! In fact, they are not even four letter words!

How can we begin to embark on a better way? I don't have all the answers, but I have a few thoughts, suggestions and implementation items that you may find helpful. Anyone else who has any more, call me and I'll cheerfully add to the list.

HAVE A GOOD "FOUNDATION"

First, you have to have a good "foundation" to build on. The following is my foundation. Yours may be different, but at least have one.

* We must embrace, understand and preach the immutable good that occurs in our facilities every day. We truly change people's lives. I ask you what value can you place on someone lowering his cholesterol to a healthy level through diet, regular exercise and even medication so that he can live 10 years longer and spend that time with his family? What value can you place on someone making a new friend? What value can you place on, at least temporarily, relieving someone's loneliness or depression? I could go on for hours. Try talking about some of these things next time you are having trouble closing a guest instead of join today and I'll give you this or that.

Closing on discounting and price is for the weak and timid. It is a crutch that can never be thrown away. And it doesn't work very well.

* Sell the sizzle not the steak! Work on, practice, and yes practice, on selling our product. Our product is not the price, our product is health and results along with a multitude of other great things and not one of them is price. I know we are in a war. I know we may be in a recession. I know it's a competitive market out there. But listen carefully. Price is only a consideration, not the deciding factor in a person joining. Price is always more important to the salesperson than to the customer. A properly handled prospect, who is properly motivated, would rob 10 liquor stores to get the money if they really wanted it. There's no stopping them. When they give you objections, give them the product not the price!

* The only truly effective way to sell this product is by being a member of "The First Church Of Fitness". Yes I am advocating evangelistic fervor when helping someone get started on a regular exercise program. I stole that term, by the way, from a very brilliant and wise man, Dr. Jack Scammahorn, PhD, a good friend to me and a better mentor.

* An important part of my foundation is the complete and absolute belief that every guest, TI and prospect that actually crosses our threshold has the total intent to join. I had that concept inculcated into me years ago, and it has served me well. You would have to kill me to get me to think otherwise. You know why I believe this so fervently? I finally figured it out a couple of years ago. I truly care about people in general, and it gives my life meaning to be able to provide them with the vehicles to live and feel better. Sounds corny but it's true.

* If you want to have more members you first have to perform for the ones you already have. Do all you can to keep them using the product and be happy about doing it. It probably isn't too smart to ask for more traffic if you aren't utterly convinced you are and can handle what you are already getting. Ideally, you would want more opportunities to increase incrementally as your success with what you already have rises. Yes, there are probably more complaints from owners regarding the lack of traffic, but I tell you they are linked like "Siamese Twins", totally pinioned together.

TRY THESE ACTION ITEMS

Here are a few suggestions (See John Brown page 21)

www.PTontheNET.com

Q: Where in the World can you find...

- ...A growing mass of leading edge content, written by world-renowned authors?
- ...An expansive resource for in-house education, exams and CEC's?
- ...A place to create, store and monitor your clubs client profiles and programs?
- ...A cost effective solution to your trainer education needs?

A: ANYWHERE in the world.

PTon
Personal Training
on the net

The world's leading online education resource for personal trainers. Used by over 1000 clubs worldwide.

www.PTontheNET.com

Your Partner in On Line Education

Visit the site and click on "Club Options"

or phone 818 878 9302 for more information.

..John Brown

continued from page 18

tions and action items, which you may be able to use.

* When I'm looking for quality salespeople, I'm first looking for people who can exhibit true and luminous compassion and caring for people in general. Give me a team of people with those traits and I can rule the world. Know why? Cause selling the membership part is easy. In fact, it's so easy people complicate it. I can teach the water fountain how to sell a membership. Add sincerity, compassion, caring and you can't miss.

* If your salespeople are going to be the ones selling the product don't you think it would be a good idea to have their compensation packages reflect at least the illusion of "a real job"? People back home still ask me when I'm going to get a job. Professional salespeople make professional wages because they are designed to do so. There are many creative ways to compensate your production people. Personally, I don't care if a salesperson makes \$1,000,000 a year. If they do I

made \$50,000,000. It's up to me to design their packages so they are mutually beneficial, are equitable, provide a return on investment for the club, and are tied to direct production.

* Don't shortcut the process! Personally, I use a system wherein I am able to tour, ask questions, receive answers and prove to the customer I am really listening! When someone listens to you these days you are either in jail or at the doctor's office. Listening is absolutely earth shattering to the majority of the population. Why? Because it's so rare. It's sad, but true. It's so important that I truly wish I could take a prospective member on a tour and never have to say a word. Just let them talk about themselves. I don't know about you but besides my mother, I love talking about myself. So do most people.

* View every sales opportunity as 100% real until it is proven not to be. There is not even one good person on the face of this earth, including and especially me, who can with any certainty, consistency or accuracy, qualify a person or opportunity until it is further investigated. This mindset I find helps me "find" opportunities I might have otherwise

prequalified.

* If you want more people to join your club then try framing your presentation in such a manner that joining and what it costs are only the "gateway" to the treasures which really await them inside. The price and actually being a member would put me to sleep. What really gets my attention is when someone shows genuine interest in what I want and what I have to say. Maybe it's me. I'm a man. I'm designed to be insecure. I think many people enjoy the spotlight being shined on them once in awhile.

* When trying to close a tough prospect sell from the platforms of Advocacy, Conviction, Delivery, Compassion, Caring. You are a formidable ally to them when debating from these platforms. When someone is really tough, I actually tear the presentation or price sheet up into little pieces and ask them "What can I do today to allow you to give me the opportunity to help you start a regular exercise program"? I follow up with "Give me the privilege of helping you".

* Want more mem-

bers? Integrate the ones you have and give it your all to make sure they are using the product and are happy with it. Yeah, easier said than done, I know. But at least have a system, which ensures that every member has a fighting chance to get what he or she came there to receive. It is one of the most appalling parts to our industry when I see or find out about a member who joined and never used the club. It's just not right.

* Owners and Managers! Create, nurture, maintain and manage your production people for success. Create real career paths for them and most of all, give them a level playing field by giving them adequate training and retraining. Just cause they were trained once doesn't mean they are still trained. In fact, if it's more than six months since the last training what they are saying and doing probably does not even resemble what your initial training program taught. Remember this, Peter Drucker, the father of modern management practice said, "If your people aren't succeeding you have only one person to blame. Yourself."

* Last, salespeople take this one tip; it will make you money immediately. You must

mentally prepare yourself for every guest, TI, prospect call. I can't even count high enough the times I have witnessed a salesperson go from one "bad", opportunity to a new one and have the last one carry over. Remember, you are as transparent as glass. If people feel something is not quite right, they then think something is not right. Our product still remains mostly an emotional purchase, which after the fact, when they get home, is then validated by some form of logic. Focus; concentrate, 90% of the sale occurs in your head.

Hopefully some of the things above have and will help you in your quest for success however you may define it. I hope at least some of it caused you to stop and think, because when that occurs, great things can happen.

(John Brown is a nationally known consultant, speaker and author. A veteran of the club industry for over 23 years, he owns, operates, manages and consults with over 80 clubs across the country and in South America. His company, Professional Club Management, Inc. is a leader in developing clubs. He can be reached at 913-557-9018 or email Jbrown8137@aol.com)