

The “Feel-Good” Factor

By Barb Cotton

As we all know, it is the relationships that we have with people which are so important in our life, and important to us within a marketing context. This “relationship marketing” is *de rigueur* these days, and much is written in this area. I have just read an excellent book by Debra Fine, *The Fine Art of Small Talk* (Englewood, Colorado: Small Talk Publishers, 2004) which identifies one key component of our relationships with people: the “feel-good factor”. The essence of Debra’s thesis is that in all of our human relationships, it is important to leave the other person feeling good about us. She suggests the following tips as to how to build rapport with others that will lead to success in a business relationship:

- **“Use small talk as a picture frame around business conversations.** Begin and end with small talk before and after making a presentation to a client, selling a widget, negotiating a contract, providing a service, or conferencing with your child’s teacher. A study conducted with physicians showed those who spend a few minutes asking patients about their family, their work, or summer plans before and/or after an examination are less likely to be sued than those who don’t. Let’s face it. People don’t sue people they care about. And we care about people who show they care about us.
- **Express empathy.** Everyone is entitled to be listened to, even when in the wrong. Consider the client who sees the stock market rise 30 percent but not his own portfolio. The stockbroker knows the client insisted on picking the stocks himself, but it would be a mistake to make the client “wrong”. It’s better to say, “I realize it’s frustrating to experience this. What can we do from here?” That goes a long way to diffusing negative emotions and helping the client feel better about this relationship – rather than tempted to move on to another stockbroker.

- **Greet people warmly, make eye contact, and smile.** Be the first to say hello. Be careful, you might be viewed as a snob if you are not the first to say hello. People often go back to their favourite restaurants because the host greets them with a sincere smile, looks at them directly, and welcomes them with warmth. My husband and I go to our favourite restaurant – and bring our friends there, too – because the wait staff, the host/hostess, and even the owner take the time to make us feel extra special.

- **Use the person's name in conversation.** You are more likely to get special treatment by using the person's name: When you call to clarify a credit card billing, for example, say: *Joe, thanks for taking the time to help me with this question.* That makes Joe feel his role is important. If you don't know someone's name, take a moment to ask, and then repeat it. Be sure to pronounce it correctly. And never presume your conversation partner has a nickname. My name is Debra, not Debbie. I don't feel good when people call me Debbie. It's a little thing that has big importance.

- **Show an interest in others.** In response to our high-tech environment of e-mail and fax broadcasts, we need high touch more than ever. That's what you create when you show an interest in the lives of your customers/clients/patients every chance you get.

- **Dig deeper.** When you engage in a conversation, don't leave it too quickly. If your customer/client/patient mentions her vacation, pick up on the cue and dig deeper. Ask where she went, what she did, what the highlight was, if she would go back. You'll make her feel good about her life and about taking time with you. Always follow up a question like *How's*

work? with *What's been going on at work since the last time we spoke?* This way he or she knows you really want to hear about what is going on with work.

- **Be a good listener.** That means making eye contact and responding with verbal cues to show you hear what the speaker says. Verbal cues include these phrases: *Tell me more, What happened first?, What happened next?, That must have been difficult,* and so on. Using them makes people feel actively listened to.

- **Stop being an advisor.** When you mention a problem you might be having with an employee or an associate, do people offer advice without asking any questions? Have you ever put together a resume and, as soon as you sent it out, someone told you it was too long or too short or too detailed or not detailed enough? Jumping in with unsolicited advice happens annoyingly often. Instead of advice, give understanding with simple phrases like: *I know you can work out a solution* or *I hope the job hunt goes well for you.* Offer advice only when you are specifically asked for it.”

I think that Debra’s thoughts on the “feel-good factor” are very insightful and can help us all in facilitating our relationships with others.

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