



My Thoughts Exactly

Committed to Knowledge, Professionalism and Development in the

Automotive, Fork-Lift, RV, Heavy Machinery, Insurance, and Floor Covering Industries.

It Is Not Styrofoam, It is REAL China

I can't tell you how proud I am of all of us and our wonderful country. Today I read that Wal-Mart was giving free health care and products to uninsured people in need. I also read of a community that took in families the economy destroyed financially, to allow them to get back on their feet as well as not lose their pride. Finally, I am proud that children in schools are starting to really understand that we, as a country, need to re-look at our lifestyles and value systems and to rethink our futures as of TODAY. How does so much good come from so much adversity? The answer is relatively simple to understand — we are human and live in the moment. As people, we have a defense mechanism that somehow allows us to forget the bad and focus on the good. In addition and possibly most important, our generation has really never been tested like our parents and grandparents were, so why should we fear what we have never experienced?

So what does all this have to do with Styrofoam and China? We could take a real lesson from other cultures and how they live their lives. Since the majority of my friends and associates that receive this monthly newsletter are from the United States and in some sort of retail related industry, I will do my best to meld this life lesson with the end-game of improving our business outcomes.

I used to visit Europe to do training at least once a year. I have been to Amsterdam, Paris, Germany and Brussels. What I was able to observe were cultures and people that enjoyed the process of everything they seemed to do. A glass of red wine would never be consumed in a white wine glass; a fine cigar would never be chewed or lit with anything other than a piece of wood; and a cup of coffee would never be served in a Styrofoam cup. Whenever I visited a retail organization, they would put out a few cookies, candies and a real china cup of the best coffee you have ever consumed. Not a giant cup, just a small cup of the best quality. They would visit with me and have sincere conversation prior to talking business, and it

always seemed that the stress level was reduced because of this approach. It was about the entire experience rather than the act of buying or selling a product or service.

You see, it actually cost less to do things correctly. Instead of throwing away a Styrofoam cup made of oil based products, they simply wash the lovely little china cup with the organization's logo on it. Instead of having pre-packaged sugar or non-sugar sweetener, they would have lovely little metal bowls with silver spoons for these items. Less paper waste, as well as just a little bit classier. It was never about drinking coffee alone, it was always about the experience of the action. What really drove this home for me was a dear friend of mine retiled a very small bathroom and was so proud at its completion. Whereas, I have known local friends to put in-ground pools in and seem to not have the same enjoyment upon its completion. I think you get the idea — to consume or experience is the differentiation factor. So, now this challenging retail and economic environment is forcing us to re-look at all aspects of our lives and how we live it. As professionals we have to look at our clients and what they truly desire from us.

Let's look at and evaluate our client's wants, needs and motives for a moment. They have more choices than ever before and know they are in the driver's seat, especially with regards to major purchases. We, on the other hand, seem to be selling and marketing from a **fear basis** instead of confidence. The confidence that we will, at every option, exceed our client's expectations. So what do we do to get back our competitive edge and confidence?

Here are some of the best practices that many highly successful organizations have done very successfully. The most important step is to realize it is a whole new ballgame and either play by the client's rules or choose another game.

Client: Ask the Client face-to-face what would make their experience better. Then take all the feedback to reach consensus and do something with it (**Take Some Action**).

Associate: Ask each of your associates what they think would improve the customer's experience. Reach consensus and do something with it (**Take Some Action**).

Benchmark: Visit an organization just like yours, with their permission and endorsement. Ask and look at what they do differently to improve the customer's experience. Do something with the information (**Take Some Action**).

The Million Dollar Question: "What can both my organization and I do to improve the customer's experience, while truly enjoying the process?" We need to learn to make the process as fun as the destination.

Because I believe that "Leading by Example" is the key to the future of all of us, my organization and I have personally just completed the top four steps. Our **NEW** website and blog is going to be unveiled on or before April 15, 2009. It has been designed to be a "**development tool**" with over 44 training videos lasting from 3 to 19 minutes, focused on sales, management, strategic planning and facilitation skill techniques. It is **FREE** to you and/or anyone that wants to use it. It was challenging, as well as fun, to design and develop. It provides value to the people and industry I love. Most importantly, it made me feel good about myself, what I represent, our industry and country. **SEE YOUR POSSIBILITIES CLEARLY** and Be a "**Professional for Life**".

Gary Tilkin

E-mail, Text, Write or Call **ME**

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