



Matt Crabtree



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MATT CRABTREE

Positive Momentum Limited
matt.crabtree@
positivemomentum.com
www.positivemomentum.com
+44 (0) 7808 780666

NEXT MONTH

The Fine Art of Managing
Sales People

The Sales Tactic of Muhammad Ali

The great Muhammad Ali famously declared (and in fact still declares) "I am the greatest". What's most interesting is that he started this declaration long before he was actually the greatest.

So the question for this month's column is – what do your salespeople think of your business just as it is and how passionate are they in their external promotion of it?

The most consistently successful salespeople are not those with the most thorough understanding of 'the sales cycle' – whatever that is! They are rarely the ones with the deepest product knowledge. They tend to share two key characteristics – superb interpersonal skills (of which more in a later column) and a passion for and belief in the company they are promoting.

Now of course it's not that fashionable in this great country of ours to actually like the company you are working for. You will be far more popular in the pub if you bitch, moan and whine about the appalling nature of your employer, their terrible services and their irritating customers! However you don't have to be a genius to work out what's wrong with the company you work for. If your business is anything like every other business on the planet occasionally things go wrong. Sometimes the technology does not work as it should, occasionally someone drops the ball and sometimes there is too much process and not enough adaptability. Whilst of course every business should always be seeking to improve, and there is no excuse for complacency, mistakes in business are inevitable. Because they are inevitable any damned fool can see them. It takes a much wiser person to see the strengths as well. Do your

salespeople go around looking for dirt or looking for diamonds?

Some salespeople have become so good at identifying all of their employer's weaknesses that they have forgotten who they work for. They attend meetings with disgruntled clients and attempt to surf the no mans land between client and supplier. They sympathise so much that the client begins to believe that things really are as crap as they have been exaggerating all along. These salespeople should be in your 'departure lounge'. They have ceased to add value. They should have left long ago but their level of self respect is clearly so low that they can't even be bothered to do that. Help them to help themselves. No one needs to work for a company they don't like anymore. Difficulty in recruiting is not a good enough excuse for retaining whingers (see last month's column). Unemployment is at almost the lowest level in recorded history. Finding another job will probably be the best thing that ever happened to these people.

The key question for the rest of your salespeople (and maybe for you too) is when did you last sit in front of a client and say "I believe that we are the best choice for you"? It's an overused cliché that 'people buy people' but when considering the purchase of a product or service I first want to know that the person persuading me to have it believes wholeheartedly in the company delivering it. I will of course make my own decision but it is very reassuring (and sadly all too rare) to meet a representative who is openly passionate about the business they work for.

In summary, coach your salespeople to be explicit with others about their absolute belief in your business despite all of its weaknesses. If they are unwilling or unable to do this perhaps it is time to part company...