

Have you ever thought about...

...the ways you may be feeding your own failure?

• **You have NO goals.** No goals is not a good thing. If you don't know where you're going, how will you know when you get there?

• **You have the WRONG goals.** Goals that are too high or too low are frustrating or unchallenging. Make your goals specific and realistic; high enough to stretch you but low enough to be reachable. As you accomplish, raise the bar on yourself.

• **You take shortcuts.** Shortcuts cost you in the long run. A half-done job is NOT better than no job. Don't sacrifice your standards or quality.

• **You take the LONG road around.** On the other hand, don't wait for all the T's to be crossed and I's dotted before you get going either. If you're too slow, people may lose interest in what you have to offer or you may lose out on a good opportunity.

• **You QUIT too fast.** Giving up too quickly is self-defeating. On any new project, give yourself 6 months before you change, delete, or eliminate. At least you'll know you gave it an honest try.

• **You continually blame OTHERS.** While beating yourself up is counterproductive, taking NO responsibility is not wise either. Own up and move on.

• **You continually blame YOURSELF.** Conversely, you can't change the world single-handedly in one massive swoop. Acknowledge your shortcomings and the influence others had on it and learn from it. Next time, watch out for the landmines.

• **You neglect little things.** Details DO count, particularly if you're competing with many notables. Do the usual unusually well and stand out!

• **You focus on PAST burdens.** Don't get stuck in what could have been. Learn your lessons, change the direction of your sails, and move on.

• **You are in love with the ILLUSION of success.** Success is WORK, plain and simple. While you will benefit from a great reputation or income, becoming enamoured with the fluff will cause you to fall quicker than you can say "huh!" ■

SOURCENOTE: Submitted by Carmen Stine.

Words of Wisdom

"A bargain is in its very essence a hostile transaction; do not all men try to abate the price of all they buy? I contend that a bargain, even between brethren, is a declaration of war."

— Lord Byron 1788-1824

"Practical Advice That Works" Vol 6 No 1

Coaching techniques that will make you look like a pro

Using coaching and feedback techniques can be one of the most successful (and least dangerous) recognition programmes for CEOs and managers.

AS COMPANIES CONTINUE to look for ways to cut costs, coaching/ recognition is a low-cost but high-impact way to go.

In fact, managers are courting trouble if they fail to make coaching skills a priority and an instrumental part of every supervisor's job description and performance assessment, say Ron Magnus and Nate Allen, writing for leadership training consultants FMI.

Managers who create a learning environment with a focus on developing staff skills and character will set themselves apart from the competition by attracting and retaining valued employees.

Those with reputations for investing in the skills and growth of their people will attract the best and most loyal employees. In other words, the staffers who work well will be more likely to stay on longer. Coaching can also be useful for:

- increasing motivation;
- increasing productivity;
- maintaining profitable growth.

What is coaching?

Essentially, it is a process of providing feedback and collaborative dialogue that deals with the growth of an individual and is usually centred on a particular competency or set of competencies.

What makes a great coach?

There are 10 critical steps, according to FMI's research:

1. Set clear performance standards and expectations. Employees who work for leaders with excellent coaching skills know what they must accomplish. They can say, "My manager set performance objectives and goals up front; I knew what was expected of me from the beginning."

2. Provide regular performance feedback. Managers who are strong at this will initiate the feedback conversation, paying attention to the knowledge, skills, and character traits that are critical for employees' success in their current jobs and prepare them for greater responsibilities. If an employee has to initiate this conversation, the leader isn't focusing on the coaching relationship.

3. Observe on-the-job performance and with customers. Managers who take the time to observe employees' behaviour in the context of their daily responsibilities can provide clearer and more relevant feedback. Those who neglect this may be considered out of touch and their feedback resented.

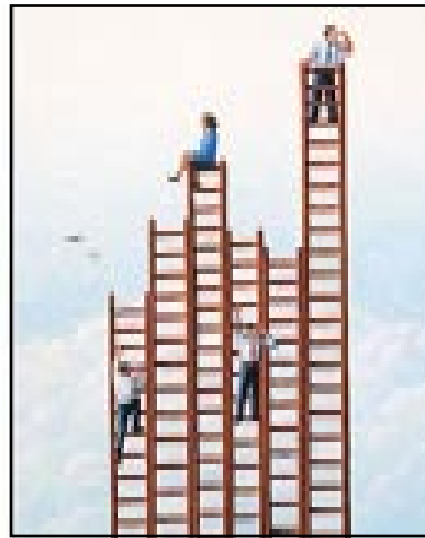
4. Help employees develop self-improvement action plans. An effective coach selects specific areas for improvement and supports

employees in developing their plans — both personal and professional — to reach desired objectives.

5. Recognize and award excellent performance. Coaches must provide public praise and ensure that their employees are recognized or receive a tangible reward for exceptional performance.

6. Provide training, guidance, and support. Effective coaches offer their team members opportunities to grow by providing professional guidance and best-of-class training and supporting them in applying what they've learned to their jobs.

7. Build relationships. Top coaches develop personal relationships with



Concluded overleaf

SMALL AND GROWING businesses looking to raise funds could benefit from two free and comprehensive guides launched by the Department of Trade & Industry.

The publications, **THE NO-NONSENSE GUIDE TO SMALL BUSINESS FUNDING** and **THE NO-NONSENSE GUIDE TO FINANCE FOR HIGH GROWTH COMPANIES**, have been produced by Government-backed business advice service Business Link.

The first is aimed at start-ups and small firms in need of finance and covers the basics of finance, potential sources available and the best ways of accessing and approaching them.

It offers detailed advice on, amongst other issues, the following:

- Working out how much you need and when;
- What advisers you need to talk to;
- Producing a business plan;
- Self-funding options;
- The pros and cons of investment by friends and family;
- Whether you are eligible for a grant;
- Tackling cashflow problems;
- Dealing with late payment.

The second guide, **THE NO-NONSENSE GUIDE TO FINANCE FOR HIGH GROWTH COMPANIES**, is targeted at more established enterprises that are looking to expand.

This starts with working out how much you want and how you will spend it and goes on to cover the following funding options:

- Bank loans;
- Invoice discounting;
- Borrowing against your business assets;
- Business angel finance;
- Venture capital;
- Flotation.

"Time after time, small firms say to me that raising finance is a top priority for them," commented Nigel Griffiths, Minister for Small Business Enterprise.

"These new guides can help them make the decision over which funding route is right for them." ■



Mike Lowry

The way I see it...

Thoughts on a difficult subject — Listening

There is a grace of kind listening, as well as a grace of kind speaking.

Some men listen with an abstracted air, which shows that their thoughts are elsewhere. Or they seem to listen, but by wide answers and irrelevant questions show that they have been occupied with their own thoughts, as being more interesting, at least in their own estimation, than what you have been saying.

Some listen with a kind of importunate ferocity, which makes you feel that you are being put upon your trial, and that your auditor expects beforehand that you are going to tell him a lie, or to be inaccurate, or to say something which he will disapprove, and that you must mind your expressions.

Some interrupt, and will not hear you to the end.

Some hear you to the end, and then forthwith begin to talk to you about a similar experience which has befallen themselves, making your case only an illustration of their own.

Some, meaning to be kind, listen with such a determined, lively, violent attention, that you are at once made uncomfortable, and the charm of conversation is at an end.

Many persons, whose manners will stand the test of speaking, break down under the trial of listening.

Kind listening is often an act of the most delicate interior mortification, and is a great assistance towards kind speaking. ■

SOURCENOTE: FW. Faber, *Spiritual Conferences*, 1859

Communication

Is your business "buzzword savvy"?

BEING SUCCESSFUL IN BUSINESS is all about communicating effectively with your target customers, in order to persuade them that your product or service is the solution to their specific problem or need.

In order to do this, you've got to be on the same wavelength as them, and speak to them in language they understand.

So it's essential to keep yourself up to date with changes to the English language, and particularly with new "buzzwords" and phrases that are being granted a place in the dictionary all the time.

New words reflect modern cultural attitudes, and while you wouldn't use slang or popular phrases in your official business communication, it can be useful to know about them for your sales letters, web adverts and mailshots, especially if you're hoping to target young consumers.

See whether you can match the following words of 2004 to the right meaning. They're all categories of consumer with different psychographic profiles.

a) oldbie

- b) chav
- c) retrosexual
- d) sneezer

1) a person who readily spreads an idea or marketing message by telling others

2) a man who spends very little time on his appearance and personal hygiene

3) a person with a basic knowledge and some experience of using the Internet

4) a young man who wears lots of cheap gold jewellery and a baseball cap, and hangs round in shopping precincts

And the answers to our buzzword quiz?

• Oldbie goes with definition 3 — it refers to Internet users who are a bit more advanced than newbies, who are complete beginners;

- Chav goes with definition 4;
- Retrosexual goes with definition 2;
- Sneezer goes with definition 1. ■

SOURCENOTE: You can find more of the same at <http://www.buzzwhack.com/buzzcomp/dict.htm>, and there's a good news article about the history of buzzwords online at http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,3604,1330487,00.html.

COACHING — Concluded from overleaf

their teams and work at relating with quality interpersonal skills. Less effective managers focus only on the administrative and task aspects of their work at the expense of individual relationships.

8. Determine if an employee has a "skill" or a "will" problem. Skill problems require patience and training; will problems require motivation. It's not unusual to observe a skill problem and assume it's a will problem, but ignoring that need for better skills will be

costly from the productivity point of view.

9. Maintain the big picture. Effective coaches see each situation as only one element of a person's overall performance. They are open-minded and consider all aspects of the individual's performance before making a fair and objective performance assessment.

10. Provide opportunities to employees and expose them to strong leaders. Good coaches become champions for the employees they're coaching. They do this through sponsorship and letting the organization know what their charges are accomplishing. ■

THERE'S NO SUCH THING as customer loyalty.

People go where they can get the best value for their money, and just because your customer bought from you once, don't be fooled into thinking they will buy from you a second time.

Even though they may have had a good experience with your business, the next time they buy it is likely to be from someone who provides a product that is as good as yours, but which costs a little less or is delivered a little faster.

So how do you keep your customers coming back time and again? You could start by trying the following two practical strategies:

1. Nurture your relationship with previous customers. When a customer has formed a positive relationship with your business, perhaps as a result of a great experience, they develop an emotional bond which needs to be nurtured to prevent it fading away.

You can do this by keeping in regular touch with your previous customers — through a personalised mailshot on the anniversary of their first purchase, a birthday or Christmas card, or a follow-up call to check how they felt about the last product or service they bought from you.

2. Give customers an incentive to continue the business relationship. Businesses that reward their customers with details of special offers, discount coupons, loyalty points and bonuses create an incentive-based relationship.

The more personalised and unique your offer is, the less likely it is that your customers will be able to find it elsewhere.

A good starting point for devising some incentives is simply to brainstorm ideas for add-on products or services you could realistically offer to customers.

But make sure your offers are regular, as the desire to return to your business can crumble once the incentive is taken away. ■

SOURCENOTE: Enterquest

Speaking in public

Making a successful presentation

Of business tasks which involve speaking or presentation, 80% of company directors find public speaking the most nerve-wracking activity they have to undertake.

GIVING PRESENTATIONS is a daunting prospect for businesses, according to a survey carried out by executive communications consultancy, The Aziz Corporation.

It found that a wide range of business tasks which involve speaking or presentation seem to strike fear, with 80% of company directors finding public speaking the most nerve-wracking activity they have to undertake.

First impressions count

Whether you are presenting a business plan to your bank manager or to investors to raise money, or whether you are pitching your business to a prospective client, first impressions are all important.

It may seem obvious, but putting your presentation into a smart folder can help. How you look is equally important, as Shilpa Panchmatia, founder of leadership training and coaching services company Human Xpression points out.

“Dress appropriately for the occasion and make sure your appearance is clean and neat. Wear something you feel good in. It will boost your confidence.”

Go for clarity

Above all, aim to be clear — compiling a glossy presentation pack could prove to be a distraction and could give the idea that you are trying to hide something.

If your business revolves around technology and you have to use specialised words, remember to explain these, or to include a glossary.

Be clear in your own mind what is interesting, different or exciting about your business. Ensure that you don't get sidetracked by details — this may stop you from bringing out the important elements of your plan or business.

Similarly, listen carefully to any questions asked and make sure you answer clearly and concisely what you have been asked.

Dealing with nerves

“Whether you are presenting to a large group of people or to an individual, your success hinges on the way you deliver your message. Feeling some nervousness before giving a speech is natural and healthy. It shows

Words of Wisdom

“A bore is a person who opens his mouth and puts his feats in it.”

—Henry Ford 1863-1947

you care about doing well. But too much nervousness can be detrimental,” warns Panchmatia.

She suggests that you get to know your audience. Greet them with a smile and with warmth. It's easier to speak to a group of friends than to a group of strangers, so imagine they are your friends.

Practise can make perfect

Carry out your presentation with someone you feel comfortable with, like a family member or friend.

Use this opportunity to perfect your technique and to highlight any areas for improvement.

You could also approach a source of finance or a client where you don't rate your chances too highly, and use it as a testing ground for those times when you do stand a good chance.

Human Xpression suggests the following tips to help you with your presentation skills.

Know your material. If you're not familiar with your material or are uncomfortable with it, your nervousness will increase. Practise your speech and revise it if necessary.

Visualise yourself giving the presentation. Imagine yourself speaking, your voice loud, clear and assured. It may help to picture someone you know who presents well and imagine yourself presenting in the same way.

Make sure you are well prepared. Make good use of any visual aids, handouts, props, samples or technology. Practise well so your presentation looks slick and that props fit in at the appropriate moment.

Don't apologise. If you mention your nervousness or apologise for any problems you think you have with your presentation, you may be calling the audience's attention to something they hadn't noticed. Keep silent.

Plan ahead. Think about any possible questions that may arise so you can be prepared with an answer.

If you are asked something that you can't answer on the spot, just say that you'll send the information through at a later stage. ■

SOURCENOTE: Lloyds TSB Small Business Guide.

Roads report drives small business message home

'BETTER TRANSPORT 2005' is a report published by the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) aiming to highlight the reliance of small businesses on a good road infrastructure. The FSB report calls for adequate parking and better public transport, criticises the low amount the Government spends on transport, and concludes that Britain's road network is failing and small businesses are being undermined as a result.

A summary of the findings is online at <http://www.fsb.org.uk/news.asp?REC=2232>. To download the full report, scroll to the bottom of the following web page and click on the report icon: <http://www.fsb.org.uk/policy/main.asp>

The Institute for Independent Business

FOUNDED IN 1984 in the UK, the Institute for Independent Business (IIB) is now one of the world's largest international networks of business advice providers.

As of 23 December 2004, 2707 carefully-selected men and women had been accredited as IIB Associates.

Experienced professionals

Experienced senior business people in their own right, who have elected to become self-employed business advisers, Associates and Fellows of the IIB have received additional training to enable them to focus accurately and cost-effectively on the needs of clients and prospects.

This ensures that Associates' clients receive the "practical advice that works"—the Institute's motto in every country in which the Institute operates. ■

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I wish I'd said that...

"A burning desire is the greatest motivator of every human action. The desire for success implants 'success consciousness' which, in turn, creates a vigorous and ever-increasing 'habit of success.'"

— Paul J. Meyer

Selling

Distance selling — keeping it legal

Distance selling laws give your customers certain rights.

THE LAW DEFINES distance selling as any consumer transactions that aren't face-to-face.

Quick quiz

Which of the following are exempt from the Consumer Protection (Distance Selling) Regulations 2000? (You will find the answers at the end of this article.)

- a) fresh food and flowers
- b) financial services
- c) second-hand goods
- d) eBay auctions

Customer rights

Distance selling laws give your customers certain rights.

Here's a quick guide to the Consumer Protection (Distance Selling) Regulations 2000, followed by some links to websites that give more detailed information.

• The regulations state that consumers who order goods from you over the phone, by mail order, or via your website, are entitled to a seven-day cooling-off period, during which they

can change their minds and send the goods back.

• The cooling-off period begins when the goods are received, but before that date consumers are also entitled to contact you and cancel their order.

• You must dispatch the goods within thirty days of receiving an order.

• The regulations only apply to consumer purchases, not business-to-business transactions.

• The regulations also apply to services. The seven-day cooling-off period in this case begins on the day the order is made.

One of the best websites offering more details is the Office of Fair Trading's factsheet on distance selling.

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) also has a practical guide to your obligations as regards promotion and what you must tell the customer before they buy.

The ASA's site is worth keeping an eye on for future developments in distance selling - as we mentioned last week, the law is due to change in April 2005.

And the answer to the quiz? Fresh food and flowers are both covered by the Distance Selling Regulations, and so are second-hand goods. Financial services and online auctions such as eBay (answers b and d) are exempt. ■

Brief and to the point

OFT survey on BACS payment system

The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) is asking small business owners for their views on the efficiency of the BACS electronic payment system. It wants to know how BACS could improve service to businesses as part of a Task Force working group's project on innovation in BACS payments. The survey looks at issues such as the clearing cycle and the possibility of surcharges for fast payments.

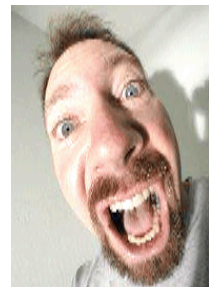
Mobile phone 'roaming' charges may drop

European telecommunications regulators have launched an EU-wide inquiry into 'roaming' charges, which are the sometimes hefty fees that some mobile phone operators levy when users make calls outside their domestic service provider's home range. The European Regulators Group confirmed that all 25 national telecoms watchdogs would investigate mobile operators in their countries to judge whether additional regulation was needed to reduce prices and control roaming rates.

First Aid regulations still effective

A full review of workplace First Aid provisions has found the current system is working well and should not be changed. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) consultation found the majority of business owners and health professionals supported the current framework. Most thought the Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations 1981 are fit for purpose, but that more work could be done to improve understanding of the system.

Have your say!



Add your voice to those of other business people on important business

issues. Each issue of Business Alert will feature a Statement on which you can voice an opinion. Simply select the view that reflects your opinion and email it to me. Your opinion will be submitted to the Institute for Independent Business for inclusion in its continuing business research.

The Statement:

'Small Business Owners are often intimidated by Inland Revenue red tape.'

Please email me with the letter (A-E) expressing your opinion from the following choices:

- A.** Strongly agree
- B.** Agree
- C.** Unsure
- D.** Disagree
- E.** Strongly disagree

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