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# Tips from the Top

Business insights from those at the top for those at the top

May 2010 · Excerpt Edition

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THE ALTERNATIVE BOARD

Change Perspective.  
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## Customer Care Run Amok

I recently had an opportunity to experience an industry-who-shall-not-be-named's version of "Customer Care." Followed thereafter by another industry's version of "Customer Care." Incidentally, both industries have been in the news recently. Before anyone starts thinking this is a statement on healthcare reform or the airline industry, it is not. This discussion is about how the drive for efficiency and streamlining can sabotage any company, big or small - regardless of industry. For contextual purposes, [allow me to share some background prior to going further.](#)

Marcy Turkington, Achieve Business Solutions with The Alternative Board, Newton NJ

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### Our Facilitators

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Chief Executive  
The Alternative Board  
NW Jersey & Poconos  
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## Get the Most Out Of Your Meetings

We have all spent time in meetings and left them feeling like nothing was accomplished and the time was wasted. You can insure that you properly structure your meetings by:

- Having an agenda
- Setting an objective
- Appointing a notetaker
- Appointing a time keeper
- Listing your action items in an action plan (who will do what by when) so you come out of the meeting knowing what you are going to review in the next meeting.

In addition, someone should own the meeting. That person needs to prepare the agenda and notify all in advance of the meeting. Putting the action plan on a laptop hooked to a projector so that all can see it is also a good idea. The action plan can then be updated during the meeting.

At the end of the meeting, the minutes and action plan can be e-mailed or posted where all can access them.

The Toastmasters International Web site, [www.toastmasters.org](http://www.toastmasters.org), is an excellent source of information for training folks on how to

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Dick Cipoletti



Certified SBL Coach &  
TABBoard Facilitator  
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## About Me



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## Inside this Issue

Customer Care Run  
Amok

Get the Most Out  
Of Your Meetings

Using Skype as a  
Customer Service  
Tool

run a meeting.

Ron Mondor, Zantek Information Technology, Winnipeg, Canada

## Using Skype as a Customer Service Tool

Our company recently started using Skype as a method of providing timely and useful information to our clients.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with Skype, it is a freeware application that allows people to communicate via text, audio and video over the Internet. To communicate via Skype, just download the application from [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com) and set up a free account.

In many industries, it is easier to show a client a product or how a product functions than to describe it over the phone. Skype allows you to provide a real-time demonstration to clients, explaining products as you show them visually. Clients may ask questions while you show them specific features or benefits they may find useful.

A simple requirement is for both you and your client to have a video camera (Webcam) attached to your computers, which enables them to see you and you to see them. This permits you to read their body language to see what features excite them and which make their eyes glaze over.

In addition to using Skype for demos, we also use it for technical support. If the client is having problems with a product, you can see exactly how they are using it and whether they are using it incorrectly or if the equipment is defective.

Skype has allowed us to get valuable face time with our clients while providing a valuable service. Whether your client is just around the corner or across the country—or even around the world—Skype allows you to be right at your customer's side in a moment's notice gaining mindshare and customer loyalty.

Douglas J. Angell, Imagination Center, Frederick, MD

## Getting On Top Of Your Receivables

Very few people like to make collection calls yet it is imperative to stay on top of your receivables, especially these days in this tight economy.

One of our frequent challenges was reaching people. So we updated our process. Now we are sending out e-mails, scheduling blocks of time during the day to make calls and having different people make calls throughout the day.

## Getting On Top Of Your Receivables

Effectively "Opening" a Sales Call

Time and Commitment

Simple Process Improvement Feedback

The Art of Compromise



Achieve more for you and your business. Download our **Strategic Business Leadership** White Paper now!

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Since implementing these processes, our collection calls are getting made, we are reaching people, we have spread the responsibility across our staff and our receivables have come down significantly.

Kevin Adams, Direct Dental Plans of America, Denver, CO

## Effectively "Opening" a Sales Call

Sometimes the best way to start your sales call is to forget your sales pitch and offer information instead.

For example, instead of trying to sell a prospect on our services, we had our people call and ask prospects if they were aware of the new tax bill that would give a tax break to companies that hired new employees. They mentioned there was a good chance the bill would be signed into law. The information they provided affects every business owner and every company can benefit from hearing it.

By giving out helpful information, we positioned ourselves as tax experts who could be helpful to the prospect. If it was appropriate, we could have followed with a sales pitch. Or we could have stopped after educating them and merely used the call as an introduction that could lead to a sales pitch in a subsequent call.

Not all sales calls have to be about sales; sometimes educating a prospect is much more effective.

Lorri Cochrane, Certified Payroll & Tax Services, Bohemia, NY

## Time and Commitment

We all talk about time management and the commitments we have made. What I have found is that you start with what you are currently doing and then keep adding commitments that at the time seemed interesting. This means managing time becomes difficult. What do we do?

We sometimes look for a better system or technologies that will help save us time, so we can jam more things into our day. I have changed this on-going problem by reviewing and ranking all the extracurricular activities I have committed to each year. If I have committed to serving on a board for a local charity, for example, and I am not getting any personal satisfaction or benefit from that commitment, I rank it low on my commitment list and perhaps eliminate it.

So if you are committed to something and it no longer fits into your business or personal plans, simply cross it off your list of commitments and stop doing it!

Perhaps you'll find time to commit to something new and more interesting with this time.

ways of making their businesses even better. We'll share income-building ideas, profit-improving strategies, and more.

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## *Quick Tips*

### **Great Interview Starter**

When beginning an interview with the usual greetings, casually throw in the question, "So, how's life treating you?".

You will learn a great deal about the person's attitude based on their response. It is amazing what people will share when offered that simple phrase in an informal manner.

Brad White  
Nomad Technologies Inc.  
Eden Prairie, MN

### **Technicians Can Also Sell**

Ronald Rogé, R. W. Rogé & Company, Bohemia, NY

## Simple Process Improvement Feedback

As a small company, we are challenged to find methods to obtain customer feedback and to turn that feedback into processes that improve quality — without adding complexity to our lean employee base.

I recently overheard a delivery driver talking with another employee about a complaint from a customer and realized that we solve individual customer complaints but we don't have a means to capture these issues in ways that allow us to observe patterns and focus on process improvements.

I set up a white board and a bulletin board in the shop where anyone can write a note with a marker or sticky note describing customer, product or internal communication problems. All employees are instructed to document problems and resolutions as simply and concisely as possible. We capture the notes on a weekly basis, analyze them for patterns and look for ways to eliminate them through process improvements.

The result is a simple way to capture information that will lead to quality product and service improvement for a small company with limited staff.

Stephen Skirrow, CVJ Axles Inc., Denver, CO

## The Art of Compromise

In business, before fighting a battle, it pays to step back a moment and think about your goals in the situation. Is it more important to "win" about being right or to "win" by achieving those goals?

For some people it becomes an ego thing. They fight so hard to prove they are right in an issue that they lose sight of the outcome they had hoped to achieve in the first place.

For example, in discussions with business colleagues and co-workers, the important thing is to move a discussion forward rather than get sidetracked by smaller issues.

With clients in particular, we have occasionally found ourselves having to deal with the aftermath of an action they've taken that went against our recommendation. In this case, focusing on our being "right" would be a mistake; forging past it to create the "win" for our client, with the circumstances as they are, is what matters.

Deborah Elms, Imprinted Originals, Smithtown, NY

Make use of an "Ambassador Program" within your organization that provides incentives for field personnel, technicians and so on, in order to identify potential opportunities for the sales force to engage clients or prospects.

The incentive could be something like a \$100 referral fee or some other type of tangible reward.

Outside of the benefit of having potential leads generated in this manner, an "Ambassador Program" also solves the problem of non-sales personnel feeling intimidated by the prospect of selling. This approach takes the onus off of them and instead requires only the ability to spot and/or identify potential opportunities.

Eric Aschinger  
Aschinger Electric  
St. Louis, MO

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Considered one of the most valuable and beneficial business advisory organization in the world, The Alternative Board® has been featured in leading business news sources from the Wall Street Journal, Business Week, the Washington Post, and CNN. The The Alternative Board® consistently delivers to small and medium size businesses, essential elements organizations need in today's dynamic business environment to thrive.

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