NATIONAL SALES CONFERENCE/ANNUAL MEETING

SPEECH FOR

DANA MENDENHALL

TITLE: FORGING NEW PATHS TO SUCCESS: EMBRACE CHANGE, EXPLORE CHALLENGES, INSPIRE EXCELLENCE (SUGGESTED)

Hello everyone and thank you all for being here with us at this year’s convention for the National Sales Network. This year our focus is on “Developing New Success Paths: Embrace Change, Expect Challenge.” I want to congratulate each one of you for the tenacity and perseverance you bring to your careers-if it weren’t for the skills you’ve already honed and the natural drive and passion for excellence I am sure you already possess in abundance, you wouldn’t be here today, but guess what? Times are tough and when the going gets tough, we all learn more and valuable lessons! Today’s challenging business environment can be your greatest asset and we are here to discover the tips and tools to foster and support even greater success from right this minute and well into the future. It’s time to capitalize on the “3 C’s”: Change, Complexity and Competition.

We all know how to sell. We do it every day, in every phase of our lives, and we know how to produce a result, sometimes mechanically, but in order to be **excellent** at what we do, and believe me, there is a distinction between a body in a job going through the motions by rote, and a committed, resilient, resourceful person who strives for excellence and tangible results as a confirmation of the passion and dedication he or she applies to the job. We are all here to recognize, evolve and master the excellence within each one of us. To some, this is exciting. To many it’s scary. Our mandate is to be excellent, and in this uncertain economic climate, we must embrace change, launch ourselves into the unknown, and go further than we have dared to go before. In order to do that, we need to be informed and although we are all savvy when it comes to our particular industry or market, remember that it is not possible, in this day and age, to know too much. That is one of the major distinctions of the business context within which we all operate. Complexity abounds and it is up to us to navigate as efficiently and effectively as possible.

In his article featured in the Harvard Business Review, Steve Martin discusses the seven personality traits of successful sales people. Martin teaches sales strategy at the Marshall School of Business at USC and has authored several books on the topic. He has interviewed and consulted with thousands of sales people and has observed what works and what doesn’t work when it comes to the personal environment required to be a dynamic and effective sales professional. Let’s see what he has discovered:

* **Modesty**-Martin discovered that as opposed to “Bravado” which is a trait stereotypically attributed to a sales person, 91% of top sales people exhibited modesty and humility. He points out that this suggests that ostentatious sales people tend to alienate more than engage the client.
* **Conscientiousness**-Top sales people have a sense of duty, responsibility and accountability to their jobs and the results they produce.
* **Achievement Orientation**-this is obvious and I am sure each one of us possesses this trait. To paraphrase Robert Browning, “a person’s reach should exceed his or her grasp.” Shoot for the moon and reach the stars!
* **Curiosity**-82% of highly effective sales people had a hunger for knowledge and information.
* **Lack of Gregariousness**-I personally found this trait interesting. According to Martin, top sales people feel that in order to dominate and succeed in the sales relationship dynamic, those that are less personally involved with the client will tend to have more success. It was discovered that if a sales person is too close to his or her customer, there might be difficulty in establishing dominance and guiding the sale. Of course an integral part of any sales relationship is the human connection established, but it’s interesting to consider maintaining some sort of boundary to support the optimal conditions that will lead to successful deal closure.
* **Lack of Discouragement**-this is a simple one. Positive attitude attracts positive results.
* **Lack of Self**-**Consciousness**-How easily are you embarrassed? How inhibited are you? How much are you wiling to work through your inhibitions in order to be successful? Do you even realize the inhibitions you have? Ultimately, **it’s not about YOU**. It’s about serving the client and providing the product or service that will enhance the client’s life. Let that self-consciousness go!

Every market is tough. Economic conditions are precarious. Technology challenges us to embrace perpetual updates and stay apace with the modern systems and innovations that dominate our world. Competition abounds. What is it going to take for you to begin right here, right now, to be as excellent as you can be?

We’ve taken a look at what may be considered essential characteristics to possess in the sales arena, what conditions do we find in today’s business environment?

Peter Drucker has said, “Knowledge has to be improved, challenged, and increased constantly, or it vanishes.” We also know the major challenges facing businesses today are:

* Accelerating Change
* Increasing Complexity
* Multiplying Competition

What does all of this tell us? We’ve identified the traits of effective sales professionals, we know the universal challenges we face, and we know we have to constantly hit our own personal “refresh” buttons to renew and update our knowledge base and our skill sets. It seems to me that we’re in pretty good shape! All we have to do is **more** than what we’ve **ever** done before!

Let’s face it-Life **begins** at the **end** of your comfort zone. Welcome challenges! Embrace change-because it’s coming quickly-whether you like it or not! Remember that you are **NOT** alone. Everyone around you is experiencing the same conditions-maybe from slightly different angles, but remember that education and focus brings clarity. Bring people together who are not connected and learn from the process and from the interaction of the people. We’re all here at this convention as an expression of community. We share what works and we warn about what doesn’t work.

Attending this convention is a great step in embracing the ever-changing world we live in. Being here demonstrates **YOUR** commitment to success. Let’s take the theories discussed and the abundant energy that has been generated here, and find a way to infuse this inspiration into our productivity and effectiveness in our daily lives. You know how, when you’ve returned from vacation and you wish there were a way to maintain that sense of being refreshed and renewed? I don’t know how many of you have ever taken spa vacations, but there is a place called Canyon Ranch, and they had a slogan years ago, and it simply said, “I’m still at the Ranch!” They encouraged their clients to continue to live the nurturing, positive and healthy lifestyle they discovered during their stay, and in a way, that’s exactly what we’re doing here. Canyon Ranch offered exercise plans and recipes to foster healthy living in the “real world,” and I’d like to suggest some “recipes” to take with you and practice in order to maximize your potential and the potential of those around you.

* **STAY INFORMED**-Do your research. Ask questions. Explore avenues you’ve never been to before. Read more about finances, related industries-not just your own, and immerse yourself in deeper familiarization with your product, market conditions and customer demand. Delve into new areas and unravel the complexities that have you questioning your expertise. Be prepared to “peel the onion,” and by that I mean as each exploration teaches you something new, explore the next layer. Don’t worry-You will never know everything. Just keep going. I know someone whose mantra is, “I don’t know what I don’t know.” It’s true. Neither do any of us, but as we broaden our research, we discover more of what we need to know. Look for the next technology, the next way to connect, and try to discover and anticipate what will be coming down the road, because before you blink it will be here. By the way, this also includes honing your tech skills. It is no longer okay to say, “I don’t use that”-whatever **THAT** may be. You never know when you will need it. Set goals to designate certain times of the day or week to explore new information on finance, technology, and related industries.
* **LIFE BEGINS AT THE END OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE**. I hope your office chair is not too cushy and cozy-and I mean that metaphorically and physically. Don’t get sucked into the “Bermuda triangle” that is your desk or your title, or your current responsibilities. If you are your own boss, get out in the field. Maintain an internal image of what it has been like to meet so many colleagues at this convention and carry with you at all times the memory of meeting and mingling with new people, learning fresh ideas; recreate enthusiasm generated here this week, and replicate it for your colleagues and clients. This gathering is a microcosm of our lives. If enthusiasm can be generated, it can be recreated, and it’s far more contagious and positive than complacency! Bring people together who are not connected and see what new synergies are formed. Just as we have done here, you can feel the energy that’s created in refreshing, unexpected, and exciting environments. You have the power to create that excitement. Schedule a meeting for sharing new ideas or dealing with challenges each of you face and see what solutions and dialogs are created.
* **MASTER THE SKILLS OF EMPATHY AND TEAMWORK**-John Donne taught us, “No man is an island,” … and **neither are YOU**. The art of sales does not exist in a vacuum. It is essential that you know how to master the skills of empathy and teamwork, leadership and inspiring your colleagues and clients. Perfect your skills in team building and de-emphasize archaic hierarchies. Remember that according to Steve Martin’s extensive research, bravado does not work effectively in the sales environment. People relate to partners, not superiors. Practice placing yourselves in the other person’s shoes and treat others as you want to be treated-with excellence, intelligence and genuine curiosity and interest. Your greatest asset is your limitless connection to talent, intelligence and partnership. Learn from the people around you and don’t take anything for granted. Try to sit in a circle as opposed to a hierarchal table so no one can sit at the head. Manage the context and play to peoples’ strengths while still providing the challenge for them to grow. Constantly strive to extend a person’s grasp and they will learn to exceed their reach.
* **ADAPT OR DIE**-Life is kinetic. Nothing stays in the same place. Ever. Embrace change and challenge and know that the only certainty is uncertainty. Don’t assume that what you have today will last for tomorrow, because it won’t, and that goes for all resources-information, funds, client loyalty-all of it. Don’t run on empty. Keep reserves so you have some sense of security to guard against, “What if.” We saw the economy tank in 2008. Think of the lessons you learned from **THAT** wild ride and protect yourselves. If there is one thing that we can learn from crisis, it’s that we can never be too prepared. Set up an emergency fund of supplies, financial resources and contacts-just in case, and be sure to keep that fund-whatever it may be, active and replenished. As you go forth to navigate those unknown waters of the future, knowing you have reserves will support your exploration of exciting new avenues of growth.

It has been my intention to “stir the pot” with you. Start the process of expansion into new and exciting territories in every phase of your sales careers, and even your lives. Embrace new technologies. Welcome those challenges-those experiences will teach you the most and increase the value of your personal and professional “Brand.” Learn from others as you create new partnerships and remember that **you don’t know it all**. Believe in your product, your skills and **yourself**, and reach for new and unchartered levels of excellence, service and compassion in every phase of your sales careers. Be fully informed about your product, industry and competition. Demand more of yourselves and you will inspire others to new levels of excellence and productivity as well.

Nelson Mandela is a person who has truly had his share of challenges and triumphs and has led a full life devoted to the well being of others. I have always found his words to be deeply inspiring and I would like to share some of his thoughts with you as we leave this conference and go forth to conquer new paths to success. His words are timeless and precious and we can all relate to, and carry, this inspiration with us at all times.

* “It always seems impossible until it’s done.”
* “After climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more to climb.”
* “There is no passion to be found in playing small-in settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living.”

Thank you all for being here and sharing this great event and I look forward to learning of all of your magnificent successes!