

Relationships Matter — A Story©

By Kathy Ellis, The Business Lab Marketing Coach

With the brisk January air whisking across his face the man sat down on a park bench outside his office window.

He closed his eyes and thought about all they had accomplished last year. A smile came to his face then quickly left. He knew there was more, much more to be done in the new year ahead.

With eyes still closed he looked up, trying to avoid the wind and hoping to find a small ray of sun to warm his cold face. Something was missing from his business model. But what? He began to take stock in all that they had done last year to improve sales:

- The equipment had been upgraded and new talent was hired.
- They set goals to deliver more value at less cost faster.
- They researched and wrote a new customer service plan.
- They hired a sales trainer to help them close more business.

Now uneasy and fidgeting, the man opened his eyes in frustration. What? He thought to himself. What is the missing piece? Is there some special secret he hadn't discovered? How would he really improve his business this year?

"Oh well!" his demeanor seem to say. He knew he needed to get back into his office. The staff would be waiting to hear his speech for the new year. A sudden wave of panic covered him. He hadn't even thought about what he'd say. He sighed at the thought of bringing out that old, tired, pump-um up speech. Besides, they deserved better. They had worked really hard last year and they really were in a great position to improve sales. Almost convinced himself, he stood up and began to turn toward the office. Then, something caught the corner of his eye and he slowly turned back around. He noticed something being carried by the wind. It seem to be drifting much slower than the wind and it seemed to be coming directly toward him.

As he reach out his hand, a small folded paper gently landed on his palm. Everything seemed to be in slow motion. As he examined this object a childhood memory came to him. He remembered playing this game with his sister and his friends. He laughed out loud and thought, why not? He decided to play the game and ask a question to see if the folded puzzle could reveal the answer, as it had always done in his childhood.

How can I improve my business this year?

- He placed his fingers in the puzzle.
- He chose a color and moved his fingers spelling out the color.
- He chose a number and moved his fingers that many times.
- Then he chose the deciding number. The hidden panel where his question would be answered.

As he lifted the panel he felt a sense of newness then he noticed the wind. The wind that was once cold had become warm and swirled all around him as if it were wrapping him in

this secret. This gift that landed so eloquently in his hand was the gentle reminder he needed.

Now he couldn't wait to greet his team. He knew exactly what he would say.

Relationships. Relationships Matter!

Tip From The Business Lab: With your team, determine how solid your relationships are with your clients. Here are some ideas to help you get started:

- Identify the clients that are your "ideal" clients: most profitable, match your values and philosophies, recurring business, refer business to you, etc.
- Create a scale to measure the strength of your relationship with them. For example, use a scale of one to 10 with one being, "would take my call if I phoned," and ten being, "would come to my home for dinner."
- Inspect what you expect. Monitor the growth of these relationships at defined intervals to determine your progress.
- For those clients that you did not identify as "ideal," determine who in this group has the most potential to become ideal. Run the same relationship test with this group.
- Put your most talented and innovative people in charge of building a wall around this group of clients. The wall should be built out of strong relationships as well as meeting and exceeding their expectations.
- Identify all the ways you can improve your relationships with your clients then together with your team, develop a relationship program for the new year.

Tip From The Business Lab: On the [following page](#) we have provided some relationship enhancing ideas to help you get started.

Happy holidays and our sincere wish for a safe and prosperous new year!

More Information? If you would like to learn more about this important topic or would like to receive our FREE Service Ideas Booklet, please send an E-mail to kathy@thebusinesslab.com, visit our Web site at www.thebusinesslab.com, or fax a note on your letterhead to 281-517-0789.

Author's Note: Kathy Ellis is a Marketing Coach and the owner of The Business Lab, a full service marketing and graphic design company. We specialize in creativity and helping you think outside the box. We then help you implement those creative ideas through programs including database marketing, Web sites, interactive CD brochures, company brochures, client newsletters and promotional marketing materials. We share with you our FREE newsletter to showcase powerful marketing tips, techniques and ideas to help you improve your business. The Business Lab is based in Houston, TX at 281-517-0998 or by E-mail at kathy@thebusinesslab.com

Relationship Ideas

- Create positions within your company that are committed to enhancing relationships: Vice President of After The Sales Experience, Executive Vice President of Customer Experience, etc.
- Ask your best clients to join your board of directors and/or create a customer forum and ask them to be a member.
- Delve into their business and find out how you can create better systems for them to do business—either with you, or with their customers. Start by monitoring their level of activity and investigate when you notice something new or different.
- Call your clients up each quarter and invite them to lunch or dinner. Give them your cell, pager, home number and let them know you are serious about wanting to hear from them.
- Create peer-to-peer monthly/quarterly meetings and invite their peers (non competing) to gain insight on how to improve business. (Note, this can be done via the telephone for very convenient TeleForum meetings.)
- Create, implement and monitor an in-house client expectations program.
- Create, implement and monitor a client challenge/problem program.
- Have your company shopped by an objective outside source to get a better feel for what it is like to do business with your company.
- Create a company resume and have everyone on your team contribute what they feel was their best performance.
- Stay in touch. Here are several ideas to help you stay in touch with your clients:
 - Send an article/newsletter with information to help them improve their business.
 - Send thank you notes any and every time you can.
 - Send direct mail/postcards to help educate/inform/showcase. (Note, following up by phone once the mailer has gone up will significantly improve your response/result rate).
 - Send out a creative promotion once or twice a year to say thank you and entertain.
 - Send out spotlight/case study mailers that feature your clients (and how you helped them become successful).
 - Showcase their progress (if applicable)—i.e., graphs of progress your company is making for them.
 - Invite them to events that will interest them. (Seminars, networking events, social events, etc.)
 - Sponsor/create events that will interest them.
 - Ask them to speak at an event you are involved with (as an industry expert).
 - Offer to speak at events that they are involved with.
 - Send press releases about you and them to the local newspapers, then send them a copy once it is released (i.e. ABC Company has selected XYZ as their newest provider of telecommunications equipment.)
 - Write articles about your industry and submit to publications (especially those publications your best clients read).
 - Send articles of interest that you have found in other magazine - personalize with a short note (thought of you when I read this).
 - Advertise.
 - Invite clients to your Web site by offering them a special gift to visit.
 - Honor your clients by creating a special gift/presentation (plaque, crystal/metal, etc.)
 - Refer business to them.