

**Established Client Relationships Can Last
a Lifetime: New Generation of Hospitality
Sales Professionals Lesson #10**
(Tenth in a series)

By David M. Brudney, ISHC, February 2008

I attended a funeral this month for Tom Roberts, a man who had been a client of mine dating back to my previous hotel sales career, and who later became a high-profile labor arbitrator who ruled on some of Major League Baseball's landmark cases.

I asked myself, "Why was I there?" After all, I had seen Tom maybe only four times in the past 25 years. I had met his wife maybe once and did not know his grown children at all. Gazing around the standing room only church, I found only a handful of friends, neighbors and business associates with whom I had even slight previous connection.

Yet, for reasons I may not fully understand, I took a full day off from work, drove the two hours each way, so that I could pay my respects and say goodbye to Tom.

One thought that came to mind as I sat and listened to one passionate tribute after another was I wondered how many of today's new generation of hospitality sales professionals will have established the kind of relationship the two of us enjoyed? Will it be that kind of special relationship wherein they will be attending client retirement dinners, family weddings and the inevitable funeral services?

Will today's hospitality sales professionals have established client relationships?

I doubt it. Here are two of my reasons.

1. I doubt today's hospitality sales professionals will remain in sales positions within our industry long enough to develop those kind of client relationships and
2. I doubt they recognize or appreciate the value in - - nor the time and necessary skills required of - - establishing those relationships

I have, to be sure, more than belabored the point in my recent articles that as I interact with sales offices across the country I find far too many examples of today's sales pros relying far too much on technology based and not enough on relationship based selling.

My long time friend and former very worthy competitor Chris White of Krisam said it best: "we live by relationships with support from technology."

A client relationship developed over time, based on consistent performance

The kind of client relationship that I enjoyed with Tom Roberts was developed over a period of time and was based clearly on my becoming a valued resource for Tom, my understanding his needs, my availability, turnaround time and my consistent performance and delivery for Tom and his organization - - and, of course, Tom's honesty, openness and loyalty to me and my products.

Tom had not yet established himself as one of the foremost labor arbitrators when we first connected back in the early 1970s. I was the DOSM at what is now the Grand Hyatt San Francisco and Tom was a "volunteer" site selection committee chair for his national arbitration association. Tom was the key to booking the association's national and regional continuing education programs and annual conventions.

I must have done a good job for Tom and his arbitrators group because when I left Hyatt a few years later and joined Marriott, Tom continued to use me as a resource and began booking meetings through me with hotels throughout the Marriott chain.

Before the end of that decade I returned to Hyatt with expanded responsibilities and Tom returned to Hyatt, too.

What set Tom apart from other major meeting and event planners of that era, was that he was such a consummate "low maintenance" client. Unlike so many of his contemporaries, he demanded nor expected little personally in return for his good business. Tom didn't need to be "wined and dined" nor would he accept gifts or even invitations to join "Fam trips" to popular new Hyatt destinations.

Tom made only one simple request of me over the years. He was a Los Angeles Dodgers baseball season ticket holder and once every summer he would call to ask for a room at our downtown Hyatt Regency L.A. so he and the family could freshen up after a rare weekday afternoon game before going out for dinner. That was it.

Reversal of roles

I found myself in need of serious legal counsel the very first year I started my consulting practice and the only one I turned to was Tom. He gave me some great advice that enabled me to make a very critical decision at a seminal moment in my new career.

I had become Tom's client now. I think we were both very comfortable and pleased experiencing the "switch" in roles - - due, I have no doubt, to a previous long established relationship between a meeting planner and a hotel sales professional.

We wound up as neighbors in Rancho Palos Verdes, a suburb of L.A., and over the ensuing years I would see Tom occasionally at local cultural and fundraising events. The very last time I saw him he was well into his 80s, but the bond with me was still there.

What a pleasure it was to have known the man professionally and personally for more than 30 years. I hope that today's new generation of sales professionals will be able to experience client relationships that can last a lifetime. We shall see.

To access all previous nine "Lessons" in this series visit www.DavidBrudney.com

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