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Extraordinary Results Require ONE Thing

Curtis Schroeder, MBA Candidate - Associate Editor, Keller Center Research Report

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Extraordinary Results Require ONE Thing

Curtis Schroeder, MBA Candidate – Associate Editor, Keller Center Research Report

Life's demands and responsibilities, both personally and professionally, increase as we get older. Our families grow, we look to advance further up the corporate ladder, and the pressure to “achieve” only intensifies. We employ countless strategies to alleviate this pressure and boost productivity: some buy self-help books or hire career coaches, and some just accept the pressure as part of the cost of doing business. We might begin to think we need to harness more self discipline, exert more willpower, lower our expectations, or abandon our dreams altogether to achieve some semblance of accomplishment in our lives.

Gary Keller, co-founder and chairman of the board of Keller Williams Realty International (KWRI), and Jay Papasan, executive editor and vice president of publishing at KWRI, contend that achieving results and happiness is much more simple. In fact, Keller and Papasan argue that each of our personal and professional ambitions should point back to ONE question:

“What’s the ONE Thing I can do such that by doing it everything else will be easier or unnecessary?”

This simple strategy – or the “Focusing Question,” as Keller and Papasan call it – can help real estate professionals (and any individual) live purposefully and productively. In their 2013 book, *The ONE Thing*, Keller and Papasan address the importance of identification and implementation through the Focusing Question technique to help individuals accomplish extraordinary results.



To Conquer Mount Everest, Knock Down the Lead Domino

Achieving success is a sequential process – it is not the result of a single decision or activity. Rather, success is achieved incrementally until a specific goal or task is accomplished. To illustrate the power of sequential success, the authors cite physicist Lorne Whitehead. Professor Whitehead’s experimentation reveals that a single domino can knock down another domino that is up to 50 percent larger than itself. Using this logic and considering a sequence of dominos, each 50 percent larger than the one before, the 10th domino in the sequence would be roughly as tall as NFL quarterback Peyton Manning, and the 31st domino would be 3,000 feet taller than Mount Everest. By simply setting the first domino in motion, a domino larger than Mount Everest can eventually fall.

The point the authors make is that taking the first step (and setting subsequent steps into motion) is crucial. There is power in each decision we make and activity we engage in, so we must make each one count. Keller and Papasan believe this all points back to the ONE Thing – the lead domino – that sets extraordinary results in motion. Identifying your ONE Thing is an important part of the process, and requires significant thought and consideration.

Consider beginning your day with the Focusing Question: *What is the ONE Thing I can do today such that everything else will be easier or unnecessary?* Keller and Papasan recommend starting with the “big stuff” – spiritual life, physical health, relationships, job, business, and financial life (and in that order). By knocking-down the lead domino, you set your goals in motion and give yourself the opportunity to achieve results greater than you imagined you could achieve.

A Great Question and a Great Answer

As asking Focusing Questions become more habitual, they can be reframed to address specific areas of life and business. To achieve maximum results, though, the authors contend that there are *good* questions and there are *great* questions. To help readers identify the difference and to leverage the power of a great question, they introduce a four-pronged model of question types: 1) *Small & Specific Questions* (e.g., “What can I do to increase sales by 5% this year?”), 2) *Small & Broad Questions* (e.g., “What can I do to increase sales?”), 3) *Big & Broad Questions* (e.g., “What can I do to double sales?”), and 4) *Big & Specific Questions* (e.g., “What can I do to double sales in six months?”).

Great questions are *Big & Specific* – they contain a big goal (“What can I do to double sales...”) and a specific timeframe (“...in six months”) for accomplishing it. The questioning process also requires individuals to consider a second component, though – the answer. Answers compel us to think beyond “what” and focus on “how.”

Keller and Papasan also note that there are *good* answers and *great* answers, and that answers fall into three categories: 1) *Doable* (easiest to seek, within scope of skills and experience), 2) *Stretch* (within reach, but at the farthest end of skills and experience), and 3) *Possibility* (exists beyond what is already known and being done).

Great answers are *Possibility* answers – rather than checking-off a task from the list, possibility answers require individuals to engage in a transformative process. Through benchmarking (i.e., leveraging the research and experience of other individuals or companies) and trending (i.e., anticipating tomorrow’s outcomes), possibility answers are achievable. Although this may be the more challenging and time-intensive approach, the potential outcomes are much greater.

Live With Purpose, By Priority, and For Productivity

Identifying and implementing the ONE Thing are two separate tasks. Keller and Papasan understand that without implementation, the ONE Thing strategy is rendered ineffective. The implementation formula the authors suggest is framed by three tenets: to *Live With Purpose*, *Live By Priority*, and *Live for Productivity*.

Live With Purpose

Living with purpose means living for something “bigger” than yourself. Having a purpose driving all you do can ultimately bring you meaning and joy. You can find your purpose by first seeking to understand what drives you: *What keeps you going in the face of adversity? What gets you excited?* Pick a direction and identify a purpose – your purpose can change, but you should begin seeking it now.

Live By Priority

In business or personal life, the priority you should focus on is the one that most effectively helps you achieve your purpose. There may be many priorities across the different areas of your life, but when you seek to prioritize you will discover there is one priority that is the most important. To begin the prioritization process, first set a future goal. Write the goal down on paper, and then write down the necessary steps to achieve it. Visualizing the steps will help you identify top priorities and put together a plan of action for implementation.

Live For Productivity

Productivity begins by taking the first step. Leverage the work you accomplished in identifying your purpose and priorities and then get to work. Keller and Papasan argue that the best way to make your ONE Thing happen is to “time block” – that is, setting time aside time each day to focus on accomplishing your ONE Thing. Do not let yourself get distracted during this block (put away your phone, email) and do whatever you can to spend the full amount of time you allot. The authors believe your time block is the most important meeting of the day, so you need to protect it.

Purpose is the guiding force that drives prioritization. Prioritization promotes productivity. And productive activities yield results. While most individuals look first to be productive, they often fail to realize the process that makes productivity possible – and that productivity is best achieved through purpose-driven prioritization.

What This Means for Real Estate Professionals

Application of these concepts across all facets of life is important for holistic development and achievement. Real estate professionals can use this framework in daily business activities, as

well, to drive revenue, improve customer satisfaction, and to achieve a more meaningful work life, among others.

Consider how you might identify and implement the ONE Thing to impact your business:

As A Real Estate Professional...

- What is the ONE Thing I can do to improve *(big goal)* by *(specific timeframe)*?
- What is the ONE Thing I can do to ensure I *(big goal)* by *(specific timeframe)*?
- What is the ONE Thing I can do to make my company more *(big goal)* by *(specific timeframe)*?

As A Real Estate Professional...

- My *purpose* is to _____.
- My *priority* is to _____.
- I will achieve *productivity* by blocking time and focusing on my ONE Thing *(days)* from *(time)* to *(time)*.

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Do Your Customers Really Want A Relationship With You?

Christopher P. Blocker, PhD, Lance A. Bettencourt, PhD, Mark B. Houston, PhD, and Daniel J. Flint, PhD

“Success depends on building relationships with your customers!” This mantra has been unquestioned for decades. But, do your customers *really* want a relationship with you and your company? The answer is both yes and no. Yes, they do...but not necessarily in the traditional sense you may have been led to believe. According to research that we (Mark Houston, Dan Flint, and Chris Blocker) recently published (*Journal of Consumer Research*, February 2012), along with studies in progress with Lance Bettencourt, the conventional perception of the customer relationship is being challenged.

Some of the most common selling advice, training, and research suggest that salespeople can get ahead by building relationships that are characterized by strong interpersonal friendships with buyers. Most of this advice, however, is based on theories developed to explain “expressive relationships,” meaning relationships with friends, families, and romantic partners. Can these theories from the personal world be appropriately applied to help firms build successful buyer-seller relationships?

In our research, we explored the very idea of a “relationship” between a buyer and seller using in-depth interviews with 38 experienced business buyers over a period of several years (over 1200 pages of transcripts). Because most research has focused on why *suppliers* should try to build relationships with their customers, we wanted to get the *buyer’s* viewpoint. We hoped to glean insights into the meaning of relationships and the perceived benefits to buyers. Our



business-to-business research revealed that applying the “relationship metaphor” can be problematic in the world of sales, and our findings provide new insights for real estate professionals looking to manage ongoing sales interactions with important commercial buyers.

Relationships Versus Value Creation

Our research certainly reveals that buyers use the terminology of personal relationships (e.g., close friend) and they frequently employ relationship analogies (e.g., dating). However, when you study buyers’ communications closely, it becomes clear that commercial buyers measure the quality of their supplier relationships almost entirely based on their business performance

implications; most viewed the interpersonal elements of a relationship through a lens of instrumentality. The buyers clearly preferred to deal with suppliers with whom interactions were “friendly” and “pleasant,” and being able to trust a supplier’s integrity and reliability is crucial. But at the end of the day, such considerations were overshadowed by the value created by the supplier’s products and services relative to the buyer’s business needs. In other words, even the interpersonal elements of a relationship were evaluated against the question “Does it help me get things done?”

Here are a few examples from our research of how buyers viewed relationships with suppliers. Some, like Drew, a buyer in transportation services, confessed to “using” relationships strategically. For key suppliers, he would engage in extensive social interactions, “acting friend-like.” And although he described it as “like a marriage,” he went on to clarify that only as the suppliers proved their worth by increasing his profits would he continue with the efforts. Stated starkly, “relationships” are sometimes used as a tool for influencing suppliers (a “social lubricant”). Others, such as Ted, a 40-ish buyer in construction supplies, explicitly kept “arms-length distance” from suppliers so that he could always do “what was best for his company” without the “complications” of friendly interactions. Still others, like Dave, who worked in consumer packaged goods, and Rachel, a buyer for a non-profit, explicitly stated that they did not want friendships with suppliers. They did consider a few salespeople to truly be friends, but only outside of work. Dave’s descriptions brought to mind the classic Warner Bros. cartoon characters, Ralph the Wolf and Sam the Sheepdog, who were adversaries by day, but after “clocking out” of their respective jobs (hunting sheep and protecting sheep, respectively), they were friends.

An unavoidable fact in professional relationships, including the commercial real estate context, is that the buyer is an agent of his or her firm, with compensation and employment security connected to the financial outcomes of their buying activities. The buyers in our sample were attuned to the tension this creates. Although relationships can create an environment of trust, many aspects of a genuine, expressive relationship put the buyer in a tough situation when their firm’s best interests do not coincide with a “friend’s” best interests.

Some worried that engaging socially with a supplier (e.g., “taking tickets to a Dodgers game”) would compromise their judgment or damage their credibility within their own firm. Several buyers who explicitly acted relationally in order to get more favorable terms from a supplier expressed personal feelings of “guilt,” apologizing that “I sound like a manipulator.” Many of the arms-length buyers had stories of relying on “friendship” in some past business decision, only to have been burned by the supplier - a “mistake” that they did not intend to ever repeat.

Implications for Managing Ongoing Interactions with Commercial Customers

It seems that a true, expressive relationship is not really what most customers want. So what do our findings imply for the commercial real estate industry? Here are some things to consider.

Long-term, buyers stay with firms that deliver better value than is available from alternative firms. Personal relationships do not alter this fact except in the short-term. At the same time, relationships are of incredible importance for their instrumental value - they open up channels of communication that can enable business partners to accomplish great things together.



So, it is important to recognize that the power of a personal “relationship” does not come from social benefits; rather, it comes from the buyer recognizing the value that the real estate firm can provide them over time. *Thus, relationship building is not an end unto itself;* instead, a relationship offers connections to your customers that allows you to gain insights into ways to create better value for them. It also can create an environment in which the customer gives a bit of “grace” when

inevitable conflicts arise. While it is good to have salespeople who are friendly, it is better to have salespeople who have the interpersonal skills needed to help buyers get their jobs done better (e.g., listening, asking good questions, clear communications, and so on).

Further, to avoid over-reliance on relationship thinking, there may be some benefit to training your sales force to view and to talk about interactions with buyers using terminology other than with relationship verbiage. A change in terminology can be powerful, because invoking the metaphor of a relationship conjures up notions that over-emphasize emotional bonds and draw attention away from the instrumental motives that drive long-term partnerships. So, perhaps a better metaphor for viewing and managing commercial real estate interactions is that of *connections*.

Connections – a metaphor from electrical circuits or computer science – link things together so that resources can flow for an instrumental purpose. And in practice, useable and reliable connections are selected to fulfill resource needs. In the same way, connections between commercial real estate buyers and firms enable work to get done. These individuals do not have to be “in” a relationship; rather, they can connect when a connection would be useful to achieve a goal achievement (and disconnect otherwise). The only connections that get used repeatedly are those connections that reliably create value. The connections metaphor focuses a salesperson’s attention back on task achievement or creating value for the buyer.

Finally, our research also has implications for measuring the quality of customer relationships. Buyers use relationship language, but not with the same connotation as when such language is used in everyday conversation. Thus, rather than asking general questions about a buyers’ satisfaction with their “relationship” with your firm or a particular salesperson, be more precise

in your language. Measures of desired behaviors and instrumental results tied to the relationship, such as whether your firm does a good job of taking the time to understand business objectives and offering creative ideas to grow the customer's business, are more likely to be uniformly understood by buyers.

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Intergenerational Relationship Selling in Real Estate

Michael L. Mallin, PhD and Ellen Bolman Pullins, PhD

The demographic makeup of the workforce is changing. Top-end Baby Boomers are turning 65 years of age and are rapidly moving towards retirement. The estimated 53 million members of the Millennial generation, born after 1981, have been earmarked to fill the needs of the 21st century workforce (Bartlett 2005). Nowhere have these trends had a bigger impact than in the field of professional sales. With such a potentially large influx of younger sellers entering the workforce, there will inevitably be generational issues to contend with as they attempt to build relationships with buyers who may be upwards of 30 years older.



Given this trend, the purpose of this paper is to investigate what we term intergenerational relationship selling (IGRS). We define IGRS as a salesperson who must establish relationships with buyers from another generation. This has obvious implications for the large Millennial sales force entering the workforce, as they will be faced with dealing with buyers who may be decades older. We discuss this trend relative to selling in the real estate market AS it impacts brokers, agents, and customers (home sellers and buyers).

Examination of IGRS can readily be studied through the lens of social identity theory. This describes the inherent social/relationship problems stemming from issues due to the inequities between groups and their fit. Based on structured interviews with Millennial salespeople, we discuss the relevance of our findings on the buyer-seller interaction in the real estate market.

Background: Challenges of the Millennial Salesperson

“... Some customers will automatically throw up a red flag. You know they are thinking how old are you, 22 or 23? You don't have enough experience to know what you are doing...”

These illustrative comments from one of the young salespeople we spoke with sums up the core challenge Millennial salespeople face. Based on their age, the Millennial salesperson seems to be subjected to a level of scrutiny and discrimination from buyers that creates an added layer of frustrating obstacles to an already challenging trade. Due to inexperience, their competence, credibility, dependability, and overall ability to support customer needs are questioned. Compared to the generations preceding them, Millennials are more hopeful of the future, ambitious, and goal-oriented. They are more likely to lead by collaboration, and seek loyalty in

relationships (Lancaster and Stillman 2003). They view work as a way to make an impact on the world and as an opportunity to be creative with other committed people rather than viewing work as means to get results (Furlanetto et al. 2004) and personal mobile devices and email are acceptable means of communication.

The social psychological paradigm of social identity theory (SIT) can be used to explain the implications of IGRS. SIT involves self-categorizing, which entails a process where individuals within the same category emphasize similarities and individuals in dissimilar categories emphasize differences (Dwyer, Richard, and Shepherd 1998). Self-categorization is commonly based on age (Messick and Mackie 1989) and causes members of a category to form stereotypes toward the members of another. Typically, such stereotypical behavior results in in-group favoritism, inter-group discrimination and conflict, and preference for the in-group over the out-group (Richard and Grimes 1996; Riordan and Shore 1997; Tsui, Egan and O'Reilly III 1992). By nature of their age and generational differences, Millennial salespeople would represent members of the out-group while more mature-aged buyers would belong to the in-group. Inter-group discrimination and conflict here would be any selling obstacle that the salesperson faces due to his/her age group (i.e., generation). To compensate for dissatisfaction with their psychologically disadvantaged status, members of the out-group (e.g., Millennial salespeople) will try to improve their social identity through "identity management strategies" (van Knippenberg 1989). This involves an individual group member's attempt to alter an unfavorable comparison. Such strategies might center on demonstrating levels of knowledge, credibility, dependability, professionalism, and so forth that exceeds what is expected of the buyer. This notion is also confirmed based on some of the examples that our sample reported.

Method

To test our understanding of how younger salespeople feel and react to their age disadvantage, we used semi-structured interviews to collect accounts of actual occurrences and analyzed the content to support our findings. We identified twenty-four Millennial-aged salespeople that would be willing to talk to us via referrals from current business student and faculty networks. Subjects were provided a definition of Intergenerational Relationship Selling (i.e., building a relationship in order to sell to a buyer from a different generation) and asked a series of open-ended questions. A member of the research team categorized a series of quotes according to the themes identified.

Findings

Our research finds that Millennial salespeople seem to be frustrated and dissatisfied with their inability to relate to older generations on an interpersonal level. Despite this challenge, they feel confident that they can sell across generations. We identified five distinct identity management strategies that Millennial salespeople use to overcome their seemingly disadvantaged out-group

status. These strategies are presented below and an illustrative summary table is included as the paper's appendix.

Overarching Theme

A common theme across subjects was that Millennial salespeople go into a sales encounter with the expectation that they will successfully relate to their buyers only to emerge disappointed. In reality, most found it hard to relate to older generations on an interpersonal level. The following are a few excerpts from the responses:

"... We had zero in common. When he (the customer) talked of politics or business issues, I had no idea what he was talking about. I felt I was not up to date on the issues that he was most interested in. Small talk was an all time low. The hardest parts were the 'remember whens' - because you don't remember when ..."

"On a couple of occasions, customers would tell me that they have a daughter my age. In one particular case a customer acted like I didn't know what I was talking about. He even asked me if he should be working directly with my boss..."

Strategies Used to Deal with IGRS Challenges

Having established that IGRS selling is a real issue for Millennial salespeople, we turn our attention to the strategies that these salespeople use to compensate for their seemingly disadvantaged out-group status. One very clear pattern emerged where Millennial salespeople were able to credit successful sales relationships to **establishing similarities** with their buyers:

"I deal with a customer who grew up in the same area as me but only 30 years before. I got to know him, and we shared some stories and found some things in common."

"...one of my clients in his early 40's likes to run and bike – I also like to do that. He was easier to crack ..."

"I did have some clients who would comment that they had a son/daughter my age. It was a fair rapport builder. Depending on their social style and our relationship, I would ask about their kids. Most of them liked to talk/brag about their kids."

We also found that **establishing credibility** was a key to dealing with IGRS challenges. In situations where a group is viewed as different and in particular as less experienced, credibility as well as demonstration of product knowledge took on an increased level of importance:

"When I go into a call, I come equipped with numbers or data ... this tends to make me look more credible in the customer's eyes ...I think that building credibility is a major issue here since we do not have the age and experience."

“... I feel that I need to show the customer that I know my trade despite my age...”

Another identity management strategy that emerged was to **establish dependability**. They try to produce actions to assure their buyers view them dependable:

“...so you say to them - yes I am new, and I am young, but I am willing to learn. I am willing to find the answer for you ... I can help you...”

“It is more important to build relationships with customers and other businesses by following up with any promises you make...”

A **focus on professionalism** was considered necessary to overcome difficulties relating to older generation buyers. Demonstrating professionalism signals to the buyer that the salesperson respects his/her time, position of power, and need to accomplish business goals. This provides an opportunity for buyers to re-evaluate the seller and potential for a more satisfactory relationship to develop:

“My overall strategy is to be polite. I always begin by calling someone Mr. or Ms. until they tell me otherwise ... I want to show them the proper respect...”

“A lot of times, they don't want to talk to a 'kid' so you have to come across as a very mature, well spoken person.”

For some, they are able to **use their youth and energy** to overcome unfair age comparisons. Our interviews revealed that some were actually motivated by the age gap and used their energy, personality, and character to create a positive selling advantage:

“Being younger provides some positives ... having more energy, not having to worry about a family ... the hunger to succeed seems to be a function of someone my age. Older customers tend to respond to all this favorably.”

“...customers see the fire and enthusiasm that I bring, and they get excited when I am around...”

Conclusions and Implications for Selling in the Real Estate Market

Based on our interview data with Millennial salespeople, we can confirm that intergenerational selling challenges exist and salespeople must deal with and overcome the difficulties from the age/generation gaps with their buyers. Our findings have implications that can be discussed relative to the real estate sales environment.

From a managerial standpoint, brokers of real estate agencies must recognize that hiring younger agents (particularly those directly from college) will require additional training effort and

investment. We found that few sales organizations include IGRS as a training topic (yet salespeople mentioned that they wish they had exposure to this type of training). At the very least, brokers should make their younger salespeople aware that they are going to face such issues and challenges and invest time to coach and role-play scenarios – teaching young sellers to respond appropriately when faced with a comment, objection, or IGRS obstacle as exemplified from our research findings.

For agents who find that the majority of their customers are from older generations, having an awareness of the likelihood that they may be initially judged relative to their age can be an advantage in of itself. Sensitivity to this issue may encourage younger agents to establish their credibility by investing extra time and effort to prepare housing market data, neighborhood “comps,” trends, and home selling/buying strategies and present this information to their clients during initial meetings. Keeping and being on time for appointments and home showings will be a clear signal of dependability. Preparation and presentation of a marketing plan for selling a home will demonstrate professionalism and maturity. Such actions, demonstrated during the beginning stages of a customer relationship, will serve to squelch any concerns of inexperience due to youth.



From the buyer’s perspective, IGRS can provide some advantages. A client from the Baby Boom generation may not have bought or sold a home in decades. Changes in real estate valuations, the ubiquity of online real estate resources (home search engines, transaction information, etc.), and available information about neighborhoods (e.g., school ratings, tax basis, etc.) are valuable resources that make the home buying/selling process more efficient. It is well documented that the

Millennial generation is the most tech-savvy group (Howe and Strauss 2000) and buyers stand to gain from these young agents’ proficiencies using social media, online search engines, and mobile devices (e.g., data phones, iPads, etc.).

As the buyer population ages and the number of Millennial salespeople entering the workforce increases, understanding the challenges and strategies of this generation of salespeople are of paramount importance for both theory and practice. Millennial salespeople must be equipped to deal with the age disadvantage they may encounter. Strategies they use will serve them well in fostering productive buyer-seller relationships.

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Appendix

IGRS: Social Identity Management Strategies and Findings

<i>STRATEGY</i>	<i>FINDINGS</i>	<i>QUOTES</i>
<i>Establishing Similarities</i>	<i>Millennial salespeople attempt to establish common ground/interests with their customers.</i>	<i>“I deal with a customer who grew up in the same area only 30 years before. I got to know him, and we shared some stories and found some things in common.”</i>
<i>Establishing Credibility</i>	<i>Establishing credibility seems to be a viable mechanism for Millennial salespeople to cope with their disadvantaged out-group status.</i>	<i>“When I go into a call, I come equipped with numbers and data... this tends to make me look more credible in the customer’s eyes...”</i>
<i>Establishing Dependability</i>	<i>Millennial salespeople attempt to establish a sense of dependability with their customers early on in the buyer/seller relationship.</i>	<i>“...to make the customer feel that I am dependable, I need to go the extra mile for them...”</i>
<i>Demonstrating Professionalism</i>	<i>Millennial salespeople need to demonstrate a high level of professionalism.</i>	<i>“... the customer called my presentation ‘professional’ because I grouped their needs and went over each of them one by one. I told them ‘what was in it for them’ and kept it very clear and crisp...”</i>
<i>Using Youth as an Advantage</i>	<i>Millennials can use their energy, personality and character to create a positive selling advantage.</i>	<i>“...for me, it (IGRS) is an advantage. Since I have less experience using these products, I am able to ask a lot of questions and make them feel that they are helping me understand more of the products’ applications.”</i>

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It Takes Two to Tango: How Empathy Affects Sales Encounters

Jan Wieseke, PhD, Anja Geigenmüller, PhD, and Florian Kraus, PhD

In sales, retailing, or service businesses, employees' performance during personal encounters is the most influential driver of customer satisfaction. Numerous studies strengthen the fact that employees' behavior shapes customers' service evaluations, their trust in a service employee, and their desire to continue their relationship with a service provider. Accordingly, service firms are advised to hire employees who are willing and able to take the customer's perspective, to sense and respond to a customer's emotions, and to display individual attention and caring for customer needs. Likewise, there is anecdotal evidence that customers' attention and concern for service employees can enhance smooth and harmonious service interactions. Customers who are sensitive to service employees' working conditions are more likely to acknowledge an employee's efforts, which may countervail their discomfort with an unsatisfactory service outcome.

Although the reciprocal character of customer-employee interactions and the influence of empathy on the experience of these interactions are widely acknowledged, studies on effects of empathy in personal encounters are scant. Therefore, we sought to understand how employee and customer empathy govern service interactions. Our study identifies two main effects of empathy. We found that *customer empathy strengthens the positive effect of employee empathy on customer satisfaction*, leading to more “symbiotic interactions.”

The findings also indicate that *customer empathy is able to mitigate negative effects of customer dissatisfaction on customer loyalty*. Obviously, empathic customers are likely to respond to a dissatisfying encounter with “forgiveness.”



These findings have important implications for real estate professionals, specifically in the areas of *hiring and training sales agents* and *managing clients*.

Employee and Customer Empathy

Despite a considerable ambiguity regarding the nature and conceptualization of empathy, we contend that empathy is best understood as a multidimensional construct comprising cognitive and emotional constituents. We define employee empathy as an employee's ability to sense and react to a customer's thoughts, feelings, and experiences during a service encounter (Castleberry and Shepherd 1993). Imagine a typical home-purchasing decision. For real estate agents, it is critical to anticipate their clients' wishes and to guide them through the decision process. Since

searching a new home is a challenging and emotion-laden process, responding to verbalized needs would not be sufficient to provide a satisfying purchasing experience. Employee empathy would therefore enable the agent to react to the client's feelings and thoughts in order to manage the service encounter successfully.

Further, we identify customer empathy as a customer's ability to fully recognize the employee's perspective. We propose that customer empathy fosters an increased understanding of the employee's experience during the service encounter. Empathy strengthens a client's ability to competently interact with the real estate agent and to display behaviors appropriate for such a complex purchasing situation.

Symbiosis and Forgiveness in Service Interactions

Prior research reveals two main effects of empathy in employee-customer interactions. First, empathy strengthens the ability to competently interact with others and to display behaviors appropriate for a given situation or person (Redmond 1989). By fostering a more complete and accurate understanding of the interaction partner, empathy elevates the ability to predict or anticipate the actions or reactions of others (Hakansson and Montgomery 2003). In addition, adapting behaviors to the other's thoughts and feelings and acting for the benefit of the other facilitates reciprocal actions (de Waal 2008). We conclude that empathy on the part of the employee and the customer enhances mutual adaptation in service encounters, which results in "symbiotic" customer-employee interactions and a satisfying service experience (Varadarajan and Rajaratnam 1986). We call this interaction effect of customer and employee empathy "symbiosis," indicating mutual alignment between the parties involved in service encounters.

Second, empathy relates positively to actions intended to help others. In particular, sensing and understanding another's distress increases one's willingness to advance the other individual's welfare (Batson and Shaw 1991). Further, the motivation to help is an integral component of forgiveness, which involves a decrease in revenge-seeking and an increase in benevolence (McCullough and Hoyt 2002). Having the ability to understand and relate to another's thoughts, feelings, and experiences increases the likelihood of forgiving encountered mistakes (Thompson et al. 2005). As previous studies suggest, individuals with greater empathy tend to respond to interpersonal hurt with less anger and greater indulgence than do those with less empathy (Konstam, Chernoff, and Deveney 2001; McCullough and Worthington 1995). We term this effect of empathy "forgiveness," referring to the fact that empathy is capable of alleviating dissatisfying experiences in social interactions.

We postulated and tested three hypotheses. First, referring to prior research, we expected employee empathy to relate positively to customer satisfaction. Having a better understanding of their customers' needs and wants, empathic sales agents are able to tailor their interactive behaviors to the individual client. Second, we hypothesized that customer empathy elevates the effect of employee empathy on customer satisfaction. Empathic clients are able to recognize the

efforts sales agents make to satisfy their clients. A favorable perception of an agent's efforts, in turn, increases the level of customer satisfaction. Third, we put forward a hypothesis regarding the "forgiveness effect" of empathy in service interactions. Research in social psychology reveals that an individual's disposition to empathize influences responsibility attributions for negative outcomes. Empathic individuals are more apt to make benevolent attributions when an unfavorable event occurs. This provides rationale for the "forgiveness" of customers – that is, customers who are better able to sense a situation that causes a failure are more inclined to react to an unsatisfactory event in an indulgent, benevolent manner.

Research Study and Empirical Findings

To test our hypotheses on the symbiosis and the forgiveness effect in employee-customer interactions we chose the context of travel sales. Travel agencies are characterized by (1) individual and interpersonal interactions with the customer (including verbal and nonverbal exchange) and (2) a significant influence salespeople may exert on the customer during the interaction. Furthermore, travel sales require intense collaboration between the travel agent and the customer.

Dyadic data were obtained using face-to-face interviews with travel agents and customers in different locations (metropolitan areas, smaller cities). Research assistants visited selected travel agencies and administered the questionnaires to frontline employees and customers who were present on the day of the interviews. To achieve the best possible response and matching rates between employees and customers, members of the research team personally administered questionnaires to travel agents. Subsequently, the interviewers spent one day in the travel agencies and asked customers for an interview after their interaction with a travel agent. We used code numbers to match frontline employees and customer questionnaires.



Data analysis provided support for all hypotheses. We found a positive effect of employee empathy on customer satisfaction. Hence, an agent's level of empathy drives its client's satisfaction with a service. Further, our research supports the proposed "symbiosis effect." The higher the level of customer empathy, the stronger was the impact of the employee's empathy on the customer's satisfaction. Finally, data supported our proposition regarding the "forgiveness effect."

In line with prior research, our study revealed a direct, strong and significantly positive impact of customer satisfaction on loyalty. As expected, clients' satisfaction with a service results in higher customer loyalty. Beyond that, we identified a significant interaction effect between customer

empathy and customer satisfaction on customer loyalty: The effect size of customer satisfaction on customer loyalty decreases when customer empathy is high. In contrast, when customer empathy is low, the effect size of customer satisfaction on customer loyalty increases. These results provide support for our proposition that customer empathy mitigates the negative effect of customer dissatisfaction on customer loyalty. These results indicate that for empathic customers, satisfaction with the service encounter is less important to customer loyalty than it is for customers who are less empathic.

Implications for Real Estate Professionals

Hiring and Training Sales Agents

Real estate agencies need to hire sales people capable of sensing client expectations and fostering symbiotic client–agent interactions. Candidate profiles, search mechanisms, and recruiting methods should therefore address not only professional skills but also the ability to apprehend and react to customers’ thoughts, feelings, and intentions during a service encounter. Sales agents must be able to walk in the shoes of their clients, to sense and to share their clients’ emotions.

Moreover, real estate agencies should foster their agents’ abilities to recognize and to respond to different client characteristics. To this end, measures including role playing, videotaping, and mentoring programs are valuable instruments. Managers should be aware of the relevance of knowledge sharing between experienced and inexperienced employees regarding relevant customer characteristics, strategies of recognition, and responses to cope with those characteristics. Helping agents to manage their own emotions and to respond verbally and nonverbally to clients in an appropriate manner is of particular importance with regard to the relevance of personal interactions in home-purchasing situations. This is especially true for situations when agents must respond to clients’ expressions of anger or dissatisfaction.

Managing Clients

In order to trigger symbiotic service encounters, agencies can try to match clients and sales agents by their personality types and their language styles. Client pre-encounter profiles allow a matching of clients and sales agents, enabling the client to be directed to an agent with whom he or she is most likely to experience mutual understanding and smooth interaction. Service providers for call centers such as eLoyalty’s Integrated Contact Solutions (www.teletech.com) employ this approach to steer each caller to an employee who best matches the caller’s personality (Boyd 2010). From the initial contact, the system records and analyzes a caller’s language pattern so as to create and enrich his or her personality profile. In doing so, the level of each employee’s empathy is leveraged. Moreover, this way of “interaction routing” enhances communication quality between the interactants and, hence, symbiotic interactions.

An easy way to implement this approach is to ask clients to reveal their communication preferences themselves. Before a sales encounter takes place, clients could be asked to answer some questions regarding preferred personality types and individual abilities. Alternatively, agents could ask their clients to assess the quality of interactions and communication during the sales encounter in order to find the best match between clients and sales agents.

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Diversification and the Rise of Cultural Sales

Xiao-Ping Chen, PhD, Dong Liu, PhD, and Rebecca Portnoy, PhD

Since 1970, the U.S. immigrant population has risen dramatically. In fact, foreign-born citizens represent 12.5% of the entire U.S. population (Census Bureau 2008). As would be expected, this dramatic shift in the makeup of the population represents an important shift in the makeup of the U.S. workforce.



As scholars study the impact of a diversified workforce, significant evidence shows that workplace diversity is beneficial at the firm-level, helping companies generate higher earnings, net profits, and return on investment (Hartenian & Gudmunson 2000; Herring 2009; McCormick & Kinloch 1986; Erhardt, Werbel, & Shrader 2003). Other studies, though, have shown less-favorable impact of diversification on corporate culture, including greater misperception, miscommunication, and increased tension, among others (e.g., Adler & Gundersen 2008; Thomas 1991; Tsui et al. 1992).

Although the specific impact will continue to be debated, a more culturally diverse business environment is an important reality for the real estate industry. Not only does a changing population result in a more diverse *workplace*, it also represents a shift in *customer* demographics. As minorities and immigrants are the fastest growing home-buying segment, real estate professionals must understand and learn how to leverage the opportunities that exist within a diversifying population (PR Newswire 2010).

Motivational Cultural Intelligence and Diversity Climate – Our Study

Our research team set out to examine the area of motivational cultural intelligence (CQ) as a driver of cross-cultural sales performance. Motivational CQ refers to an individual's ability to direct and sustain energy toward learning about and functioning in situations characterized by cultural differences (Ang et al. 2007). Relative to other dimensions of cultural intelligence or CQ (e.g., cognitive CQ, behavioral CQ), we believe that motivational CQ is the most accurate in terms of predicting an employee's cross-cultural task performance. Therefore, using motivational CQ as a foundation, we sought to take an integrative view of *individual motivational CQ*, *firm motivational CQ*, and *firm diversity climate* to learn more about how these variables influence employee cultural sales (i.e., the number of transactions occurring between people of different cultural origins).

The real estate industry provides a strong context to study these variables, as real estate professionals serve in a role that directly engages the increasingly diverse workforce and customer base in the U.S.

For our study, we surveyed 305 real estate sales agents from 26 real estate firms in the northwest United States using both online and paper-based questionnaires. In addition to demographic data, our survey measured four key variables shown in the appendix.

What We Learned

Our research provides strong support for the impact of both the individual real estate sales professional's personal motivations and for the impact of the real estate firm's ability to shape cross-cultural sales exchanges. Specifically, our data show:

1. *An individual real estate professional's motivational cultural intelligence (CQ) is positively related to volume of his/her sales exchanges which span the cultural divide.* This means that as real estate brokerage firms seek to develop a customer base that reflects the diverse marketplace, identifying and recruiting individuals to represent the firm who have higher levels of motivational cultural intelligence is a key strategy. Hiring managers might consider the full battery of questions that we used to measure this trait by considering our [full article](#).
2. *The impact of the firm's motivational cultural intelligence (CQ) shapes the level of cross-cultural sales that the firm generates.* The individual real estate agent's motivational cultural intelligence, assuming a moderate to high level, will be enhanced (in academic circles, we call this a moderating effect) by the firm's motivational cultural intelligence. Leaders of real estate firms and brokerage houses can facilitate the organization's motivational cultural intelligence by creating opportunities for agents to engage across cultural boundaries in non-sales-related situations which will serve to enhance the agents' ability and motivation to do the same in the real estate sales role. The end result will be even greater cross-cultural sales exchanges which will allow the firm to penetrate more diverse markets.
3. *Firms that provide a climate in which diversity is acknowledged and even celebrated provide a context that enhances the individual's motivational cultural intelligence (CQ).* Offering diversity training, having an agency in which everyone, regardless of cultural background, has opportunities for leadership and clearly celebrating the firm's rich cultural tapestry produces another accelerating (what scholars call moderating) impact on the individual's ability to achieve cross-cultural sales. Individuals having a moderate to high level of individual motivational cultural intelligence (CQ) will experience even greater levels of cross-cultural sales if they are engaged in an operation having a strong diversity climate.

What This Means for Real Estate Professionals



The results of this study have important implications for the real estate industry. At the firm-level, leadership must reinforce an environment that encourages employees to engage in accelerated development of motivational cultural intelligence (CQ). Companies might consider shifting resources into training initiatives to help agents recognize cultural cues and to empower employees to respond positively in diverse cultural environments. Engaging in cross-cultural training programs aimed at orienting and acclimating employees with prominent local or regional cultures will also drive cross-cultural real estate transactions for the organization. Cross-cultural training initiatives can also yield business development opportunities as employees are introduced to a new network of prospective clients.

Additionally, an organizational culture that promotes diversity in leadership and in the body of its employees can be an important differentiator among competitors. For real estate agencies, this could mean incorporating intentional diversity management and hiring strategies to encourage a more ethnically-robust workforce. Our findings support the notion that a diverse organization can increase a firm's intercultural business success.

Finally, the impact of the individuals' motivational cultural intelligence also matters for cross-cultural real estate transactions. Taking the time to understand how a prospective agent thinks about and cares to engage with others who are cultural different from his/herself is an important strategy for those in leadership positions at real estate firms. The environment can accelerate the cross-cultural sales process but the individual must have a propensity to want to engage in such exchanges in the first place.

Conclusion

Cross-cultural effectiveness goes beyond simply recruiting a diverse workforce. Companies (and individuals, alike) need to adopt a strong diversity-centered climate to leverage the opportunities that exist in the increasingly diverse U.S. population. Agencies and agents who engage in important cross-cultural training initiatives and promote an intentionally diverse employment strategy can influence cultural sales success.

Appendix: Sample Survey Measures

1. *Individual Motivational Cultural Intelligence (CQ)*
 - I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.
 - I am confident that I can socialize with locals in a culture that is unfamiliar to me.
2. *Firm Motivational Cultural Intelligence (CQ)*
 - Agents in my firm enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.
 - My firm shows confidence that it can socialize with locals in an unfamiliar culture.
3. *Firm Diversity Climate*
 - Diversity is a part of relevant education and training activities in the organization.
 - Organizational members have equal access to leadership opportunities.
4. *Cultural Sales*
 - The number of sales transactions, involving clients/agents from cultures who differed from an employee's own culture.

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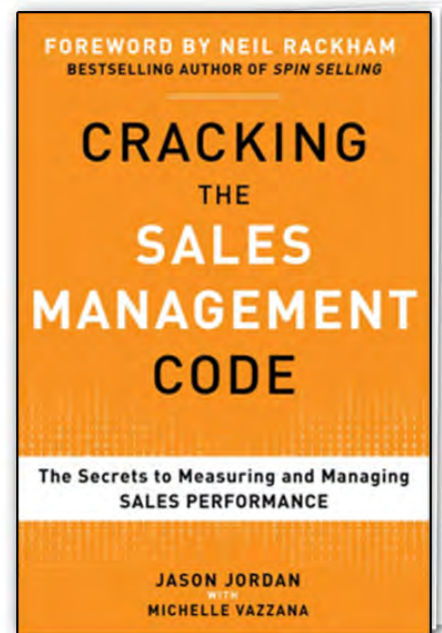
INSIDER: Cracking the Sales Management Code

Dennis Thé, MBA

Today's sales force is inundated with metrics. The increasing prominence of information management systems has provided managers with the tools to track and evaluate performance data from anywhere and at any time. Metrics often fill the desks and line the walls of company "war rooms" and are used to assess all areas of corporate health. Despite which metrics a company uses, all metrics eventually relate back to the alpha metric (i.e., the main measure by which performance is measured) - *revenue*.

Jason Jordan and Michelle Vazzana's *Cracking the Sales Management Code* alludes to a lack of focus in most organizations' use of performance metrics. Many organizations invest in capital-intensive CRM systems that can generate detailed reports on the activities and productivity of an organization's sales force, but most do not utilize these reports effectively. Today, more than ever, senior leadership, sales managers, and salespeople are subject to an overflow of data and metrics. However, the old adage, *you get what you measure*, still rings true.

Greater visibility does not equal greater control. Organizations must not only have the *capability* to accurately measure performance, but they also must be able to *understand* how these metrics are managed to drive revenue. Jordan and Vazzana claim that sales professionals often lack the discipline to focus on the metrics that actually matter. *Cracking the Sales Management Code* empowers sales professionals to understand how metrics can be better managed through a reverse engineering process, dividing each metric into three important categories: *Business Results*, *Business Objectives*, and *Business Activities*.



THINK POINT #1: The End Goal – Business Results

Reverse engineering can be a counterintuitive process. In this context, reverse engineering emphasizes focus on the relationship between metrics. This means starting with a company's end goal in mind and funneling backwards towards the specific activities to drive desired results. For most companies, the authors argue that Business Results metrics can be divided into three categories: *financial*, *satisfaction*, and *market share*.

Financial metrics include a company's pre-determined, objective financial parameters, and may include metrics such as total revenue, gross profit, pipeline growth, revenue per sales representative, and/or revenue per region. *Satisfaction* metrics relate to how healthy a company

appears from the outside, and can include customer and/or employee opinions. These metrics can be highly subjective and are often derived from personal experiences. Examples include customer/employee satisfaction, number of customer referrals, or employee intent-to-stay reports. *Market share* metrics measure how a company performs in relation to competitors, and can include percentage of overall market share, market share by region, or market share by department.

The *financial*, *satisfaction*, and *market share* categories are ultimately the most important metrics that a company keeps track of. As these metrics help measure success, they provide a clear snapshot of the overall health of the company. The biggest mistake that most companies make, though, is in attempting to directly manage these Business Results. Unfortunately, end results cannot be directly managed.

Consider a real estate professional that has a goal of generating \$1 million in total real estate sales each quarter and is falling behind on his quota. The agent's strategy, knowing that he needs to make-up for an insufficient total dollar amount of sales, may include a scattered approach of spending more money on marketing activities or time cold calling to attract new customers. This mismatched strategy is an inefficient effort to drive revenue. Managing activities towards an end goal (generating \$1 million in total sales), is not a direct process. Rather, the emphasis must be placed on setting clear Sales Objectives and Sales Activities to yield desired Business Results.

Question #1: What end goals (Business Results) are you trying to achieve? Are you thinking through a results-based lens or an activity-based lens?

THINK POINT #2: Setting Sales Objectives

After establishing Business Results, companies must then focus on setting and monitoring the objectives that will lead to a desired end goal. The authors argue that Sales Objective metrics can be categorized into four key categories: *market coverage*, *sales force capability*, *customer focus*, and *product focus*.

Market coverage objectives look at the metrics that determine whether a sales force has enough resources to pursue all opportunities in the market. Examples include number of total selling hours, percentage of customers called, and cost per sale. *Sales force capability* metrics refer to the degree to which a sales force is effectively maximizing resources during customer



interactions. Capability metrics include win-loss ratio, length of sales cycle, and percentage of deals advancing per stage. *Customer focus* metrics assess whether a company is focusing on the right customers, and includes metrics such as number of new accounts and customer retention percentage. The last category of metrics, *product focus*, looks specifically at how a company manages its product mix. These four Sales Objectives metrics allow the company to take next steps in driving Business Results. Clearly-defined objectives and measured Sales Objective metrics empower a company to funnel resources into activities that can ultimately drive Business Results.

For the real estate agent looking to achieve \$1 million in total sales, understanding and monitoring the Sales Objective metrics is necessary to achieve his desired end result. Had the agent been monitoring objective-based metrics such as his client retention rate (*customer focus* metrics) or perhaps a local trend that signaled stronger demand for high-end homes (*product focus* metrics), then he could have more effectively begun to manage his sales process to maximize his total sales to meet his quota.

Question #2: How are you defining your team/individual Sales Objectives to drive your desired Business Results? Where is there opportunity to refine your goals using these objective-based metrics?

THINK POINT #3: The Main Driver – Sales Activities

The final category of sales management metrics, Sales Activities, represents the areas where the most control over sales performance can be exerted. While many managers begin strategizing with activities, Jordan and Vazzana contend that through reverse engineering, activity should be the last area to approach.

Sales Activity metrics provide leadership with accurate success indicators and the tools to proactively manage a sales force. All Sales Activities fall into one of five following categories: *call management*, *opportunity management*, *account management*, *territory management*, and *sales force enablement*.

Call management metrics help evaluate the planning and conducting of customer interaction. These metrics can include average talk time and/or percentage of sales representatives engaging in call planning. *Opportunity management* metrics help sales teams navigate complex sales process effectively. Metrics include adherence to planning process percentage and/or the number of opportunity plans per sales representative.

Account management metrics maximize the long-term value of each customer, and can include the number of interactions per account and/or the percentage of completed business plans. *Territory management* metrics help allocate a team's selling efforts efficiently across regions. Metrics include the number of customers per sales representative and/or the activity volume per

sales representative. *Sales force enablement* metrics improve a sales force's ability to sell effectively. These metrics can include training hours per full-time employee, frequency of coaching, and/or reporting tool usage percentage.

Sales Activity metrics can easily be monitored by a sales manager, and goals for each activity can be adapted to reflect changes in the market place and to improve overall sales performance. If an agent's goal is to meet a \$1 million sales quota by the end of the quarter, and the agent had been monitoring his Sales Objective metrics (e.g., a low customer retention rate and shift in demand for higher priced homes), the agent would be able to further focus selling efforts on the Sales Activities that drive those Sales Objectives. For example, the agent would be able to identify specific areas in the sales cycle where customer retention is low (*opportunity management*) and re-evaluate processes at that point of the sales cycle. He could also focus his selling efforts specifically on areas and customers who would pursue higher-priced homes (*territory management*).

Question #3: How are you monitoring your activities to drive your specific objectives?

Conclusion

In order to sustain growth and increase sales force capacity, real estate professionals must learn to leverage the power of metrics through Jordan and Vazzana's reverse engineering model. Focusing on the specific metrics related to Business Results, Sales Objectives, and Sales Activities (and in that order) can help drive stronger results.

Most importantly, though, managers must take time to tie these components together to understand how these different metrics relate and affect one another. This process must not be taken lightly – Jordan and Vazzana's reverse engineering process and metric-based approach will be critical to a company's ability to proactively manage its sales force.

Recommended Reading

Jordan, Jason and Michelle Vazzana (2012), *Cracking the Sales Management Code*, New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

About the Author

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Dennis is from Boston, Massachusetts and received an MBA in Health Care Administration from Baylor University. Dennis' professional experience includes over 6 years of marketing and project management experience in IT, an administrative residency at Vanguard Health Systems, and over 7 years of community service. He is passionate about health care with a strong interest in health care policy, payer reform, and population health management models.

INSIDER: LinkedIn for Business Development

Susan Monaghan, MBA Candidate

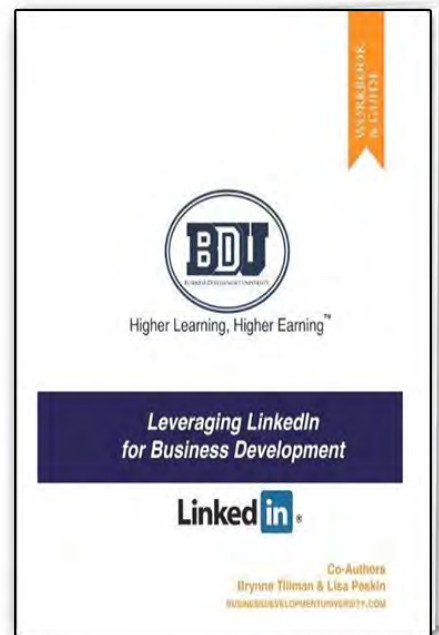
Are you using LinkedIn most effectively to grow your business? With over 200 million members in over 200 different countries representing 2.6 million companies (including every Fortune 500 company), LinkedIn is a powerful networking tool that can help real estate professionals build relationships and prospect for new clients.

LinkedIn for Business Development, a 2013 book by sales trainers Brynne Tillman and Lisa Peskin, will help sales professionals use LinkedIn to take their business to the next level. LinkedIn may seem like a basic online networking tool, but its robust features can help salespeople connect with potential clients more quickly, efficiently, and purposefully. Specifically, LinkedIn's resources can provide salespeople with a faster, better way to fill the pipeline with more targeted, pre-qualified leads.

THINK POINT #1: Maximize Your Profile

Did you know that if someone searches your name on Google, one of the first entries they see is your LinkedIn profile? A real estate professional's LinkedIn *profile* should briefly tell her "professional story" in a way that attracts viewers. To design a profile that optimizes your brand in a web search, Tillman and Peskin recommend that you first create a headline that establishes your credibility and sets you apart from your colleagues. For example, a powerful headline for a real estate agent might read: "Sarah Smith, Broker, Pinnacle Producer and a *D Magazine Top Real Estate Agent* for the past 7 years." Impressive headlines will stand out on Google searches and as users browse through LinkedIn, which will help you begin to reel-in potential clients to your business.

LinkedIn's *summary* section is also an important area to focus on. Just like the summary at the top of a resume, the summary section in your LinkedIn profile provides an excellent opportunity for you to showcase your experience, skills, and accomplishments. The authors encourage users to develop a story that conveys a unique value proposition. For example, a real estate professional might consider writing: "Russ established himself in the real estate industry following a long career in business sales and financial management. He is knowledgeable and enjoys staying current with the latest technologies and market trends to help his clients buy or sell their homes quickly. Customer service is Russ' top priority."



Content in the summary section is enhanced and supported through LinkedIn's *recommendations* and *testimonial* features. Users cannot provide their own recommendations and testimonials, but real estate agents might consider encouraging satisfied clients to provide a recommendation or a testimonial after a closing.

An effective recommendation might look something like this: "John is an incredible real estate agent and spent countless hours putting together the necessary resources to help my family relocate to our new home in the prestigious River Oaks neighborhood. For anyone looking for a quality, respected agent, I definitely recommend John." When prospective clients see recommendations that provide support for the qualities and characteristics outlined in your profile summary, your credibility is immediately enhanced.

Testimonials, like recommendations, can help your clients communicate their satisfaction with your work. When working with a pleased client, direct them to your LinkedIn profile to write a testimonial about your work. A testimonial might look something like this: "Patty is client-oriented, strategic in the way she approaches the sales process, and full of energy. During each of my house hunting trips, Patty always provided new insights and a clearer picture of how my feedback was refining my search process. Patty does not sleep until she finds you the perfect house!"

Did you know you can also upload videos to LinkedIn? Informative videos can help potential clients learn more about your work and provide a way to convey your passion for your business. Through a short video, users can share generic information, industry insights, and/or thought-provoking ideas to encourage prospects to contact you. Whether you use a large-scale production company or the simple webcam on your computer, be sure to take advantage of the video function as a unique lead-generating tool.

THINK POINT #2: Make New Connections

In addition to creating an effective profile that attracts prospective clients, Tillman and Peskin help users consider ways to use LinkedIn to proactively make new connections. LinkedIn's *advanced search* feature, designed to help users work smarter (and not harder) in the search process, allows users to filter through different industry or group categories as they search for new connections. Unlike traditional networking settings, a LinkedIn user can see a broad database of other users and identify prospects in a whole new way.

When you have identified someone you would like to connect with, first see if you know someone who is already connected to him/her. If you do, leverage the relationship that is already established and ask your connection to make an introduction for you. A warm introduction can yield a much stronger likelihood that the prospect will respond to you than if you tried to make the cold connection on your own. Asking for an introduction on LinkedIn opens up a whole new

channel for potential clients, referral sources, or strategic alliances that can also help you gain additional client opportunities.

Once an introduction has been made, LinkedIn provides resources for building rapport and turning new connections into clients. First, make sure to read the prospect's LinkedIn summary. This can provide insight into his interests and reveal the activities or business ventures that are important to him. Looking through his mutual connections might also reveal common interests or experiences, as well as shared connections.

Also within the prospect's profile, you will find his *skills* section and a place that shares any *awards and honors* he may have earned. In becoming familiar with these sections, real estate professionals can determine how to engage and encourage potential clients in conversation, which can be a powerful tool for building rapport. The authors advise salespeople not to use LinkedIn just to "sell their stuff," but rather to engage clients in conversations about topics that are important to them. Your business can reap the rewards of due diligence if you take time to build your own profile and leverage the opportunity to make new connections with potential clients.

THINK POINT #3: Become a Business Connector

While many users engage in networking with a "what's in it for me" mentality, the authors advise that helping others is an equally important component of networking. Real estate agents can help others be successful by becoming a *business connector*, or using LinkedIn to create value for others. When you help others, others will be more likely to help you in return.

Business connectors can use LinkedIn to create value by building bridges between other users and sharing unique expertise. A real estate professional might consider sending a LinkedIn message to a new contact and offering to make an introduction on his behalf. Or an agent might consider posting a blog or writing a white paper with specific market knowledge. Either way, you are creating value for others.

Also consider creating and/or joining LinkedIn groups to become a business connector within your network. By sharing information, others will look to you for expertise and may be more likely to use or refer prospective clients to you. Discussions that occur within LinkedIn's group function can provide useful information for your business, and can open up new lines of communication and other opportunities with potential clients. Business connectors leverage LinkedIn's tools to help others, and in turn help themselves.

Conclusion

Authors Tillman and Peskin provide sales professionals with current best practices for leveraging resources and tools in LinkedIn to generate leads and build relationships with potential clients.

By maximizing your profile, making new connections, and becoming a business connector, you can use LinkedIn to open up new doors for business development.

Recommended Reading

Tillman, Brynne and Lisa Peskin (2013), *LinkedIn for Business Development*, San Bernardino, CA: Business Development University, LLC.

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Susan is a graduate student from Houston, Texas. She earned her bachelor's degree in English from Vanderbilt University and her master's in elementary education from the University of Houston. Before coming to Baylor, she taught first grade in Highland Park ISD in Dallas, TX for eleven years. Susan is currently pursuing an MBA with plans to transition into a sales or consulting role.

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