

United We Stand, Divided We Fall

Aesop said it first in his fable, “The Four Oxen and the Lion,” sometime around 600 B.C. Patrick Henry proclaimed it again in 1799,¹ and the Commonwealth of Kentucky adopted it as its state motto in 1942. Since that time, variations on the phrase have shown up in military calls to action, labor union speeches, and song lyrics from Dwight Yoakam to Pink Floyd to Marvin Gaye. But wouldn’t “united we stand, divided we fall” also make a great mantra for the timeshare industry?

While there are obvious distinctions in the business models of developers, brokers, and resellers, the similarities far outweigh the differences. The same objectives unite big hoteliers, timeshare brokers, or timeshare for sale by owner advertising and marketing companies. The goal of every legitimate player in the timeshare industry today is to provide high-quality customer service, enhance the industry’s credibility, and above all else—make sales. At every level, the fundamentals of good salesmanship and the want, need, and desire to make sales, binds our industry together.

Back to Basics

Elsom Eldridge Jr., is a nationally known sales and marketing guru and is often referred to as the “consultant’s consultant.” Eldridge says, “There are six fundamental keys of selling, and it doesn’t matter whether you are selling toasters, tea sets, or timeshares. Lose sight of the fundamentals, and you lose the sale.”²

The Six Keys to Success in Selling is a boot camp Eldridge has led for sole proprietors, mid-size companies, and major corporations. In his training program, he defines these essential keys as (1) prepare, (2) greet, (3) qualify,

(4) present, (5) close, and (6) follow-up. Said this way, it sounds so simple—and yet, by implementing Eldridge’s back-to-the-basics approach, companies have reported as much a 42-percent increase in their retail sales.³

Technology and marketing are vital to growing your business and increasing your bottom line, but they are only tools that make it easier to put prospective clients in front of your selling staff and to perhaps move those clients a little closer to making a buying decision. In the end, whether a company survives, thrives, or falters always comes down to whether or not the sound fundamentals of selling are entrenched in everything the sales staff does and says.

As Eldridge explains: “The great secret to success in selling remains simple. It is still a matter of finding out what people want and helping them get it.”

It’s All About the Relationship

With \$40 million in direct sales to his credit, Mike Sigers, shares his own simplified views of successful selling on a Web site appropriately known as “Simplenomics.”⁴ He talks a lot about the simplicity of making sales and the significance of building relationships—and where does relationship-building ever matter more than it does in timeshare?

“Never think of selling as an easy way to wealth. It’s *simple*, but it’s not *easy*,” Sigers says. “It’s simple to someone who sees it as an opportunity to serve people by filling their wants. But it’s not easy because it’s hard to convince people to buy, even when it’s to their advantage.”

No one ever bought a timeshare or joined a vacation club without a dream. That vision, that dream, includes the buyer with his/her family on a beach, by a lake, riding a ski lift, or teeing it

up on the back nine. The vision is a glimpse into an imagined future where leisure time is easier, more luxurious, and more accommodating. Each customer’s dream is singular, defined by the set of experiences and expectations s/he shows up with upon arriving at your sales center or with that first visit to your Web site. But it is fed, nurtured, and turned into a burning desire that motivates the customer to commit because of the relationship-building created by your sales staff.

Sigers says, “Everything your company does in service, marketing, advertising, and promotion builds toward the one moment, when your sales associate connects with the prospective buyer and does or says the one thing that enables the buyer to confidently believe that now is the moment and this is the product to buy.”

If It’s Not Broke, Break It!

Many experts regard Chris Daffy as Britain’s number-one specialist on competitive customer service. Daffy has either been a speaker at or the chair of the European Conference on Customer Management for the past seven years. He also speaks for the Association of British Travel Agents conventions, and works with many of the U.K.’s top leisure and hospitality businesses.

Chris Daffy says the adage, “if it’s not broke, don’t fix it,” is an excuse people often hide behind to justify poor results or inaction—an excuse that can easily turn into a mindset of believing that a satisfied customer is a sufficient goal. But research shows that there is little or no link between satisfaction and loyalty, as noted in a 2001 *Harvard Business Review* article, “Why Satisfied Customers Defect.”⁵ When companies are stuck in the “it’s not broke” mental rut, Daffy offers these solutions: “If

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it's not broke, maybe it is, but you just aren't looking hard enough. If it's not broke, find something that is broke and improve that instead. If it's not broke, break it, and start again to create something better."⁶

Daffy suggests considering the following: If you could start your business from scratch, what you would create that would exactly match what customers want and that no competitor already offers or could copy? Before you write it off as impossible to offer your customers products and services that are unique within the timeshare industry, consider the automobile companies, airlines, or manufacturers of consumer electronics that 10 or 15 years ago seemed to be keeping pace with the competition. Perhaps they weren't offering anything distinctive, yet their products were no better and no worse than those of the competitive companies.

Now, consider how many of those companies have fallen by the wayside. Even the companies that look like they are selling exactly what you sell aren't

your competition because if you are truly selling the same thing the same way, then one of you is not going to survive anyway. Good enough, just simply isn't good enough anymore. The sales of pre-construction property, a resale timeshare, or advertising space from which the owner resells his property himself are not competitive businesses. They are all important niche services within the multi-faceted industry of timeshares.

Stand on Your Sales—Elevate Your View

Vacation ownership in all its forms is a strong industry that, united, will only grow stronger. Keep selling simple, and focus on sound fundamentals that your sales associates can believe in and are want-inspiring and relationship-building. Fight the complacency that lulls one into believing that it's enough for your customers to be satisfied.

Implementing these simple steps will grow individual businesses while strengthening the industry across the board. Timeshare companies will

become less about competing for the same prospects and much more about pursuing the prospects most likely to buy this distinctive product or service. There's room in the timeshare business for a lot of good salespeople, and united with the same objectives, our industry can stand tall. ▀

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Endnotes

1. Henry, Patrick. Multiple sources. Speech on the Virginia Kentucky Resolutions, made at the Charlotte Courthouse, VA, March 1799.
2. See www.amazon.com/How-Position-Yourself-Obvious-Expert/ and Eldridge, Elsom, Jr., Telephone interview on July 16, 2007.
3. See www.saleskeys.com. Also quoted by Elsom Eldridge in telephone interview on July 16, 2007; and Eldridge has letter from former VP of Radio Shack stating 42-percent increase.
4. E-mail from, Mike Sigers, July 18, 2007. See www.simplenomics.com.
5. Jones, Thomas O. and Sasser, W. Earl, Jr., "Why Satisfied Customers Defect," Harvard Business Review, OnPoint, 2001.
6. E-mail from Chris Daffy, July 28, 2007. See www.customerserviceuk.com/.