

A Time For Heroes

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty...

Those are the words that begin the modern citation for the Congressional Medal of Honor. Since 1861 when the Medal was authorized as the US military's highest award for valor in action, there have been 3447 recipients, and there's no question that these Medal of Honor winners are American heroes.

It is a time for heroes right now, and I'm not just talking about our military men and women serving their country. It's also a time for heroes in the private sector, specifically in the quick/digital/small commercial segment of the printing industry.

Heroes and Victims

By definition, any situation which creates a hero must also have a victim. So, if I cast you in the role of the hero, who must you rescue? Your first thought was probably *my customer*, but that's not who I have in mind. Granted, there are likely to be hero opportunities with your customers—in fact, I wrote a column about those opportunities quite a few years ago. (Hero Opportunities, *QP* August 1996. If you don't save your old copies of *QP*, you can find it in the article archives at my website: www.davefellman.com.)

No, the victim I'm most concerned with is the employee you may have to lay off if your sales volume doesn't improve. Last month, I wrote that an "educated assumption" puts the current number of quick/digital/small commercial printing companies in the United States at approximately 29,000—down from approximately 39,000 in 1995. And though I don't have data to prove it, I wrote, I think a survey of the industry would find that there are at least 1000 former printshop owners now working as salespeople for other printing companies.

Here's something else I don't have data to prove, but I think would be borne out by an industry survey: The quick printing workforce is down by at least 29,000 over the last 12 months. Between closings and layoffs, I think it's very likely that 29,000+ people have already lost their jobs, in just that timeframe. I know companies that have laid off 2-3 people, and have already targeted the next one to go. And there's only one thing that's going to save those jobs—more sales volume!

Wanna be a hero? How about getting yourself out there to compete for some new business and reversing the trend that is threatening someone's livelihood!

Heroes and Villains

By definition, any situation which creates a hero must also have a villain. So, who is the villain here? Your first thought was probably *me, if I don't rise to the occasion*, and I'm afraid you might be right. But you have a choice here—hero or villain—and it's really that simple. So which do you want to be?

There's more to it, of course. You have a lot on your plate. You don't really know where to start. You never signed up to be a salesperson in the first place. So maybe the real villain is your lack of time management, your lack of prioritization skills, your lack of sales experience, or maybe just your comfort zone.

Let's do something about those villains, and maybe you'll find it easier to be a hero!

A Simple Plan

I have written pretty extensively about time management and prioritization, and in the interest of space today, I'll just refer you to a few more articles in the archives: The 7-Hour Selling Plan (*QP*, August 2005), Make The Time To Make More Money (*QP*, January 2006) and Violent Prioritization (*QP*, April 2008). As for the lack of sales experience and not knowing where to start, well, let me lay out a simple plan for you.

First, make a list of 10 companies you'd like to have as customers; companies or organizations that you think have significant printing needs that fit your capabilities. Second, call or visit those companies to identify the decision-maker. (That process is explained in The 7-Hour Selling Plan.) Third, send a letter or an e-mail or make a phone call to communicate this message:

I'm the owner of (your company name), and there are four things I want you to know: First, we're a really good printing company. Second, our business has slowed down considerably, because most of our customers' businesses have slowed down. I wouldn't be surprised if your business has slowed down too, but I still expect you to have printing needs that we can help you with. Third, I want you to know that I'm probably the world's most reluctant salesperson. This is not my strength at all, but I'm forcing myself to reach out to people like you, because fourth, I don't want to let any of my employees go, and that's what will have to happen if our sales volume drops any

further. So, while I know that you already have a source for your printing, I want to ask you for the opportunity to compete for some of your business. I promise you this, you won't find anyone who wants your business more right now. Can we get together and talk about your needs and our capabilities?

I can't give you any guarantees of success, other than this one: Doing something like this is a whole lot better than doing nothing! Start with ten, then do the same thing with ten more, and then ten more. I'm pretty confident that you'll find at least a few people who'll be sensitive to your situation, and willing to consider sending at least some of their business your way. If you think about it, it's a pretty low-risk hero opportunity. And while you're at it, you'll be benefitting yourself and your own family too, right?

Closing Thoughts

It was not my intention to be sexist in using the male pronoun in my opening sentence. For one thing, I took the line directly from www.cmohs.org, the Congressional Medal of Honor Society's website. And among other things, I learned that there has only been one female recipient of the Medal of Honor, Dr. Mary Edwards Walker of the Civil War Union Army.

I also learned that the most recent recipient was PFC Ross A. McGinnis, US Army, whose medal was awarded posthumously on June 5, 2008, for his gallantry on December 4, 2006, in Iraq, when his action directly saved four of his comrades from serious injury or death.

Sadly, there will be more posthumous Medal of Honor recipients. Happily, America seems to have a never-ending supply of heroes. Something else I learned in my research is that the Carnegie Medal has been awarded to more than 9000 civilians since its inception in 1904, all of whom demonstrated their heroism by risking their lives while saving or attempting to save the life of another person. Approximately 20% of the Carnegie Medals have been awarded posthumously.

When you think about that kind of heroism, is it really so much to ask that you stretch your comfort zone and make a few sales calls?