

Survive
Thrive
or Dive

The Focus on the Customer

Having established that the mission to achieve synergy is not impossible, it just requires certain foundational steps to be in place first, let's get into putting the first things first. We need to start with the individual. What we want to do is begin to create positive change in the mindset of each individual member of the company, one at a time, until there is momentum within your Environmental Dynamic to serve the needs of the:

1. customer first,
2. co-workers second,
3. health and welfare of the company third, and
4. the individual's needs fourth.

As previously mentioned, when *everyone* embraces this mission statement, then *everyone's* needs will be met as they simultaneously put their energy, emotion and effort into serving the needs of others. As more and more individuals begin to see the benefits to being synergistic, then you will start to see a change, holistically, in your overall Environmental Dynamic.

But the customer comes before the co-worker so let's look at what it means to serve the customer. We'll start by taking a detailed look at what it means to meet the needs of the individual holistically, i.e. physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

Physically

Essentially, when you consider another's physical needs, you are considering how you can ensure the safety of those who are involved with whatever products or services your company provides. If your company manufactures power tools, you would want to ensure that your power tools are safe for the end-user. If you own a restaurant, you would want to ensure that the premises are clean so as to prevent any health hazards to the restaurant's patrons. If you provide a service that involves direct contact with your customer's body, such as would be the case with an occupational therapist, a massage therapist, or a doctor, while you perform your healing arts you would want to ensure that you are performing these duties in as gentle a manner as possible.

Irrespective of what product or service your company provides to the public, another part of looking after the customer's physical needs comes in recognizing that personal welfare and security is as much a part of our economic vital signs as heartbeat,

respiration and skin tone are indications of the vital signs of our health status. The money customers pay for your product and/or service is money they could be using to provide for all of their other physical needs whether it be housing, clothing, food, etc. Accordingly, if you were to follow the conceptual understanding of the Mission Statement and put all of your energy, emotion and effort into meeting the physical needs of your customer, then you would be wanting to ensure that your product and/or service is provided *to the best of your ability* so that your customer gets good value for their spending dollar.

An excellent example of looking after the customer “physically” as it relates to finances is a company called Kal Tire. It has 230 offices that work under the simple mission statement and vision of *True Service*. I bought a set of tires several years back for my Ford Expedition. Since that purchase, I have had several occasions where I have walked out of the house only to find that one of these tires was flat. After calling the motor league to come to the house and “pump me up” I have driven straight to my local Kal Tire dealer, where in as little as an hour, I have been advised that my repairs were done. This is a phenomenal focus on service, because more than just fixing my tire, they’re committed to minimizing my time without the use of my vehicle. The real service however, or for my money what Kal Tire can justifiably boast is its *True Service*, is that when I go to pick up my vehicle there is no charge for the repair.

The fourth time this happened, as I was waiting for my service rep Ryan to process my paperwork, I was truly expecting some sort of service charge. To my delight (and this never ceases to surprise me) Ryan handed over my keys and gave me a service report with a total charge of – zero. I asked him how Kal Tire can afford to repeatedly fix my flats at no charge, and humorously, his first response was “*We’re a charitable organization. We don’t try to make a profit*”.

On a more serious note, he explained that Kal Tire has a service philosophy that when you buy tires from them, you get free repairs, free balancing and free wheel alignment for the lifetime of the tires. In the event that you ever “blow” a tire, the company replaces it at no charge. Corporately, their focus on customer satisfaction is based on the premise that if you are happy with their service, you’ll tell others, and word-of-mouth is the best (and least expensive) type of advertising. If you’re *not* happy with Kal Tire, they also believe you’ll tell *that* to your friends and family. This is why their mission statement is “*True Service*” as opposed to, say, “*Great Tires*”. You can get tires anywhere, but how many places offer this kind of service?

Kal Tire understands that to look after customers physically means making the effort to safeguard vehicles while they’re on the road, and making the effort to safeguard their customer’s wallets in the event that the vehicle has to be taken off the road. And

they do it in such a timely fashion that customers are only inconvenienced for a matter of hours, not days.

True service.

Guess where I'm buying tires the next time I'm in the market?

Mentally

Looking after the needs of customers mentally involves providing them with sufficient information to make intelligent decisions as to how they spend their money. Selling something isn't the answer; helping them buy something is. See the difference? When you sell something, you play the dominant role in the process. The credit goes to you for "selling" them, but so will the blame if the customer later decides they aren't satisfied with the purchase. When your focus is on the customer, then you allow them the opportunity to be the primary player in the process. When they decide to buy, then they have made a conscious decision to support your product or service. They become a participant who was brought *alongside* you, not a pansy who bought *from* you.

To help customers make a conscious buying decision, they must be fully conscious of what they're doing and why. This only occurs when they have been given ample enough information to dispel any fears or doubts about their intended purchase. When fear and doubt are eliminated, faith and trust take their place and people feel mentally comfortable to buy. If you give them all the information they require, then you acquire *informed consent*. This is the focus of what a truly customer-centered sales representative strives to achieve.

The goal of meeting your customer's mental needs is to provide sufficient information to the point that they feel informed enough, therefore comfortable enough, to give their consent to buy from you.

All too often, customers are not provided with the information they require to be able to comfortably make a proper consumeristic decision. What is required to make customers feel comfortable with a potential buying decision is usually nothing more than having a customer service representative be willing to put the energy, emotion and effort into answering all the customer's questions until no more questions remain. There is a saying in sales that goes:

***Once you overcome all the customer's "No's"
the only response they have left is "Yes"***

Psychologically speaking it is completely understandable, not to mention *reasonable*,

that without having a sense of comfort customers do not carry forward to the point of buying. Sales agents or customer service representatives who are not focused on putting all of their energy, emotion and effort into making sure that a customer's questions are all answered, and answered fully, have no right to be irritated when a customer doesn't buy. And why would a sales rep be irritated, unless of course their primary focus was self-centered on their own best interest, presumably to make a commission. When sales reps learn to become just as focused on providing a customer with detailed information irrespective of whether a sale is made or not, they will find themselves making a lot more sales.

When customers are not provided with all the information they require, they will feel deceived. Deception, by definition, is a lack of the truth. When a customer asks a direct question and doesn't get a fully satisfying answer, they will often conclude that the sales rep is hiding something. They may have come to your company already convinced that they want to buy something you sell, but if in the process of "selling" your sales agents create a sense of doubt in the prospective buyer's mind, the buyer will back off. If there is something missing from the answers they seek, they will naturally assume that something is "amiss". Yet they have previously already decided to buy the product they want, so if your representatives drop the ball by not providing enough information, the customer leaves. More importantly, they leave frustrated, because they wanted to buy.

Ironically, they often choose to go down the street and do business with the closest competitor they can find, because they want to satisfy their perceived need to acquire that which they have already decided to buy. Your competitor "makes the sale" because the representative from your company "lost the sale". Either way, the sale was already made – the only question was, with whom? If you want your company to thrive, then how many sales can you afford to lose when prospective customers come to you *prepared* to buy the product but instead of capitalizing on the opportunity to "make the sale" your guy "blew the sale" by not ensuring that the customer felt sufficiently "mentally comfortable" to follow through with their predetermined buying decision?

Psychologically, the primary reason customers need to feel mentally comfortable is so they can be confident and convinced in their mind that they're making an intelligent purchase. Everyone wants to be "right" because that's the food that feeds our ego. It's back to our need for a healthy self-image. Conversely, no one likes to make a mistake in making a purchase, as this forces people to admit to themselves that *they* screwed up when they bought a "lemon". To protect one's image of "self" often the best defense is a good offense, so in the buyer's "self-defense" they will blame the bad buying decision on the sales rep. Whenever this happens, your company's reputation suffers.

Sociologically, the same principle holds with the buyer's "self" image amongst their peers. No one wants to appear foolish in the eyes of their friends, which is exactly what will happen the moment the purchase they were once so quick to boast about, eventually proves to be a "lemon" of a decision. To avoid looking foolish in front of their friends, the buyer will spin a yarn about how deceptive and devious the sales rep was and how this "pond scum" ripped them off.

Whether the defense is sociological or psychological in nature, the fallout remains the same: your company's reputation in the community leaves a sour taste with everyone who hears the story about the bad buying decision. Understanding these factors should create a strong sense of motivation with every sales manager to provide training for sales reps in communication skills. Every sales rep should be confident enough in their presentation to ask "*Have I answered all your questions, and if not, which questions need more attention?*" realizing that if the customer says they need more information, the sales rep should be encouraged; it means they are that much closer to making the sale. If the customer says they have no further questions, the follow-up question should be: "*Did I answer all your questions thoroughly?*".

If a customer desires your product or service and comes to you of their own free will, then assuming you provide a quality product at a reasonable price, there is virtually no excuse not to make the sale. It's *why* the customer came to you! While there is no *excuse* not to make the sale, there are *reasons* people won't buy. Four of the most common reasons are:

1. Representatives are too lazy or indifferent to provide a customer with all the pertinent details when there are several options and a comparison needs to be made (*flat screen TV's or anything to do with home entertainment systems fit in here*).
2. Representatives used technical jargon that is foreign to the customer's vocabulary (*doctors, car mechanics, and especially computer technicians are amongst the greatest culprits*).
3. Representatives do not want the customer to know about details that would demonstrate the compromised quality of the product in question, which would therefore jeopardize the potential of the customer deciding to buy (*used car salesmen are legendary for this*).
4. The representative simply doesn't know the answers to the customer's questions, won't admit this to the customer and won't put in the energy, emotion and effort to find the information the customer requires (*every other industry*).

A sales rep's best defense against alienating a customer due to a lack of information is

to admit to the customer that they *don't know the answer*. This will at least demonstrate that the sales rep has the character and integrity not to attempt to deceive the customer. The best ally to gaining a customer in such a situation is to say: "*Gee, that's a good question. I don't know the answer to that, but I'll find out and get back to you*".

And then *get back* to them.

The alternative is to try to lie. Any manager who is aware that a sales rep is misrepresenting your company's products or services needs to step in, and do so immediately. Nothing will ruin your reputation in the community faster than having lying sales reps because deception utterly destroys any bond of faith and trust. A few years ago, I was invited to be a guest lecturer to business and commerce students at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. The title of my lecture was "*If you lie, you're fired*". The moral I attempted to leave with these future business leaders was that you have two options when answering questions from a prospective client: either you can *wow them with wisdom*, or else you can try to *baffle them with BS*. If you're the owner of the company and you either encourage, enable or maybe just turn a deaf ear to your employees following the BS route, you're choosing to be the author of your own demise. Customers will abandon your ship, and jump ship to a competitor. If you're a sales rep who attempts to cover up ignorance with some line of cock-and-bull, or if you're in the habit of exaggerating your products strengths while glossing over the weaknesses, then anyway you slice it, it's deceptive. And it's still BS.

Customers can smell the difference.

Attempting to BS customers not only looks bad on you, it puts the entire company's reputation on the line. A good reputation is not made overnight, but it can be lost overnight. As customer complaints drift in (and they will) it's only a matter of time before you get caught in a lie. For companies with integrity, the day you're caught in a lie is the day your superiors are going to call you into their office and (in the flavor of Donald Trump) you're going to hear the voice of authority announce "*You're fired!*".

Having your sales representatives provide sufficient information to your customers and prospective customers is purely a matter of training. Give them the training, and then test them on it. Ignorance is not bliss, it's expensive. Teach your people the importance of meeting the mental needs of your customers, so they don't take their predetermined buying decision to the closest competitor down the street.

Along this vein, here's an Aararat quote you can teach everyone in your sales department next Monday morning:

If customers don't know - they go.

Emotionally

Looking after the needs of the customer emotionally involves being sensitive. If a sales rep has done her best to serve the customer's mental needs by answering every question, yet the customer seems unsure about which product to purchase or whether to purchase the product at all, the follow-up question we learned earlier will often dissipate any sense of uncertainty: *"Did I answer all your questions thoroughly?"*.

Simply by asking this question, if a customer is feeling emotionally unsure about the product (*or more importantly if the customer is feeling emotionally unsure if the sales representative has the customer's best interest at heart*) their anxiety will be greatly lessened by the sales representative's sincere desire to ensure that the customer is comfortable with their decision to purchase the product or service.

If a customer has a complaint or concern about a product or service they previously purchased from your company, looking after the customer's needs emotionally involves putting yourself in the customer's shoes and asking yourself:

"If I were the customer, how would I be feeling right now?"

Too often, company representatives take a defensive position when confronted with a customer who has a concern or a complaint. Essentially, the representative makes the mistake of focusing inwardly on themselves and taking the customer's complaint "personally" rather than focusing outwardly on the customer and trying to understand the customer's emotional status. We teach our clients that when a customer feels emotionally uncomfortable, by definition they are feeling not-at-ease, therefore we can accurately predict that they are feeling a sense of dis-ease. Ignorance creates doubt, and doubt feeds fear. A fearful customer is not going to buy. They'll get sick; that is, a sick feeling in the pit of their stomach that tells them to back off. We call it a "gut reaction" and it's a physical response to an emotional sense of distrust.

To make sure your customers don't get sick (at the thought of buying something from you) it's critical that you care enough for the customer's emotional sense of well being that your efforts are focused on them feeling "cared for". In training, we call this *critical care* because without it, you lose the patient, or in this case, the customer. Critical care involves taking measures to meet your customer's emotional needs so that any sense of doubt is eliminated. This is accomplished by having good "bedside manner" which means being attentive enough to your customer that you'll be able to diagnose whatever might potentially be planting seeds of doubt in their decision making process. Eliminate these seeds of doubt and you'll prevent fear from taking root. By eliminating doubt, the customer will feel good about the decision to buy from

you, not sick. You cure the disease, by curing the *dis*-ease. The way we cure disease in medicine is by asking enough questions to make the right diagnosis. So if you want to help cure any customer's *dis*-ease with the idea of doing business with you, teach your people how to ask probing questions to determine all the factors that are making your customer feel emotionally uncomfortable.

A lot of emotional *dis*-ease is also caused by a sense of confusion. Confusion, by definition, is a lack of clarity. It's an emotional sense that something is "amiss" meaning that something is still unclear such that our psychological sense of order is askew. Confusion relates to sensing chaos, while the opposite of confusion is a sense of order. So if a person is said to be in a state of confusion, it means their psychological thought process is therefore disordered or jumbled. To eliminate confusion, we need to create a sense of understanding.

Emotionally and psychologically, understanding could be said to be the antidote for confusion. If the customer has a concern or complaint based on their lack of understanding then we return to the part of the *Mission Statement* that says we must look after the needs of the customer *mentally*. The cure then becomes to put in the energy, emotion and effort to provide the customer with more information to clear up their lack of understanding. If the nature of the customer's complaint is based on a defect of the product, then there is all the *less* reason for a company representative to take the customer's complaint "personally" because the complaint has nothing to do with the representative's personality – it has to do with the product's performance. Unless the product is beyond its warranty date, the simple solution to problems such as this is to replace the product, at which point the customer's emotional sense of *dis*-ease usually disappears.

Studies have shown that when customers have a complaint and are thinking of never using a company's product or service again, that if the complaint is dealt with immediately, in a satisfactory manner, then 91% of customers who were just about to punt your company's services into the end zone will not only *return* to do future business with you, they will actually become a *fan* of your company, boasting to their friends how helpful your company was in resolving their complaint. The choice between curing emotional *dis*-ease or allowing a customer to walk away after becoming "sick" of dealing with you has very clear ramifications with this kind of sociological evidence. Either ignore a customer's emotional sense of *dis*-ease to the point that they give you the boot and bad mouth you to all their friends, or deal with the emotional side of public relations and retain a customer for life, while simultaneously turning them into one of your greatest cheerleaders.

Spiritually

Dealing with the needs of your customers spiritually is by far the hardest part of creating the kind of holistic relationship that will mutually benefit both the client and the service provider. The reason for this is that it's difficult to define and measure. Accordingly, we're going to need to spend a little more time on learning what it means to meet the needs of our customers on a spiritual basis. First of all, let's get something out of the way. When we talk about dealing with our customers spiritually, it's not about some form of mysticism; it's simply about creating a bond of faith and trust. Faith and trust are spiritual issues.

Now granted, if you asked a fellow business owner or some colleague who is also in management whether they thought it was important to have a bond of faith and trust with their clients, virtually everybody would say yes. It's kind of a no-brainer. No one will argue, everyone will agree. They'll nod their heads in affirmation that it's important for customers to have faith and trust in your products and the service behind them.

How important?

Real important.

Just ask "anyone".

What I'm describing, admittedly somewhat rhetorically, is the same response that you would have seen from business leaders when they had heard certain buzzwords being espoused *ad nauseum* at conferences, annual meetings and conventions.

One definition for buzzword I particularly like is: *a word or phrase connected with a specialized field or group that usually sounds important or technical and is used primarily to impress laypersons*. We've all heard these words and most likely even used them ourselves. Words like paradigm shift, optimization or silos. Yet without knowing what they're supposed to signify, these are simply logos words; academic without any sense for application. They're stock phrases that have become irrelevant through endless repetition. It's just like in the mid 90's when everyone would nod their head whenever some keynote speaker at a convention said that it's important to have "synergy" in your company. Absolutely! Everyone would be quick to agree.

Synergy is important!

Real important.

Just ask "anyone".

Except most people can't define what synergy is; so when it comes up, everyone just nods their heads and agrees. The same goes for creating a spiritual bond of faith and trust with your customers. Everyone will agree: *Yes, it's important to create a bond of faith and trust.* And I agree too. It is important. *Real* important.

But *agreeing* with a statement is not the same as knowing *why* a statement is true. So seeing as one of the themes of this book is the power of words and understanding their definitions, let's do a short exercise. Grab a pen and paper and write down your definitions for the words *faith* and *trust*. Give yourself a time limit of five minutes, but if you need additional time, that's fine. The point of the five minute limit is purely to help you understand that if you can't come up with succinct definitions in that time, it only shows that you're going to get some value out of this chapter when we look at the meanings for faith and trust in depth. And we need to. Because as everyone knows, and everyone will agree: *it's important to create a bond of faith and trust.*

Time's up. You back? Good. Let's start.

If the customer doesn't have a sense of trust with respect to your product, service or your people, then they will never develop a relationship with your company. This translates into your corporate health and welfare by virtue of long-term viability. Creating a spiritual bond of faith and trust is the key to *keeping* your existing clients, which *keeps* you in business. You might be merely surviving however, and the point of this book is learning how to thrive. That means attracting (and keeping) more clients. The best way to gain new clients is word-of-mouth testimonies. It's also the least expensive way, because the cost of advertising is free. While we're talking about advertising, let's understand its limitations. All we can expect from an ad campaign is to create interest for our service. Ads don't create faith and trust: people do. So our people had better learn what it means, and what's required, to create a bond of faith and trust with the potential clients who walk through our doors as a result of our having spent enormous amounts of money on advertising. If they don't, then those enormous amounts of money have been wasted.

In biology, the sign of a thriving, healthy ecosystem is replication and growth. If we want our company to thrive, then we have to grow. Growth means getting new clients, and keeping the clients we've already got. Creating a larger customer base is therefore one of the primary vital signs of a healthy company. Let's look at keeping old clients before we look at gaining new ones. If a client is an existing customer-of-record, then at some point in the past a bond of faith and trust was previously established. If that bond of faith and trust had not been established, the customer would likely be buying from one of your competitors.

Knowing this, it becomes valuable to look at what's required to *maintain* a bond of faith and trust so you can keep the customers you've already got, rather than riding the merry-go-round of lose a few, gain a few, while getting nowhere in the process. That's what merely surviving looks like. Instead, if we keep the customers we've already got and then add new ones, the company grows and by definition, we are thriving. So let's look at how not to lose customers, before we look at gaining new ones.

Looking after someone's consumer needs spiritually involves gaining the customer's faith and trust in the initial buying decision, then putting the energy, emotion and effort into maintaining the customer's faith and trust after the sale, even when they aren't coming in to buy something. Buying may be a one-time action, but the energy, emotion and effort you put into maintaining contact (after the sale) is all about creating a long-term relationship. It's a jungle out there, so if you want to thrive in the corporate world of consumer competition, you have to be doing something your competition isn't. If you desire to see a customer refer your company to their friends and it's your goal to have them return after that first time purchase to become a repeat customer, you're going to have to give them some reason to feel at peace with the idea of coming back, or even excited about the prospect. Otherwise, in the customer's eyes, their one-time experience with you can look something like this:

Me buyer. You seller. *Ugh!*

At which point your new customer beats on his chest, grabs the nearest vine and swings off into the jungle while you ring up a one-time sale on the cash register. End of story. If you want the initial sale to be the *beginning* of the story, then part of your customer service strategy (and budget) is going to need to be focused on reinforcing in the customer's mind that they were wise in choosing your company the first time. When a customer feels that they made a wise and discerning decision, they actually develop more faith and trust in *themselves*. That's a key point. Help customers feel good about themselves and they'll return to a place that affirms their own sense of self-esteem.

Do you know why this psychological approach to helping the buyer feel good about themselves is even more powerful than it was as little as, say, thirty years ago?

It's because people are tired of getting screwed.

Accordingly, while there is still the basic desire in the hearts and minds of customers to make a *good* purchase there is now a "new" twist in their consumeristic decision making process. Namely, not making a *bad* purchase. It's as though society has adopted the jungle mentality that says it's survival of the fittest, and only the fittest can survive. If a customer returns a product or complains about a service, many companies

either refuse to make restitution or else they deny that the customer's complaint is valid. It's like the hierarchy of the food chain – either you eat, or get eaten. There can only be one winner and too often, today's consumers walk away from a bad buying decision feeling like the loser. So part of survival in our modern consumeristic jungle is the ability to make intelligent buying decisions and part of *that* ability is being able to discern when a sales representative wants to eat you alive.

In today's marketplace, there are way too many horror stories about defective products, lack of warranties and just overall bad customer service. Ask any of your friends about the last time they received crummy (or even criminal) customer service and chances are they will only need to think back a week or two. Lousy service has become such a hallmark in our "modern" consumeristic society that people are actually expecting to get screwed. Indifference to customer complaints has brought people to a point that, if they made a buying decision that turned "bad" they are no longer surprised that they can't get satisfaction at the customer service desk. In other words, consumers have pretty much stopped complaining, because they don't feel that anyone listens. If someone makes a bad buying choice, they'll simply chalk it up to experience, take their lumps and carry on. In the process, however, they will figuratively kick themselves in the butt for having been such a loser that they made the choice to do business with the company that screwed them.

If you want to stand out in the marketplace, be the kind of service-oriented business that gets people to pat themselves on the back, not kick themselves in the butt.

The best and least expensive way to deepen and maintain a bond of faith and trust with a customer *after the sale is made*, is when you put energy, emotion and effort into doing follow-up calls to ensure that the customer *is* happy with their purchase. When you practice this invaluable art of customer service, one of two things happens; either the customer is happy or else they are *not* happy. If the customer is happy, this is when you get to say "*Well, Bob, I'm glad to hear you're pleased. Thank you so much for making the choice to do business with me*". The thought this leaves Bob with is that he *is* pleased, and that he did *decide* to do business with you. The truth feels good. Bob made a good consumer decision to *trust* you and because he did, then Bob's a winner.

If Bob isn't happy, however, this gives you the opportunity to rectify the situation and prove that Bob *still* made a good decision to buy from you, because not only did you call to follow up, but because you are now going to fix the problem. When you have done whatever is necessary (in your mind) to right whatever was wrong, don't trust your own discernment to conclude that the customer is happy. Let Bob make that decision by letting Bob have the final say. You accomplish this by asking "*Bob, I'm terribly sorry for whatever inconvenience you had because our widget wouldn't hold*

it's charge, but is everything OK now?" When Bob says that everything is OK and that he's pleased, you follow-up on this positive report by responding *"I'm glad to hear that, and I hope I get the opportunity to serve you again in the future. Just call me if you need anything"*.

Chances are extraordinarily good that you will get the chance to serve him in the *future* and the reason for that is because you served him in the *present*. Bob gets to congratulate himself for having had the discernment and wisdom to trust you in the initial purchase, and now that you have proactively called him to ensure he is happy and even fixed something without Bob having had to call you first to lodge a complaint. Result? Bob has a great "feeling" about you. That "feeling" is the bond of faith of trust. Even better, Bob has a great feeling about "himself" because Bob didn't make a bad buying decision, he made a good one. When Bob feels like a winner, then he is, and so are you. It's truly a *win-win*. It's how you hold onto existing customers – by keeping in touch with them because you are in relationship with them. Otherwise, you're just a clerk at a cash register who rings up a sale, and as soon as the sale is over you call out *"Next!"*

See the difference?

Now let's talk about wasting money with advertising. Considering that it costs upwards of 900% more money for a company to *create a new customer relationship* than it costs to *maintain a relationship with an existing customer*, learning how one can best look after the needs of existing customers spiritually is arguably the single most important factor in creating a company that thrives.

Let's go back to our medical analogy of what makes for a healthy, functioning body. If you were a student in a dental or medical school, a phrase you would probably hear from your professors virtually every second day would be *"You must create a bond of faith and trust with your patients"*. The reason you'd hear this only every second day, is because the mantra you'd hear on alternate days is *"You must maintain the bond of faith and trust with your patients"*. I say this from personal experience. Yet during all the years that I heard my esteemed professors repeat these words of admonishment, never once did any of those doctors instructing us ever explain exactly *how* to create or maintain a bond of faith. Yet that wouldn't stop the students from nodding their heads solemnly in affirmation. Kind of like when you hear the phrase *"You must have synergy in your organization"*.

I would like to rectify that void for the sake of everyone who believes in putting the energy, emotion and effort in creating and then maintaining a bond of faith and trust with those whom they serve whether that be a patient, patron or parishioner. The first

thing we need to do is ask ourselves: what is “trust” and what is “faith”? Here’s where you get to pull out your assignment from the beginning of the chapter.

The dictionary defines “trust” as:

1. firm reliance on the integrity, ability, or character of a person or thing.
2. custody; care.
3. something committed into the care of another; charge.
4. reliance on something in the future; hope.

Let’s look at what “trust” means by considering what it would take to have these definitions apply in the hearts and minds of your customers, in order to get them to a place where they firmly believed in the integrity and character of your company’s sales representatives, to the point that they “trusted” them. This relational bond is not going to happen overnight. It’s going to require energy, emotion, effort and time. If a customer is to get to a place where they believe that your company would care and take custody of its promises to uphold your products or services, that belief system is not going to become established simply by placing their very first order over the phone. If a customer were to give testimony to their family and friends that your company is committed to its clients, that wouldn’t occur overnight, that would take time to prove. If your customers were to become convinced that they could rely on your company in the event that a problem would arise in the future and believed you would “be there” for them, then something would have had to happen whereby their hope would have some foundation.

It’s about time. All these definitions have nothing to do with first time or “same day” buying experience. The one common thread in all these definitions is that a form of relationship has developed, *over time*, between you and your clients. Companies that thrive are focused on building relationships. They purposely emphasize this focus by helping their people learn to build relationships. They invest energy, emotion, effort, *time* and resources in teaching their people communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and what we call “soft skills” which are related to building and maintaining customer relationships. Thriving companies don’t short-change this kind of investment. They know that building long-term relationships doesn’t happen overnight because they’re based on trust, and building trust *takes* time.

Now let’s consider the word “faith” according to its dictionary definitions :

1. allegiance to duty or a person: loyalty
2. belief and trust in God
3. confidence

Interesting. The second definition for faith includes a component of trust. So speaking of faith, if we believed in God, then maybe we could “trust” Him to provide a definition. In the Bible, the word faith is actually defined in the book of Hebrews as follows:

*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for
and certain of what we do not see.*

That, in my opinion, pretty succinctly hits the nail on the head. So if we want our customers to have a sense of allegiance or loyalty to us, then we need to create a sense of confidence, belief and trust. To which you might be wondering:

OK, I'm with you, but create a sense of confidence, belief and trust in “what”?

Good question.

If we are to take God at His word, it would appear that what we need to create in the hearts, minds, and souls of our customers is a sense of confidence, belief and trust of something which they *cannot see*, but that which they *hope for*, and we need to do it so well that the customer is *certain* that they're getting what they hoped for.

And what would *that* be? There may be a number of answers to this question, but when it comes to building strong customer relationships, I believe that the “*that*” which the customers cannot see (*because it's spiritual*) but which they hope for (*but can't measure, because it's spiritual*) is whether or not the sales representative has the customer's best interest at heart, or if the sales guy is only trying to ring up a sale. In order for the customer to come to the state of mind where they believe, trust and have faith in the sales agent, something on the part of the customer needs to happen first. Their spiritual sense is going to depend on three criteria, the same criteria that are listed in our Mission Statement. These criteria include:

- a) *mentally* analyzing the information you provided and asking themselves if there are any gaps or omissions,
- b) *emotionally* sensing if they feel comfortable or if instead there's a sense that something is amiss, out of order, or illogical such that it's creating doubt and confusion, and then
- c) *physically* they will be doing a kind of self-examination to judge whether they are getting a good feeling sometimes called the “warm fuzzies” or else are they getting a bad gut reaction. We've all heard people say “*I don't know how to explain it, I just had a really good (or really bad) feeling about that guy.*”

As much as I have taken potshots at clichés and certain buzzwords in the last ten

chapters, let's take a look at a few of society's common phrases for a moment, because they'll help us to crystallize the concept of creating a bond of faith.

The customer can't "see into the heart" of the sales representative, so effectively the customer has to take a "leap of faith" that they're making a wise decision. They will have to "walk by faith" and if they go along with you, they can only hope that they're not going to regret doing business with your company. What we're describing is called acting in "blind faith and trust" because the customer can't fathom the depths of the sales rep's heart. The hope is usually expressed as the sentiment "*Gee, I hope I didn't get screwed!*" whereby hope is placed on receiving something good, or not receiving something bad. So there is a requirement in creating a bond of faith and trust that you somehow convince the customer "to jump in with both feet" without being sure how deep the water is.

This leads to our next obvious question; how does one accomplish *that*? The answer? By focusing *on* the customer, applying the preceding components of holistic medicine.

Limitations of space obviously don't permit examples for an infinite variety of situations, but endless examples of what it means to focus *on* the customer aren't necessary if we engage in a bit of conceptual thinking. We can get a holistic picture of the physical, mental and emotional components of creating good customer relationships if we are committed to focusing on:

- 1) offering our customers a fair price (address their *physical* needs)
- 2) answering all the customer's questions (address their *mental* needs) and
- 3) by being sensitive to the customer's anxiety about making a wise decision by making a purchase from us, whereby we'll do our best to attempt to eliminate any areas of confusion (address their *emotional* needs).

By meeting the physical, mental and emotional needs, we are in the strongest possible position to have the customer begin to trust, in faith, that our sales presentation has the customer's best interest at heart.

This, by definition, would be focusing on the spiritual needs of our customer, and when we combine all four components then we have achieved the goal of looking after our customer *holistically*. This is why our Mission Statement directs employees to look after the "whole" customer physically, mentally, emotionally, and yes, even spiritually.

Can you catch the spirit of this?