

SALES

Growing Your Business is a Lot Like Bamboo Farming

by Carol Hartman, M.B.A., M.A.

At a conference I attended several years ago, a Bellevue WA-based marketing expert, Jim Cecil shared valuable insight on effective ways to develop business. I learned a lot from his message and think it is well worth passing along.

Jim compared growing a business to planting and nurturing seeds. To emphasize the analogy, he used a story about how the Chinese Black Bamboo grows. Evidently, the Black Bamboo seed once planted must be watered and fertilized almost weekly. With this kind of attention, one would think that it would sprout and grow fairly quickly. But according to Cecil, nothing at all visibly happens during the first year, or the second, or third, or fourth. Novice farmers become frustrated and even lose hope that it will ever grow, yet they continue their regiment of water and fertilizer.

Finally, during the fifth year, in the sixth month, it happens! The seed opens and a stalk bursts through the ground, and within a period lasting no more than six weeks, the bamboo grows to a majestic height of 20 feet. At this point in the story, Jim asked the audience, “When do you think all this growth really takes place?” Jim believes that the growth is a five year process. Had fertilizing and watering been abandoned at any time during those years, the seed would have died.

And so it is also with developing and nurturing business relationships. Some of our efforts don’t produce immediate returns. If we focus solely on short-term results, we may decide to abandon long term relationship-building activities thinking that they don’t work. Instead we should persist with the same patience as the Black Bamboo farmer knowing that the return on this investment will prove to be truly worthwhile.

According to Jim Cecil, to get our current and prospective customers to “think of us first”, we should develop a process to pro-actively nurture relationships even though it may take a number of years to net results. Throughout this process, we should work toward attracting an abundance of the “right kind” of clients. We should also concentrate on retaining and leveraging our best, most profitable customers, and we should diligently re-attract quality lost accounts. If we focus in only one of these areas, our businesses will grow. But, if we concentrate on more than one, our businesses can truly flourish.

As I sat in the audience frantically taking notes, Jim closed his presentation with this on-target quote from Mark Twain: “When you need a friend, it’s too late to make one.”



© 2005 Carol Hartman/Balanced Act
www.balancedact.com 252-449-5255

All rights reserved. Permission to duplicate in its entirety is granted as long as the author name, byline, and copyright information are included.