

Strategies: Making sales with a purpose

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Rick Warren, author of "The Purpose Driven Life," has sold more than 10 million copies of his book. The question asked and answered in the book is "Why am I here?"

Now, many of you hard-charging sales types might be wondering what this question has to do with achieving sales results. Perhaps everything. Do the simple math. If more than 10 million people have picked up Rick Warren's book, maybe there is a lesson for sales leaders to learn in managing and motivating their team.

Not convinced? Take time to review a popular TED talk given by Simon Sinek. The take-away from his talk is the importance of defining your company's "why." Sinek shares that most organizations focus on what they do and how they do it. The inspired organizations invest their time communicating to employees and customers their why, their purpose.

Why do you do what you do? Why does your organization exist? What is your purpose?

Years ago, a colleague shared a great story of the work he did with RTD bus drivers. The group came into his training rather disengaged. After all, they were "just" bus drivers. My colleague started asking them about the people who boarded their buses each week. Where were they going? Who were they going to see? By the end of his session, the bus drivers realized the importance of their jobs. They helped transport people home to loved ones, patients to doctors and people to work. They found their why, their purpose in their job.

Take a look at your why. For example, a company that sells video conferencing isn't just selling increased bandwidth and less travel. They are selling the ability to connect people across the world to make sure that relationships are maintained and developed through face-to-face contact rather than one- or two-sentence emails. Salespeople selling restoration services don't just sell repairing a home or building from water or fire damage. They sell getting business up and running so their employees have jobs or homeowners have a home. Insurance producers don't sell coverage -- they sell protection of loved ones.

A sales training colleague was totally caught off guard when she asked one of her clients, a data recovery salesperson, for his value proposition. His reply was full of the why factor. "I protect a company's greatest asset, their data, to make sure business owners don't lose their dream of running a business."

Your company's why may be making lots of money so you can give to those less fortunate. Incorporate purpose into your sales organization and get involved in philanthropic causes. A very successful company in Chicago, North American Corp., recently did a nice job of incorporating purpose into their annual sales meeting.

The company divided its sales reps into teams who then chose a charity. The teams contributed time, effort and donations. Each team presented the work they did with their charity of choice at the national sales meeting. The presentations were inspiring, insightful and motivating. The sales team worked with the homeless, adoption agencies and soldiers overseas. They tapped into their vendor base for donations and contributions. There was a clear sense of pride in working for the company and a good cause. This company did a great job of integrating purpose and profit into their sales meeting.

Matteo Tonello, director of corporate governance for The Conference Board, reports that potential employees perceive companies with strong community involvement as more attractive. He also noted that these corporate cultures reported higher job satisfaction and commitment to the company.

Microsoft is big on community involvement. Since 2005, Microsoft employees have given more than 1 million hours of their time. After Microsoft announced its volunteer program in Egypt, employee satisfaction increased from 61 percent to 91 percent. Not surprising that Bill Gates will be remembered as much for his philanthropy as his business successes.

An good article by Arthur Brooks shares that a number of studies have researched exactly why charity leads to happiness. The surprising conclusion is that giving affects our brain chemistry. For example, people who give often report feelings of euphoria, which psychologists have referred to as the "Helper's High." They believe that charitable activity induces endorphins that produce a very mild version of the sensations people get from drugs like morphine and heroin.

Who do you want to manage? Salespeople that feel good about themselves or a little down about life? Who do your customers want to buy from? An optimistic and cheerful salesperson or depressed and lethargic person?

Operational excellence, sales excellence and innovation are absolutely essential for business success. So is getting clear on your why and purpose. Incorporate all five elements into your 2014 sales plan. It's called doing well by doing good.

Good Selling!

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