

Everybody Sells!

This is an article that I hope will be read by everyone who works in your print shop. I know that many quick printers share *QP* with their employees every month, and that's good. I know that others tend to keep what they read in this magazine to themselves, and that's often too bad.

The reason that I hope you will share this particular article with your employees is pretty simple. I feel it's very important to your future that everyone who works in your shop understands this basic premise...that everyone who works in a quick printing business is part of the selling process.

Direct Customer Contact

Not everyone works directly with customers every day, that's true. But direct customer contact isn't the only definition of involvement in the printing sales process. Here's how I'd like you to think about your involvement...if you're not actually part of the process of communicating the benefits of doing business with your company to customers and potential customers, you are at the very least part of the process of *creating* those benefits.

You might also think of it this way: the people who are directly involved in customer contact and what most of us think of as "selling" are *promisors*. The people who work in all of the other functions in the printshop are *promise-keepers*.

Promises, Promises

Think for just a moment about all of the things that you promise—that your whole company promises—in making a sale. You promise to produce the job according to the specs you were given...size, paper stock, quantity, ink color(s), finished in the bindery a certain way, and maybe even packed a certain way. You promise to live up to the customer's expectation of quality printing or copying. You promise to have the job ready at a certain time, and at a specified price.

You may also promise to set type or create the finished artwork from whatever "original" materials a customer might bring you. You might even promise to print and affix mailing labels, and put the whole job into the mail.

Whatever the scope of your business, and whatever the scope of each individual customer's needs, every time you accept a job from a customer you make promises. And if those promises are kept, the chances are pretty good that your customer will come back and let you go through the process of making promises and keeping them again and again.

Hard Promises

Making promises is the easy part of selling. And I think you'll agree that many of the "routine" promises are pretty easy to keep. Keeping the not-so-routine promises is the hard part, and that's especially true when the promises being made seem unreasonable to the people who actually have to do the work. I've seen more than a few cases where a whole shop erupts into "civil war" between salespeople and production people—or even between owners and employees—because "it can't be done by then" or "it can't be done like that" or "you have no business promising things like that without talking to us first."

Of those three all-too-common statements, the only one I have much tolerance for is the third. The promise-keepers *should* be consulted on a regular basis. For one thing, their input can help the promisors to better understand the realities of production. For another, there's no better way to foster teamwork than for all of the players to consider and respect each other's roles. The smart salesperson—owner or employee—knows the he or she goes nowhere if promises aren't kept. Of course, the smart production or administrative person will realize that he or she also goes nowhere if the promises that bring in the business aren't being made.

It's as simple as this: Promises create orders. Orders create revenue, and hopefully profit. Profit creates job security, and hopefully increased earnings for every employee as well as for the owner.

Harder Promises, Greater Rewards

From what I can see, the most successful shops tend to be the ones that relish the most difficult challenges. The people in these shops recognize that the hardest promises are the ones that earn the greatest rewards. When a customer *needs* something that not every printer can provide, the printer that can—or will—meet that need gains a special value and status in the customer's mind. *They made a hard promise, and they kept it, and I got what I needed. They obviously want my business, and they deserve it!*

When your customers *know* that they can count on you, it will be very hard for a competitor to take them away from you. Most of the credit for that kind of strength in a printer/customer relationship belongs to the promise-keepers. *Everybody sells!*

Routine Orders

Thankfully, not every job that comes into your shop requires an extreme level of “above-and-beyond” performance. But even the routine jobs provide opportunities for production and administrative employees to bolster the selling process. The key—for every employee—is to *know* your job, *grow* in your job, and *show* that you care through attention to detail.

As I said earlier, if you’re not actually part of the process of communicating the benefits of doing business with your company to customers and potential customers, you are at the very least part of the process of *creating* those benefits. At least, I hope you are.

Two Examples

Let me introduce you to two “fictional” press operators. They both have about the same level of experience. They both are capable of producing very high quality work. They’re both willing to work hard, especially when one of those “hard promises” comes along.

One press operator, though, is a little less thorough on the routine jobs. Therefore, some of the easiest jobs that come into the shop turn into problems. He’s not especially neat or well organized, either in his personal appearance or in the way he maintains his workspace. He knows what he’s doing, but he’s never shown much interest in learning more about technique or technology, and he’s never been especially good at passing his knowledge along to others.

The other press operator is equally knowledgeable. He knows his job, but he also knows that the job is not the same today as it was five years ago, and it won’t be the same five years from now. He makes it his business to keep up with new techniques and technology. He also makes it his business to share his knowledge with others.

He’s not the kind of person who will push the new bindery person aside because he himself can get that rush job done better and faster. He’s the kind of person who will find time to spend *showing* the new bindery person how to work better and faster.

His work area is neat and clean, and he keeps himself well-groomed and presentable. In fact, any owner would be perfectly happy having him come to the front counter to talk with a customer. Everything about him suggests that he pays attention to the details, on the small jobs and the routine ones as well as the big and complex ones.

And, of course, he does pay attention to the details. He’s committed to being the best press operator and the best overall employee he can be.

Owners’ Dream

I know that every printshop owner reading this would like to know where he can hire this guy. He’s an owner’s dream! But I didn’t create this example for the owners. I created it for every printshop employee as a challenge. This fictional press operator represents a very real benefit for every customer who deals with the printshop he works in. The owner, the salesperson, *and* the customer can all have confidence that this press operator will do his part to keep the promises that are being made.

In order to meet this challenge, and to do all you can to ensure the success of the company you work for, you have to make it your business to *know* your job, to *grow* in your job, and to *show* that you care through attention to detail.

When you make yourself more than just an employee in a particular function—when you make yourself a sales-driven, big-picture *partner* in the sales process—you give your company something very valuable and important to sell. You might call that something “absolute value” or “total quality.” Whatever you call it, it’s what makes up a printing customer’s dream.

Sales Stigma

There’s one more point that I’d like to touch on today. I know from experience that many of the employees in a typical shop don’t even want to be associated with what they perceive as the sales function. That’s even true of many of the people who work at the front counter every day; owners or employees who prefer to view themselves as “customer service” people rather than salespeople. There’s a definite stigma attached to the sales process in many people’s minds, and I really think that’s sad—and misplaced when you’re talking about selling printing!

First of all, by my definition, customer service is something that can’t even happen until a sale is made. Before somebody sells, a company doesn’t even have customers to service.

Secondly—and more importantly—selling printing does not have to be associated with any of the negatives that you think of with car salespeople or pesky insurance salespeople. The best printing salespeople sell without playing games, they simply try to understand what a customer is trying to accomplish and suggest the best way to

do it. They don't sell with high pressure, but they also never hesitate to tell a customer that they value and want the customer's business.

That's the kind of salesperson you can be, and again, the key is to *know* your job, *grow* in your job, and *show* that you care through attention to detail.

Have you ever met the customer who has a certain "look" in mind for a project, but not the budget to afford 2-3 color printing, fancy paper, or some other feature? What did you do in that situation? Did you make suggestions that might help the customer get adequate *function* out of the printed piece, even though it may not look as rich as he or she had originally hoped? That's not just customer service, that's real selling!

Have you ever met another type of customer, who comes in prepared to order an important sales brochure on the cheapest paper you sell. What did you do in that situation? Did you suggest upgrading the paper—or some other element of the job—to increase the likelihood that the printed piece would perform as well as the customer wanted or needed it to? Again, that's not just customer service. That too is *selling!*

It's the kind of caring, consultive selling that many quick printers take part in every day. And it's not something to be ashamed to be associated with! It's something to be proud of!

Everybody Sells

Everybody sells in a quick printing organization. Everybody has to be part of the sales effort in order for a company to really succeed. It's true that some people will always feel more directly connected to the sales process than others, but everybody has a role to play in creating customers and keeping them happy.

I think the shops that have always been most successful—and the ones that will continue to be most successful in the future—are the ones in which people understand and accept the responsibilities of being part of the sales process. *When everybody sells, the chances are very good that your company will sell more!*