

COMPETING TO BE THE BEST

Written for Water Technology Magazine

By Norman Hurt 12-09-04

YOU HAVE TO BE THE BEST:

In order to compete successfully, you have to be better than anyone else in town. You have to know exactly what you're doing and why you're doing it. You have to study harder, work smarter and be the best you can possibly be. Being the best requires that you excel in every aspect of both your business and family lives.

And this doesn't happen by coincidence; it happens because *you* make it happen. There are no shortcuts to success; you must do it all.

Consider this illustrative comparison:

Our foremost sales rep, Carol, was on an appointment one night. The doorbell rang, and a sales rep from another company was at the door. When he realized Carol was doing her presentation, he invited himself in, pulled out a chair and stayed to watch her.

Carol was amazed at the fellow's lack of professionalism and his outright audacity at barging in and doing his best to intimidate her, but she never skipped a beat.

The poor man needed a haircut, his clothes were rumpled, his shoes were old and unpolished, and he had a 1999 city map. In fact, he had to call the homeowner earlier just to get directions to the house. It was obvious to everyone that the man was not a professional.

Carol, on the other hand, was dressed sharp. Her hair was carefully coiffed, and she wore a freshly pressed skirt and a sensible blouse. She had her company logo on her blazer, and she proudly wore her color photo ID like a badge of honor.

Carol was cheerful, bright and enthusiastic. She was courteous, knowledgeable, and a true professional. Her conviction and confidence was almost overwhelming. She knew her presentation backwards and forwards. She knew almost as much about her equipment as one of her service technicians. She also knew about every water company in town. She knew their warranties, their service policies, their operating costs, and their service costs. She even knew about their reputation in the city based on evidence provided by her customers' experiences. She knew of their weaknesses, but concentrated only on the strengths of her products.

She did an impeccable presentation. Her test equipment was so clean it almost sparkled. Her hard water costs were modest and realistic. She demonstrated how good water could protect, defend and safeguard the homeowner's home and family, and how it could do it for the rest of their lives. She demonstrated the immediate personal benefits of treating their water, and she showed the homeowner how a water treatment system could pay for

itself in the short run and provide the best return of any investment they could ever make in the long run.

She had over 500 references with her and web pages full of customer comments, and she offered so many after-sale bonuses that the other salesman never stood a chance.

In fact, when he realized what he was up against, he left in defeat.

HOW TO BE THE BEST

Being the best comes the old-fashioned way: hard work.

It begins by finding out who you are, who you want to be, and what you want in life. To be truly successful, you must have *goals* that are so powerful they give you the *burning desire* to accomplish them. Burning desire gives you the inspiration and energy to do anything you want to do. It provides the perseverance needed to be successful. It will force you to establish a highly polished work ethic. It will force you to be prompt, efficient and reliable. It will force you to be successful.

In life, we either make things happen or we let things happen. You'll either go out and obtain what you want or you'll just have to settle for whatever you can get. If you want something badly enough, chances are you'll get it.

You must be *honest and sincere*. If you're working to just make money, you won't do as well as if you are working to help improve other people's lives. Your motivation should be to get ahead, provide for your family, satisfy your customers' needs, and do all of it in an honest and truthful manner.

You always must *look* your best. You represent your company, your equipment, your service and your reputation. It's impossible to make a good second impression if the first one doesn't work. You can't sell health and cleanliness if you're not clean and healthy!

You must live and work in accordance with the *ethics* of our industry and be guided by your own higher *personal ethics and morality*.

The Water Quality Association's Code of Ethics states the following:

"Statements, either verbal or written, which are false, misleading, deceptive, fraudulent, or which deceptively disparage public or privately supplied water, bottled water, water quality improvement products or systems, or other competitors or competitive products, shall not be used." -- Point 5 of the Marketing Guidelines of the WQA Code of Ethics

Therefore, when in direct competition, spend your sales time emphasizing your strengths rather than concentrating on your competitors' weaknesses. Demonstrate your strengths, and let your competitors' weaknesses speak for themselves.

We must also follow the guidelines set forth in our own higher *personal moral code*, which should exceed the ethical and legal considerations governing our industry, and which should inevitably require that we be honest, truthful and forthright in all our business dealings. We should follow the spirit of any ethical and legal requirements and not just the letter.

You must be an upright, *law-abiding* citizen and follow the laws of our country, our government, and our industry. The Magnusson-Moss Warranty Act, for example, requires that the salesperson disclose the existence of and make available for inspection all applicable product warranties at the time of an in-home presentation.

Attitude is the one attribute you can always control. It's much better to respond to your daily challenges in a positive manner than to over-react negatively to the inconveniences we all must face. Attitude is much more important than skill, and it can make an enormous difference for you and everyone around you.

Conviction that you are the best, that you have the best company with the best equipment and service, that you have the best presentation, and that you are doing the best thing for your customers and your family will give you the extra drive and perseverance it takes to be the best at whatever you do.

Perseverance is not quitting until you get what you want.

Confidence is knowing that you are doing the right thing for the right reasons. Confidence is knowing that your product solves the secrets to the universe, and your one ambition in life is to share this miracle with as many people as you can.

Part of our confidence comes from *education*. The WQA provides certifications in courses in the water treatment industry. Get certified. Learn about sales skills, and listen to inspirational messages. Learn to do your presentation better. Practice and role play until you are perfect. Learn new sales and closing techniques. Determine to keep getting better, and you'll have the confidence it takes to be successful.

Discipline is the ability to maintain a serious work ethic because you have the burning desire to accomplish all of your specific goals.

Character is partially determined by how you treat people who don't do things your way. The way you treat people who don't buy from you dictates who you really are. Professional sales people make friends with everyone they see. More sales will come back to you if remain courteous and polite with all your prospects, and you can sleep easy at night if you've done everything you can honestly do, even if you still don't get the sale.

Credibility is demonstrated by how you look, how well you know your product and presentation, and how much the customer feels you're looking out for him, his family, and his pocketbook. Remember that you represent your company, and how the customer

feels about you is how he will choose between you and your competition. Your credibility can be further demonstrated by your experience, your certifications in the industry, and your standing in the community.

Your company's credibility is demonstrated by its history, its record with your local Better Business Bureau, its memberships in the local, state and national water associations, its memberships with the chambers of commerce in your area, and by its references and reputation.

IT'S THE MONEY

Price is not always an objection if you compare it to *cost*. If you know that in the long run your solution will cost less, then it's just a matter of your ability to demonstrate that effectively. When you compare the price to the cost, you often find that the *higher price brings the greater value* in terms of reliability, quality, convenience, maintenance, aesthetics, functionality, and long-term savings. Your presentation should be constructed to demonstrate the higher value of your product. That will justify the cost in the mind of your prospect.

Still, though, there will always be price shoppers. Remember this:

"There is hardly anything in this world but that somebody or other could not make a little worse and sell it a little cheaper. And those people who only go by the price become the rightful prey of such machinations. It is unwise to pay too much but it is even worse to pay too little. If you pay too much you lose a little money, that is all. If on the other hand you pay too little you sometimes lose everything, because the object you have bought does not meet the task you had in mind for it.

"The laws of economics prohibit you to obtain great value for little money. If you accept the lowest offer you have to accept the risk that you are taking on that it will cost something more. And if you do that then you have enough money to pay for something better." -- John Ruskin (1819-1900)

When talking to homeowners, remember to remind them that professionals don't mind paying for quality. Intelligent buyers know that quality has a better value, and people like your customers should always want only the best for their homes and families.

One of the best sales tools in demonstrating money is by building the *rapport* that is needed for your prospect to be comfortable with your numbers and with your recommendations.

We build rapport by asking a lot of questions, by developing a genuine interest in our customers and by sharing positive things about each other that we have in common. But never go too far: *If it's not in furtherance of the sale, then don't say it and don't do it!"*

Rapport is engaging your customers by finding out what their needs are and then doing your best to satisfy them. Never tell them what they think, ask them how they feel. Don't tell them, show them. Don't tell, sell.

DO THE MATH:

All professional sales people always have a calculator with them and know how to use it. Come to an area of agreement by determining exactly what your customers are spending on hard water costs, use your *math* skills to show your work to the customer, and demonstrate they are your customers' numbers and not just yours.

Knowing your math will help enable you to demonstrate the initial cost of a certain product versus the long term price of owning that product. If you use numbers that can't be challenged, you can better calculate and therefore demonstrate with numbers a true comparison between you and your competition.

MARKETING:

No matter how good you are and how good your product is, you can't sell anything if you don't have the prospects to show it to.

You must compete in *marketing* your product as well as in selling it. Be the first one to call or the first one to visit. Get to the prospects before your competitors. Go to places no one else will go. Develop new lead programs. Mine your customers for referrals.

If you have a burning desire, you'll be able to devise new ways to find qualified prospects. After all, everyone should have good water.

If you want to beat the pants off the competition, you must set out to be the best, do everything in your power to improve yourself, create the motivation, attitude and conviction it takes to be successful, and generate the confidence, credibility, and discipline it takes to be what you really want to be. Only then will you develop the genuine *enthusiasm* that comes naturally to all successful people.

There are no shortcuts.

Good selling!

Norman Hurt is the sales manager of the Houston office of Quality Water Systems of Texas. He is a WQA Certified Water Specialist - Level I and has been selling RainSoft systems since 1984. Consistently in the top ten, Norman was the Number One Sales Person for RainSoft in 1999-2000 and the Number Two Sales Person for RainSoft in 2003.