

New Generation of Hospitality Sales Professionals Lesson #2: Want to be Successful? Start by Packing your own 'Chute

By David M. Brudney, ISHC, October 2006

If you are considering, planning or already started a career in hospitality Sales and Marketing, with every intention to be successful, be prepared to pack your own 'chute before you start. You're going to have to show up with some talent and traits that can't be taught. Based upon my four decades of experience, these come to mind:

- ❑ A very strong will to succeed
- ❑ A very strong perseverance
- ❑ A passion for serving others
- ❑ A natural curiosity for why, how and with whom clients book business
- ❑ A lifetime commitment to professional excellence and continuing education

Would you use any of those attributes above to describe you? My purpose in asking is very simple: if the answer were no, you might be better off finding another line of work.

Last month I began this series with "Lesson #1" ("[You Cannot Microwave Experience: New Generation of Sales Professionals Lesson #1](#)") by challenging this new generation that if they did indeed want to become good at their new craft, there would be no substitute for experience. Lesson #2 addresses what the new generation needs to "bring to the table", what I call "packing your own parachute" before you jump. What are the skills, raw talent, characteristics, qualities and experiences you bring to this new career?

Packing Your Own 'Chute

What do I mean by "packing you own 'chute" and how does it apply to hospitality Sales professionals? I'm told that no one attempts skydiving without having complete confidence that his or her parachute will open after deplaning. If ever I decide to risk jumping out of a plane three miles up, not only would I inspect my parachute first, but I'm sure I'd take the time to master first the art of folding and packing that 'chute (It's probably a good idea also to conquer any fear of flying or heights first!).

That same mindset should apply to anyone starting out fresh in hospitality Sales. You should expect, of course, some orientation, some basic Sales training and communication equipment - - and maybe, if you're lucky, even some good supervision and mentoring.

Ask yourself first, “What do I bring with me? What attributes, qualities, skills do I already possess that will help me to become successful in this new career I’ve chosen?”

What You Bring to the Table

If I were doing the hiring or if you would be reporting directly to me, here are some of the personal characteristics that I would be looking for in any candidate:

- ❑ Some knowledge of, and a genuine interest in, the hospitality industry
- ❑ Simple, natural effective people skills
- ❑ The ability of “connecting” easily with other people
- ❑ Coachable; receptive to constructive criticism
- ❑ Any previous sales experience, e.g., retail, door-to-door, volunteer fund-raising
- ❑ Good, acceptable, overall communication skills
- ❑ Basic computer skills
- ❑ Telephone skills (including voicemail messaging)- - previous training completed
- ❑ Potential “self-starter”, someone who will learn quickly the differences between proactive and reactive Selling
- ❑ Previous employment experience (I had great success in hiring teachers with no formal Sales experience: great preparation skills, focus and “reading” reactions; also great success in hiring people who had waited tables and bussed dishes)
- ❑ No matter what formal education or what jobs were held previously, a proven track record of successful completion of tasks, finishing and “deadline mentality”
- ❑ Curiosity: ability to ask intelligent and probing questions
- ❑ Developed listening skills and an innate sense of knowing when to stop talking
- ❑ Any kind of performing skills: acting, modeling, dancing, public speaking, debating (excellent development of “thinking on your feet” ability)
- ❑ A genuine sense of humor
- ❑ The ability to not take yourself too seriously

That’s my list of some of the characteristics new Sales professionals might bring to the table. As always, I welcome your feedback, additions and deletions.

And let me congratulate all of you who possess some or many of these characteristics now. You’ve already done a good job of packing your own ‘chute!

A Good, Rewarding Career

Hospitality Sales can be a good, rewarding and well-paid career that you should find to be both interesting and very challenging. Remember to stay the course, never give up, never take rejection personally, continue to learn everything you can about the hospitality business, about prospects and clients, and always be honing your Selling skills.

What’s next? “Sales Lesson #3: Getting Started” will appear next month.

Correction: I misquoted Bob Gilbert, President/CEO of HSMIAI in my Lesson # 1 piece. HSMIAI's membership consists of 80% Sales & Marketing practitioners and 20% service providers and others. Of those 80% S&M practitioners, more than half come from the hotel sector, next would be destination marketing/CVBs. Only a very small percentage of S&M practitioner members come from the airlines, car rental and cruise industries.

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