

Mission Ready

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Are You Seen As the “Good Guys” by Your Customers?

Those familiar with this newsletter know that the authors are great fans of the Marine Corps—both as an elite fighting force and as a business model. Sometimes the business lessons to be learned are less of a tactical nature, and are on a more fundamental level. For example: the character issue. By any objective standard, Marines are the “good guys” in any conflict. Although Marines are capable of meeting violent terrorists in Afghanistan on their own terms, it is clear to any reasonable person that they are not, themselves, terrorists, or cut of the same cloth.

And, although Marines are legendary for their toughness, recruiting efforts focus much more on character. One doesn't see menacing Hells Angels on the recruitment posters, although Hells Angels would certainly present a tough image; one sees, instead, clean cut, stalwart American youths—who can take on the Hells Angels of the world without being like them.

And I think, as businesspeople, we have to ask ourselves, “Do our customers see us in a similar light? Are we perceived as “the good guys” in the competitive battlefield of the marketplace—a cut above the competition, both in performance and in character?” And, by the way, not just the customers. Do our suppliers see us as the good guys? Our transportation folks? It's important, because the

time will come when we will need a favor from those who have traditionally served us; and having a likeable team, rather than a bunch of number-crunching, desperate, company “hit men” can mean a lot.

If you are a sales manager, you might want to ask yourself, “Have the pressures of work, and the burden of an impossible quota, turned my sales people into numbers-driven demons who see the customer as a piece of meat, and as a means to an end?” Because the day your people look at their customers simply as a cell on the spreadsheet of their marketing plan, is the day you have lost that customer. He or she will see through the phony smile and the forced conviviality of your sales rep in a heartbeat.

All managers should bear in mind that sales or production quotas can turn the nicest people into monsters—especially in a tight market—and that the obsession with numbers will lose more customers than gain. But, when your people are courteous—and when they think of the customers' needs before their own—they will set themselves apart from the competition. Business is not just “all about the numbers;” all of us would rather do business with those we like, and trust. Those who truly listen to the customer, and who take a consultative approach, will be seen as the “good guys” in a marketplace populated with manipulative