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## Generation X Hotel Sales Associates: All Important Curiosity Factor Missing?

*By David M. Brudney, ISHC, June 2006*

“What are the most important qualities or characteristics to look for, that distinguish the best of the best of today’s hospitality industry Sales professionals?”

That question is posed to me often by hotel owners, operators, lenders and asset managers - - also meeting planners and even fellow passengers on longer commercial flights.

I think the question is asked because a perception exists amongst owners and operators, in particular, that today’s Sales professionals have yet to fulfill their potential and that most continue to struggle to make their numbers.

I’m asked this question because over the course of my 40-plus year career I have been a successful Sales professional, I’ve trained and mentored other Sales pros, and since 1979 I’ve reviewed and evaluated Sales teams throughout the U.S.

### ***Qualities to Look For***

What are some of the basic qualities to look for in successful Sales pros today? Here are ten (10) of mine:

**People skills.** Likeability. If you don’t or can’t connect with prospects and clients quickly, probably you should get into another line of work.

**Listening skills.** Prospects and clients must know that you hear their concerns and understand their needs.

**Asking good questions.** The mark of a true professional.

**Homework.** Never leave home without (having done) it. (There’s) so much market intelligence out there today.

**Perseverance.** Most Sales pros stop soliciting the business if they have no bookings after the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> call. Shame on you!

**Clearly defined goals.** Always keep “top of mind” your monthly and quarterly room nights and revenue goals; break them down to daily goals to help you keep focus every day.

**Plan your work, work your plan.** Avoid becoming the “Christopher Columbus” Sales pro: take off on a long, expensive journey, unsure of where you’re headed, get there and don’t know where you are, arrive home not knowing where you’ve been and expect to be paid handsomely upon your return.

**Always be closing.** Still, the defining attribute of successful Sales pros: booking the business, lots and lots of it, a.s.a.p.

**Commitment to continuing education.** Never stop learning: Selling F&B, understanding operational, financial reports, technology, meeting trends, planner preferences.

**Commitment to constant improvement.** Adopt Japanese philosophy of *Kaizan*, “continuous incremental improvement”.

### ***Curiosity***

The one quality I always look for - - or encourage to develop in others - - is curiosity. I believe that curiosity is the lynchpin in putting together a long and successful hospitality Sales career.

Oddly enough, I find very little curiosity in the new generation of hospitality Sales associates today.

If you manage, direct or have corporate oversight over a hospitality Sales force - - or if you are building a new Sales team, or need to replace a departing top producer - - in today’s competitive marketplace, here are some examples of the kind of curiosity you should be looking for in candidates:

- ❑ What can I learn from the successful, more experienced Sales associates on my staff? In my company?  
What can I learn from my competition?
- ❑ What is it that they do with clients and prospects that help them make their numbers consistently?
  - ❑ How long should I continue to contact a qualified prospect and qualified lead before I “fish or cut bait?”
- ❑ What is it that makes clients book consistently with one brand or another? One hotel over another?
- ❑ What are the one or two primary reasons for my competitors getting good business that I have pursued? What can I learn from that? What can I take from that experience that will be useful and will help me with future solicitations?
  - ❑ How does my competition sell against my property?

- ❑ Do I know the *real* reasons for my “Lost Business”?
- ❑ Do I incorporate those reasons or lessons into my solicitation of new business?
- ❑ Do I have what it takes to keep pressing until I learn what I could have done differently, what did I miss?
- ❑ Do I know all of what constitutes a successful meeting for a prospect or client? Do I make it a rule to ask?
  - ❑ How can I become more effective in my use of testimonials and 3<sup>rd</sup> party referrals?
- ❑ Are there sure-fire, never fail techniques that get phone calls returned? Get you through gatekeepers?

Again, the lack of curiosity amongst this new generation of hospitality Sales associates puzzles me. I realize today’s Gen X relies heavily upon the Internet as their primary source of information, but they may not be receptive to really good professional Sales training, mentoring or simply observing the best Sales professionals with years of empirical knowledge and successful track records.

I don’t know if you can *teach* curiosity, but I do know this: if I were building a successful Sales team today, I would be looking for candidates that are curious. Curious about our business, curious about our customers and curious about learning more on how to become successful Sales professionals.

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