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In this issue:

- The Power of Language
- Lisa's tips - February's topic - Why Start with Inventory Accuracy?
- Recommended Reading

The Power of Language

Now that there is significant support in the media that we are emerging from the recession, Executives are beginning to think about "what's next". Many companies are still battered from the recession in terms of sales, employee morale / energy etc. So, how can we rejuvenate the message to regain excitement and commitment to our company's goals and next steps? One simple yet profound step is the power of language!

I started thinking about this concept as my consulting mentor has repeated numerous times that a key tenet to success is mastering the conversation with the power of language. Think about it. How often have you seen the ultra qualified expert fail due to poor communication while the empty-headed savvy communicator succeeded? More times than you can count!

For example, this concept even relates to a simple game of Pictionary. Whether it's through pictures or verbal language, those who can express themselves clearly and effectively are the ones to win the game. The good news is that it is not hopeless (which is good news for me since my Pictionary partner and I lost tonight's game – after all, who can draw toilet paper successfully anyway?).

I've been a student of the power of language throughout my career. It really hit home when I had to present my plans to overcome uncontrollable obstacles (rising oil and gas prices) to a conservative Board of Directors as a young, female, Operations Executive (obviously NOT the preferred profile). My CEO provided my mission, "talk naturally, as I knew the subject backwards and forwards; however, ensure I include x, y, and z facts." What I thought could be an insurmountable task (reconciling two opposites in my mind) turned into an achievable one with the help of my HR mentor as she described how to utilize the power of language. In this situation, we used the power of an example to talk the Board through the subject in a clear yet powerful way. I still owe her as many glasses of white wine as she can drink for her help!

Following my VP of Operations role, I was immediately immersed in the importance of language again as I decided to start a consulting practice. After all, now I was in charge of sales and marketing (I couldn't fire that deadbeat salesperson!). How does a consultant gain clients? You must be able to convey (through written, verbal, and non-verbal communication) how you will help improve the client's condition in such a way that the client has enough confidence that his/her investment will provide a significant return in bottom line business results (and, of course, this assumes the most important tenet – your ability to deliver!).

So, what are a few of the keys to the power of language?

1. **Focus your message on your audience.** What do they value? What is meaningful for them? Don't fall into the common trap of thinking about what makes sense to you. Instead, think solely about what will make sense and add value for your audience. Tailor your language to them.
2. **Simplify!** What could be more powerful? Clarity is valued. If people can understand your message, it is more likely to resonate with them. Delete extra words. Use a process visual or graph. Choose your words carefully. Is it

the correct meaning? Not only is simplification a key to powerful language, it is also cornerstone to business success.

3. **Use examples, analogies etc.** In other words, illustrate what you mean through language. Provide clarity.
4. **Preparation & Practice.** Think through the potential scenarios and prepare for likely conversations. Prepare for common questions, objections, situations etc. Practice with a friend. Find an expert, watch and listen. Lastly, don't give up. This skill can be learned.
5. **Speak, write or present with confidence.** There is no doubt that confidence is cornerstone – after all, the other person in the conversation needs a reason to listen!

Assuming a solid strategy and plan, I have no doubt that those leaders that master the use of language will not only be the most likely to succeed but also will have the full support of their people. What could be more important to emerge from the recession in a solid position?

Lisa's Tips: Why Start with Inventory Accuracy?

As companies set priorities for 2010 or next year's budget, it is important to understand where to start. So, why should inventory accuracy be a top priority?

1. It's required from an accounting standpoint. Typically speaking, inventory can be a substantial number on your financial statements. What could be more important?
2. It's cornerstone to your ability to manage inventory levels (which affects your cash). After all, if you think you need to order an item because you don't have enough in inventory and then find out that you have more than you thought, you have just paid to bring in inventory you don't need (which will tie up cash).
3. Inventory inaccuracy will negatively affect your warehouse efficiency: For example, if you are pulling inventory for a truck and find that the inventory is not where it should be, you have wasted time. You wasted the time going to the wrong location. You have wasted the time preparing incorrect paperwork. And you've wasted the time you'll have to spend to find the inventory and/or address the issue.
4. Inventory inaccuracy can increase freight costs: Following the last example, if you cannot find the inventory, you might have to send a partial truck. Thus, each item will cost more to deliver and, in some cases, it can lead to higher incidents of damage.
5. Customer Service: If the inventory is not available as expected, the customer will receive a late shipment or a partial shipment with a potential for damaged material. Not a way to win loyal customers!

Recommended Reading

"The Connectors" by Maribeth Kuzmeski – an insightful book on how the world's most successful businesspeople build relationships and win clients for life. I thought the book did a great job of illustrating the importance of relationships and people.

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