

# Sales Down? Don't hire an Expert Fix it Yourself!

By: John M. Brown

**W**OW! I never thought I would be saying this, but after 23 years of fixing my own problems and other people's I have to admit it's true. This is like a lawyer telling you not to sue. I base this profound statement on the following elementary but convincing research. The last 195 out of 200 times I have gotten on a plane to go help someone with their sales issues I have been compelled to say basically

the same things. Its like the movie "Groundhog Day".

Don't get me wrong, I would love to help anyone who wants or needs help. I'll even go so far as to admit I like the money. But in good conscience I have to tell you that in my expert opinion, you don't need an expert to solve many of your sales issues.

For all you would-be, soon to be consultants, here's a template for success. Its what I always do first. Usually I don't have to go any further. No sleight of hand, magical formu-

las, tricks or potions. Here it is: **Consulting for Yourself 101.**

Before we start, lets ask ourselves some very direct questions. It may be painful but its best if you answer honestly.

1. Are you in control, aware and have detailed records of every telephone inquiry call that comes in to your club on a regular, consistent basis? If so, how do you know? What's your validation system?

2. At the end of the day, week, month, and year can you reconcile what happened to every guest that came in to your facility? What's your reconciliation process? Who is accountable for it? How do you know it's accurate?

3. Can you, with total certainty, say you know that every guest or TI or prospect was followed up on thoroughly? What makes you so certain?

4. Do you know for sure that your salespeople are directly asking prospects to join

your club? How can you be so sure?

5. Are you receiving daily, weekly, monthly quantitative sales data that gives you a clear picture of what is occurring in the sales aspect of your club? Are you sure it's accurate? How are you sure? Is the information being produced by an objective third party or prepared by those who the information is reviewing?

6. Are you 100% confident of your sales staffs skills, abilities, and training? Are they totally competent?

7. Are your salespeople closing at least 50% or more of their sales? If not, do you know why?

## *This Isn't Horseshoes*

**T**his isn't horseshoes, this is like counting money. It's either exactly right or its wrong. If you can't answer absolutely yes to all these ques-

tions then you don't need to call someone like me to fix it. You can! Most of the time owners complain to me that they need more guest traffic. Usually they are correct. But what good is more traffic if you aren't handling what you have correctly? If the above aren't done consistently and correctly, then all the purported 100 million members by 2010 we all talk about is just cannon fodder.

Ok, here's where you can start to fix and solve many of your sales related problems. It is where I always go first.

## *Watch Your Front Desk*

**J**ust spend two hours without a break at or near your front desk. This means you, not someone you send to do it. Listen to the phone conversations, the member interactions, watch the check in process and the handling of TI's and guests. (See John Brown page 14)

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## ..John Brown

continued from page 10

It will be eye opening! Write down every detail or opportunity that was missed, mishandled, or could have been handled better. You will have a page full. This is where it all begins. **If you don't have command of the phones or the front door, you don't have a club.** The front desk, their procedures, policies, operations and execution are totally tied to the sales effort. I always count opportunities. Usually in a two-hour period you will observe 5-10 opportunities missed minimum. This is a secret good club operators know. That opportunities exist every day, all day inside the walls of the club! You first have to recognize them, and then convert them into real dollars. The real money in this business or any that I'm aware of is in the details and how you handle them. Mr. Donald Carty, CEO of American Airlines, once said, "There is not much, if any, difference between airlines. The difference lies in how the successful ones handle the thousands of small details every day." In other words, all of us have facilities, equipment, programs etc., but the real differences, the differences that mean something to our customers, are in the way you transact business. Sure some clubs are bigger, nicer, better equipped than others and to some people that is important. But a deconditioned person, the same people who represent the largest opportunity in this industry today, can get in shape, improve their health, the quality of their life, and be happy and satisfied at any, I repeat, any of our clubs. As long as they are first, invited and encouraged to participate, then integrated, nurtured, and handled in such a way as they perceive to be fulfilling their expectations or more. Consider this the next time you're feeling that the competition is getting all the business. Most people have never set foot in anybody's club! They don't know the competition is better because they aren't there! They're not anywhere! Except at home or work or somewhere in

between. The way in which you go about operating your business can be the single most important way to compete and level the playing field against any competitor. Do you have competition from bigger, newer chains with more locations? Are you competing with discounters, Non-Profits, Parks & Recreation Leisure facilities? So what. You can start today to outperform all of them, stabilize your position, and be successful in your own right by focusing on how you operate your business every day and how you deliver your product to your customers. Sometimes we get it backwards. It's not how much you do but rather how you do it. Clubs big and small can benefit greatly from this approach. How many times have you heard from members of big club chains say "It's too impersonal", "After they get your money you never hear from them again until its time to pay again"? I'm not knocking big club chains nor saying that getting big numbers is not important or necessary. All I'm saying is that here we are, the club industry, on the brink of success, and close to 80% of all the people in the world have yet to use our product. I believe that as we improve our efforts to go get these customers and as importantly, improve and refine how we treat, interact, transact and care for these people we, as an industry will begin to experience true success. I always think the following thought when I'm feeling really happy and successful: if I'm so successful and so good at what I'm doing then why are most people in the world not my customers?

### Observe Your Salespeople

•**N**ext, observe the salespeople closely for several hours. What are they doing with their time? How they handle members and guests and how their phone skills are. Are they focused? How they present themselves to people. Are they polished and professional? Do they look professional? Do they sound professional? Do they sound like salesmen? Bet you will have another page full of notes. Don't assume all these things are happening. Verify. Validate. Then di-

rectly begin to work on all you have observed.

### Train Your People

•**W**hen was the last time your people had any training, skills enhancement, or re-training? Remember that skills begin to erode about 24-72 hours after training. Studies show that most people, even if they are interested in listening to you, only retain about 7% of what they have heard. Any wonder why those salespeople can't or don't do what you want them to do? You think they are trained, they think they are trained, but they are not trained. The single most neglected item owners & managers fail to do is regularly train staff. Once is not enough. Many owners say to me, "I don't know how to train my people". That usually is true, but here's another big consultant secret..... training is teaching. Any organized learning you can do or facilitate for your staff is beneficial. Sure you can hire a professional and maybe you should, but if you do, take advantage of it, because it's expensive! I'm probably going to lose millions on this but I'm amazed when I go to train a staff why they don't videotape the training? It's not because I say they can't. I even recommend it in advance. Someone in your organization should be responsible to learn how to train staff. I love going back to the same place three or four times a year to do the same training, but it's not necessary. In addition there are countless manuals, tapes, videotapes etc. available for owners and managers to use. If you are going to hire a professional, use them wisely. The best consultants are the ones who work themselves out of a job. Remember the first rule in any business.... Get rid of all the lawyers, accountants and consultants as soon as possible!

### Do A System Check

•**D**o a System Check. Are all the systems you put in place still in place? Are they being used as you designed them to be? Are they being used at all? Are they being used consistently? Are your systems thorough or do they need updating? Are your systems solid and sound with no cracks? Does all your staff know how and why they are to use these systems? How can you tell if the systems are

not being used? Where's the warning signal? A smart man once told me, "Put systems in, train the people and ride herd on the people and the system". My experience has shown me that many people, especially salespeople, "like doing it their own way". Remember, ours is basically a simple business complicated by people. In fact the essence is so simple that people have trouble believing or understanding it. Here it is. "Encourage a member to bring a friend, enroll that friend on his first time in the facility, and never let him drop out". That is not an original. A very wise man taught me that along time ago and being a simple farm boy, I never forgot it.

### Ask Every Prospect To Join

•**A**t least make sure that your salespeople are closing sales that don't close themselves. As I have stated before, I abhor high-pressure sales tactics. They are outdated, unnecessary and don't work. But there is a tasteful, tactful, professional middle ground where genuine caring, passionate enthusiasm and conviction in our product will prevail on most prospects. High pressure is not the answer but pacifism kills. Find your middle ground and at least know that all your prospects have been directly and passionately asked to join your club today.

### Have A Daily Report

•**D**o you receive, review and take action on a daily quantitative sales report? In simple terms, do you know for real what is happening in your club every day and do you have a plan to fix, solve, and improve it. Hate to tell, you but most don't. It doesn't have to be complicated, just a plan. Simple is better but have a plan everyday. Yes, it changes day to day. Ask your sales manager and or salespeople this question; it usually stops them dead in their tracks. "What exactly do you have planned today to generate revenue and how are you going to do it"? If you get Well????, Uhhhh???, then you know they are making this up as they go. Often done, but not very profitable. Demand an exact, detailed answer to your question from all sales staff, then compare the results to your daily sales report the following day when you ask them the same question again. The word for the day is persistence. If you are persistent in getting answers to your ques-

tions then very soon you will begin to have a plan. Note: you may in the beginning have to teach them how to have a plan.

### One Thing

•**A**ny of you out there have your sales manager doing other things besides sales production duties? Bad idea. It's a full time job when you do it right. In fact, it's a couple of full time jobs to excel at it. Take it from me; I've made this mistake before. Your sales manager should have a laser beam focus. Production. They should wake up at 6am every morning thinking where are the next sales coming from? As we all know by now, they don't just come streaming in. We have to go get them. Your sales manager should be making sure all efforts are being made to do so.

### Use Sales Automation Software

•**K**now what sales automation software is? If you don't, learn. It can make your life easier and more importantly, used correctly make sales staff truly accountable. The computer may be wrong, but it has never lied to me. There are many systems out there ranging from inexpensive to outrageous. Shop around, but get one. It helps you get the facts, just the facts.

### Know Your Stuff!

•**F**inally, Make sure you, yes you, are totally competent in all of the above. Of all the things they don't teach in college they don't teach sales. Life is sales. You may not be the best at it but having a true working knowledge of it, meaning you've done it yourself, is invaluable in fixing your own sales issues. I've met many an owner or manager who thought sales was someone else's job. In successful clubs it starts at the top and it's everyone's job. I've always liked the philosophy, "If you don't want to sell, you can't work here".

There you have it. All roads pass through here. **Sales Consulting 101. "Physician heal thyself"**

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