

## **Ethical Selling Builds Loyalty** **by Linda Hanson, CMC**

Customer confidence and respect are indispensable to the success of any person in business today. This is especially true for sales people who build revenues and relationships based on trust and good faith. Yet the recent breaches of business ethics by many companies have shown, through dubious accounting practices and out-and-out thievery, that they believe ethics in business is not very important. Certainly the shortest route to higher sales can be through forgoing ethics by cutting corners and doing anything to get the sale. But for long term success, sales people need to adhere to ethical business. Teaching your sales force to behave honorably when faced with many companies who take the short cut isn't an easy job when paychecks are on the line. Here are four reasons to reinforce ethical behavior:

- ✍ **Repeat customers are a must.** Today, customers are well read and they have options. They are less likely to buy again from a company they feel has a poor reputation. Businesses that build ethical practices will boost their sales with customer loyalty and referrals.
- ✍ **Your reputation is critical to your growth.** Selling ethically means treating customers, employees and suppliers with integrity. In addition, customers must know that the information they entrusted to you is confidential and that you will protect them against fraud or misrepresentations to the best of your ability. If you are in business for the long-term, you must protect your reputation on all levels. Set rewards for all employees for doing the right thing—it is good for business. Set high standards for employee conduct and give employees a forum to report suspected unethical behavior.
- ✍ **Your sales people represent your company.** If a salesperson crosses the ethical line--whether by low-balling a price, making insufficiently supported claims, distorting the facts, or making unrealizable promises--the client will not trust your company, product or service in the future. Your sales force is sometimes the only contact the buyer has with the company so make sure they trust their rep so they trust your company.
- ✍ **You need more customers.** Working with customers in an aboveboard way helps your sales people surpass less trustworthy competitors and makes your company a safe place to do business. When you create an ethical sales environment, you create a buying haven that attracts customers.

Establish boundaries by being clear about which behaviors are acceptable and which cross the line, and then hold your employees accountable. Set the foundation for ethical selling by setting core values such as: 1) accountability which describes what your business does, 2) integrity which describes how your company does it, and 3) reliability which describes how your company wants to be perceived.

You must practice what you preach. Keep tabs on your employees by investigating credible ethics violations and claims from co-workers and customers. Problems are usually more easily corrected when you set ethical core values and set

boundaries. Also, take time to reiterate company ethics policies. By requiring reps to sell ethically, you'll prove to your staff and customers that you do more than just talk about values.

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