



April 2006

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Move That Mountain!

The Impact of Attitude on Business Success

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ave you ever seen two people experience the same event or situation, but respond in two completely different ways? Some time ago I was at a seminar where a simple formula was taught, and it has stuck with me for many years. I've found so many applications for it that I frequently use it in my own training. It is this:

$$E + R = O$$

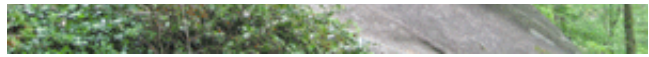
Event, plus response, equals outcome. We cannot control the events that happen in life, but we can control our responses, and therefore, to some degree, the outcome. Let me give you an example. Some years ago I was on a red-eye flight to do a training program the following morning. I was due to arrive at my destination at 7:00 AM. I got on my flight at midnight, hoping to get at least 6 hours of sleep. Moments after the flight took off a baby directly in front of me started screaming. Those of you who are cringing right now have obviously been on a long flight with an unhappy infant. It's not fun - especially when you're counting on 6 hours of sleep. That poor mother tried everything known to mankind to get her child to stop crying. Bottle, soother, nursing, toys and keys - nothing worked. After 20 minutes I found myself getting extremely agitated. By a half hour I was ready to give that woman a piece of my mind. At 45 minutes my stress level was through the roof.

Suddenly, I caught a glimpse of her through the space in between the seats, and saw the look of panic and distress on her face, and I remembered that 15 years before, it had been me with my crying baby on the airplane. In an instant, my response changed from one of anger and frustration, to compassion. I found myself rooting through my bag to see if I had anything that could help. Eventually the baby went to sleep (and so did I), but I was very aware that had I not made a shift in my response at some point, the outcome might have been very different. I may have been unkind to her as I left the plane the next morning, but instead, I commented on what a good job she had done in trying to keep her baby quiet, and I validated the stress she must have been feeling. You'd think I'd given her a million dollars by the look on her face.



So what does this have to do with your business?

Every day you are faced with a thousand situations to which you must respond.



How you respond, affects the outcome of that situation. Imagine this scenario: a supplier is late with an important shipment, you're angry and frustrated knowing your product is going to get to your customer late - you yell and curse and draw everyone in your company into your anger. The outcome is a stressed-out staff, which in turn stresses others who then exacerbate the negative spiral you have created, and an extremely negative work environment is created that may last for the rest of the day or even longer. A more positive approach is to determine to be calm, recognize that the situation is beyond your (and your supplier's) control, and do your best to make it up to your customer. The outcome of this scenario is a staff who have watched you graciously handle a difficult situation, and who feel inspired to carry out that grace in their daily activities. This results in a workplace where people seek positive solutions to problems rather than negativity and blaming.

Will a great attitude make everything in your life work out the way you want it to? Some positive-thinking gurus might have you think that, but I don't believe it. I do believe, however, that a positive attitude helps you to frame a positive response, which impacts a positive outcome, no matter what the circumstances.

Let's look at another example. Your business is struggling - you're having a hard time even making payroll each month (**Event**). You start to worry, get depressed, and believe there's no way you can make this business work. Obviously your efforts are not good enough - you can't even pay your employees (**Response**). The **outcome** of that response is that you probably won't succeed in your business, because instead of focusing on how to solve the problem, you're focusing on what you can't do. Here's a different response. You recognize that you have a serious problem, and decide you don't want your business to run like this any more. You seek help from a business mentor, who looks at your books and makes some suggestions for cost-cutting that allow you to make your payroll at the end of the month. You enroll in a class on strategic planning, determined to make your business better through better planning. The outcome? You're probably going to succeed in your business and do everything you set out to do.

It's difficult sometimes when you're in the thick of things, to realize how much of an impact your response can have on the outcome of any situation. When you find yourself reacting emotionally or negatively to a situation that comes your way, ask yourself these questions: Do I have a choice in how I will respond to this situation? Which choice will lead to a more positive outcome?

Keeping that simple formula (**E + R = O**) in front of you can be a very helpful way to remind yourself that you do have power over the outcome of difficult circumstances. Put it up in your office or post it to your computer where you'll see it every day. Move that mountain, or crumble in a heap in front of it and whine about how there's nothing you can do. The choice is yours.

"The longer I live the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude to me is more important than the past, than education, than money, than failures, than successes, than what others think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skills. It will make or break a company, church, or home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past, we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you. We are in charge of our attitude."

Charles Swindoll

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Customer Service Tips from the

Restaurant Industry

Try to remember the last time you really enjoyed a fine dining experience at a restaurant. There's nothing quite like the feeling of walking away completely satisfied with every aspect of that experience. You're probably even smiling as you remember it. Now, remember a time your experience was less than stellar. Poor service, bad food, an overpriced menu - all leave you feeling ripped off, and determined that you'll never go there again. In fact, my guess is you've already told more than a few of your friends never to go there either! What we love and loathe about our dining experiences can teach us a lot about customer service. Take these principles and see if you can apply them to your customer service strategy. After all, don't you want your customers to leave smiling?

Atmosphere/Ambience

Recently my husband and I tried a new restaurant to celebrate our anniversary. It was one of those tiny, hole-in-the-wall places you barely notice as you walk past, but as soon as we walked through the doors our positive experience began. Small, but well laid out, the decor was inviting. White linen tablecloths and napkins adorned the tables. The lighting was dim and charming mini-lights were strung along the ceiling, giving it a delightfully romantic feel. Of course the smells wafting from the kitchen were marvelous, and we were warmly welcomed at the door by the owner himself. Within just a few minutes we were seated and already glad we'd chosen this restaurant. **Business Application** - What do your customers experience when they walk through the doors of your business? Is the decor in your reception area inviting and warm? Have you added personal touches like plants or paintings to spruce up stark spaces? Are there comfortable seats in the waiting area, and a variety of things to read? Is a pot of coffee brewing? Perhaps even a basket of chocolates or candies available for nibbling? Are your customers greeted immediately when they come in the door, or do they have to wait ten minutes for someone to get back to the desk, or worse, ring a bell to summon someone? Is your retail store clean and well laid out? Are things easy to find? There is a lot you can do to enhance the ambience of your business. Why should you pay attention to this? Imagine walking into a restaurant and finding all the tables helter-skelter. Nothing matches and there are bright fluorescent lights overhead. The walls are bare, the paint is peeling and you smell something burning in the kitchen. Are you likely to stay? Transfer that mental image to your business.

Quality/Selection

After we were seated, a friendly server provided us with menus and took our drink orders. We were anticipating a wonderful meal just by the smells already present in the room, but were even more surprised by the selection on the menu. Although it was a Greek restaurant, it had plenty of other items on the menu as well - which meant that my husband (a Greek food lover) could enjoy that experience while I (not so much a Greek food lover) could also find something I enjoyed. The food itself was spectacular, and we both agreed it was one of the finest meals we'd ever eaten.

Business Application - It's not always necessary to offer a smorgasbord of services to your customers, but your product or service should have enough variety or flexibility to satisfy your clientele, or an offer to customize their order to meet their needs. Finally, are you selling things at a quality level you're willing to support? Your company may be in the low or mid-price range of products in your industry, but your products still have to live up to your customer's expectations. The question you need to constantly ask yourself is, will they be raving about their experience with your company and telling all their friends about you? Quality and selection aren't everything, but



they sure figure high in the minds of most customers.

Service

In our Greek dining experience, we received attentive but not overbearing service. A great server is one you almost don't notice. Our server made sure our needs were being met (water and coffee was refilled, she took our order in a timely manner, checked in with us to ensure our meal was satisfactory, recommended great menu items, and interacted with us in a friendly, appropriate way). Your focus when dining out is usually the company you're with. The service should augment that experience. When I requested fresh butter instead of hummus with the warm focaccia bread, it was brought to me immediately. Wine was brought to the table within minutes of ordering. When our server couldn't answer a question about a specific menu item, she went directly to the kitchen and returned promptly with the answer without skipping a beat - and the restaurant was full! **Business Application** - Are you providing excellent customer service to your customers? Are you responding to their questions or concerns promptly? Are you anticipating their needs? Are you quick to accommodate special requests? Are you quick to respond, period? Service is a high priority with most customers, and they'll keep coming back if you give it to them. I have a business friend who has the philosophy of always providing what he calls 'positively outrageous service' to his customers. He says that meeting expectations is never good enough you need to exceed them and then blow them away with something they didn't expect. In this way, he says, you make your company stand out from the crowd.

Application Exercise

Do some homework in this area yourself. Think about your last great dining experience (or make this an excuse to go out for dinner tonight!) and write down all the things that made it great, or didn't! Then, see whether you can apply any of those principles to your customers' service experience, just as I did above. What you find may surprise you, as well as give you some creative ideas to spruce up your customer service strategy.

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Dream Away!

Solve Problems Through Creative Writing

Are you feeling stuck in your business or personal life? Do you feel like you need to make some changes but can't see where or how? Are you experiencing frustrations at work or at home but can't put your finger on why? Often our subconscious struggles with things we can't see on the surface, and it affects our productivity, our energy, our ability to set and meet goals, and even puts limits on our success. I have to admit it's challenging to produce articles month after month that are both innovative and practical, and to ensure that the information provides tools and ideas my readers can actually use, rather than esoteric theory that's hard to apply. The exercise in this article may at first seem a bit more on the esoteric, than the practical side, but bear with me. If I hadn't had such a phenomenal result through doing it myself, I wouldn't consider recommending it to you. I recently discovered a surprising way to access those subconscious issues and deal with them - without spending hours in therapy. So, if you're up for a challenge and want to try something completely different to boost your creativity, and maybe even solve some underlying problems, give it a try!

This exercise comes from a fabulous little book by Elizabeth Ayres called *Writing the Wave*. You need to follow the steps in exactly the order prescribed (no cheating or jumping ahead) in order for the process to be effective. You'll need a pen and notebook or paper, a timer that you can set for up to 10 minutes, and about an hour of uninterrupted time. **DO NOT SKIP AHEAD** - just do each step at a time in sequence.

Step 1 - Invent a dream

I know it sounds weird, but just make one up. Ayres says "dreams are easy to invent because nothing has to make sense". You cannot use a dream you've actually had. Set your timer for 7 minutes, put your pen to paper and begin with the words "Last night I dreamed . . ." Just allow your imagination to take it from there - the less you censor, the more accurate the outcome. Your subconscious mind has an amazing ability to stream out the things you will need to see. At first I thought it would be difficult, but as I started writing, one bizarre idea flowed into another. Stop when the timer goes.

Step 2 - Jot down a current event or world situation

On a separate line in your notebook, write down a world situation, or current event, that comes to mind. It can be anything - something you heard on the news, something that's currently going on in the world. It can't be personal, and it can't be in the past. Pick one thing and write it down. This should take less than a minute.

Step 3 - Invent another dream

Now you've done it once, do it again. Set your timer for 7 minutes and repeat step 1. It cannot carry on from your original dream; it must be a completely new idea. Stop when the time is up.

Step 4 - Jot down a personal situation

In a minute or less, write down one thing that's going on in your life right now. It can be anything from looking for a job, to building a house, to celebrating a birthday - it's up to you.



Step 5 - Evaluate your dreams

Take a minute to compare your two dream sequences, and jot down ways in which your dreams are alike. They may seem like two completely different ideas, but look hard to see whether there are similar themes. It can be as simple as "the colour red is in both", or "in both dreams I'm running from something", or "my best friend is in both dreams." Set your timer for four minutes and come up with as many things as you can.

Step 6 - Evaluate your two situations

Similarly, write down any similarities you find between the two situations you wrote down - the current event or world situation and your personal situation. It might seem impossible as they are completely unrelated, but don't give up. Look hard. Say you wrote down world hunger and celebrating your birthday - some similarities might be they both have to do with food, they both inspire in you a desire for some change, or that they both have a significant impact on your life. Set your timer for four minutes to do this step.

Step 7 - Identify a theme

Read over all that you've written so far, and see whether you can identify one main theme that emerges - something which is common to all your answers. It might be "I'm looking for a way to express myself", or "forgiveness", or "I'm running from something I fear". If more than one theme emerges, feel free to write them down as well, but make sure you come up with at least one.

When I did this exercise about a month ago, I was amazed at what these seemingly completely random exercises revealed to me. I was able to clearly see an area where I had no idea I was struggling, and that it had been holding me back from moving forward in my personal life. I identified some things I wanted to change in my business as a result of that, and I recognized an underlying theme that I had not been aware of that was draining my energy and emotional resources. Looking at it on a conscious level allowed me to take action and make dramatic changes - it got me "unstuck".

If you've taken the time to go through this process, I'm confident you will already have some ideas

that are going to propel you forward. (By the way, if you really enjoyed this exercise or you've got a penchant for writing, Ayres' book is one of the best I've ever read on inspiring creativity - do yourself a favour and add it to your library). Use this writing exercise as a way to solve some unidentified problems the next time you're feeling frustrated or stuck in life or your business.

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The High Call of Honesty in Marketing

If you made a list of the people you most admired in your life, and wrote down the attributes that they displayed, I have no doubt honesty would be among them. Honesty is the most common value people look for in partnerships, marriages, and friendship. It is no wonder it's such an important part of business. But somewhere along the way, we've lost our trust in what people say about their businesses. We enter into sales situations with anxiety, wondering "what isn't he/she telling me?" A recent national poll in the United States showed that 53% of people sense a "feeling of deception" when it comes to hearing marketing messages. Advertising is even more mistrusted. Perhaps, sadly, there are valid reasons for this mistrust. People have been used, lied to, deceived, and taken advantage of since the beginning of time. It's difficult to find someone who hasn't had a bad purchasing experience somewhere. So here's to a resurgence of honesty in marketing. If your business becomes one that embraces honesty, you will stand out from the crowd.

Marketing guru Jay Conrad Levinson in his book *Guerilla Marketing Excellence - The Fifty Golden Rules for Small Business Success* says "Although I cannot claim that honesty is one of the most valuable weapons in the arsenal of a guerrilla, I can advise you that dishonesty is one of the mortal enemies of your reputation and your marketing." When it comes to marketing your product, can you afford to provide your customers with anything less than the truth? Here are a few ideas to inspire your thinking around this issue, and to encourage a truly honest marketing plan for your business.

Admit your mistakes

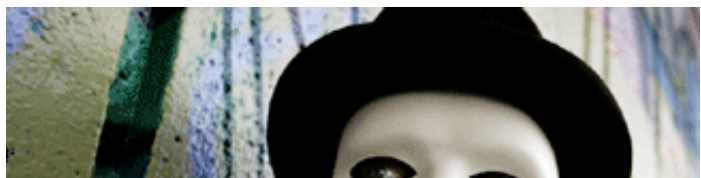
Nothing builds trust more than when you admit that you've blown it, and do all you can to make it right. Covering up, passing the blame, or giving your customer a line about why it wasn't your fault, will come back to haunt you. Eventually, they will find out. Better to say "we received a bad widget shipment, and have sent them all back to the manufacturer. We'll replace yours for free." Or, "we made a mistake - your service contract should have been renewed two months ago, but we'll honour the contract and make this repair for you." Honesty builds trust, and trust builds loyalty. And loyalty brings in new customers. That's good marketing!

Hype attracts, truth sells

There's no question that the bigger the hype, the more people you attract. But hype doesn't sell, truth does. Hype is fun, and it may get folks through the door, but in the end they don't believe it. If you want to sell your customers on your product or service, tell them the truth. Be honest about its great attributes, as well as its limitations. Don't say "best price in town" unless you know for sure it is, or are willing to beat any competitor whose price is lower. "Largest selection in Canada" doesn't wash because your customer can't find out if it's true. Do your best to represent truthfulness in every marketing piece that you put out. You'll find your sales statistics much higher than those companies who live on hype.

Offer something for nothing

Once in a while, give something away that has no strings attached. This concept is so rare that if you do it, people will take a while to get used to it. They'll keep expecting you



to ask for something. So instead of offering a newsletter that you will use to promote your next sale, just offer an informative newsletter that will be useful to your customer. Provide a free seminar on a related topic that is just that - FREE. If you own a car dealership, offer a workshop on how to change a tire. If you own a craft or sewing store, bring in one of your crafter customers to do a workshop on a specific project. The key here is - don't ask them for something as they're going out the door! The marketing impact is greater if you haven't tried to sell something, than if they felt manipulated into coming.



Use facts rather than adjectives

When creating marketing materials, stick to the facts as much as you can. Adjectives (especially superlatives) by nature detract from the honesty of the marketing. "Best buy ever!" will sell less than simply stating the price. How can you quantify "best buy ever"? It's impossible. Therefore, it's mistrusted. And if your customer has found one reason to mistrust you, I guarantee they'll look for another. Keep your marketing simple, factual, and to the point.

Offer guarantees on everything

Nothing inspires people to believe in you more than knowing you will back up everything you do or sell. If you say you'll take it back for any reason - people will trust you and buy your product. I was recently shopping for a gift item. I went into one store and found an item that was the perfect size and quality, and, it was selling at half price. Before I got to the till, I read that dreaded small print on the ticket - FINAL SALE. I turned around and put it right back where I found it. Further along in the same mall, another store had an almost identical item for the same price. I asked whether I could bring it back if my friend didn't like it, and heard that wonderful phrase all customers love to hear - "No problem". Who do you think I bought the item from? Whatever is in your power to guarantee, do it. You'll actually have far less people trying to return things, and more people buying with the confidence that they can, if they need to.

Take steps to inspire honesty through your marketing efforts. A little bit of trust goes a long way when it comes to customers. Be a company they can believe in and count on, and they'll be loyal to you, and bring new customers to you. That's a pretty sound marketing strategy if you ask me!

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Facing the Challenges of a Home-Based Office

Those of you who work from home offices know that the home-based business owner faces very specific and unique challenges. Running a business from home has its perks for sure: you can set your own schedule to be more available for your family; sit on the porch in the sun while you're reading those reports; enjoy the "good" coffee from your French press rather than drinking "office coffee"; unload the dishwasher during your morning break; or take your laptop to your favorite coffee shop and work from there. There are however, some inherent downsides to working from home - one of which is that you never feel like you're away from the office. The reverse is also true, having more time for family is great but it can keep you from getting things done. Lack of structure can lead to procrastination, and not connecting with a regular group of people each day brings about isolation and can reduce the valuable stimulus we receive when talking to a diverse group of people everyday. Let's take a look at some of the specific challenges you face when running a home-based office, and offer some tips on how to deal with them.

Challenge #1 - Wasting Time

Most of us are more likely to manage our time better when others are watching how we're doing it. If a colleague comes into your office while you're staring out the window, you're more likely to quickly get back on task than when you're looking out your window at home. A half hour can go by before you even realize you're not being productive, especially if you have dozed off! **TIP:** Use a timer to help you stay on track. If you're writing a report and feel it should take you an hour, set your timer for the halfway point. When it goes off it will remind you to get back on track and will help you to use your time more effectively, or at least wake you up! Another time waster is the constant coffee excuse; it is easy to convince yourself that you need a coffee - right now! The trouble is, how many things distract you on your way to and from the coffee pot in the kitchen? Set times for your coffee breaks and stick to them, in fact use them as a reward for finishing a good solid work period.

Challenge #2 - Staying Organized

When you're working for someone else, you're aware of how really bad your office looks when others come in to see you. You're also forced to be more organized because others often depend on your productivity to get their work done. At home, you're the only one depending on you, and no one ever sees your messy office. **TIP:** Set aside one hour per week to organize your office. Write it in your calendar as an appointment with yourself, and then do it. Appointments with yourself could involve getting your filing done, re-prioritizing your tasks, putting books back on the shelf, putting away the CD's that are lying on the floor. At the end of the day create a workspace that allows for maximum productivity. When your space is organized, you will more naturally be motivated to organize the rest of your tasks.

Challenge #3 - Balancing Work and Life

When you work away from home, the line between work and home is obvious. When you work from home, that line can get blurred pretty easily. It's great to be able to stop at 3:00 p.m. to help your son with his homework, but will that mean working through the family's dinner time to finish your project? Saturday may well be set aside for family activities, but your office beckons you, and before you know it you've put in three hours of work. **TIP:** Set definitive work and home life boundaries. The freedom to be flexible is one of the benefits of working from home, but you need to be cautious that one doesn't constantly bleed into the other. If you know you routinely want to be available from 3-4 every day for your kids, plan when you will make up that hour and stick to it - maybe after they are in bed. If you want to enjoy a round of golf on Friday mornings, what will you have to give up in order to make that happen? If you've promised your family that you'll attend a specific event on the weekend, don't allow your office to take you away. (Sometimes actually closing and even locking your office door on weekends serves as a reminder that you are committed not to go there until Monday). When you set specific boundaries, you are able to more clearly define your workweek, and have the time you want to commit to your family.



Challenge #4 - Managing Resources

Home-based business owners need supplies just like people in big offices, but often can't purchase things in large quantities to get the best value for their dollar - either because they don't have room to store things, or the money required to purchase large quantities. **TIP:** Start a small business co-op. Get together with other home-based business owners and share the cost of supplies. When 4 of you are sharing, you can purchase a box of 30 reams of paper at a great price, and split the cost. Take turns doing the shopping, and take advantage of better prices.

Challenge #5 - Dealing with Isolation

It's easy to become comfortable in isolation, but it's not good for you. You need others to boost creativity, stay challenged, hear new ideas, and get perspective on your struggles. Sitting behind your desk by yourself day after day will actually make you less productive. **TIP:** Stay connected. Even though it can be difficult, make a point of getting together with others on a regular basis to keep yourself sharp. It can be a weekly lunch with other home-based business owners, a networking group, or working with a business mentor. Be creative, but make sure you do it. The greater the number of hours we spend at the computer without a break the less productive we become. Go out for a short walk and get some air, you will be surprised at how this will boost productivity and more than make up for the time lost.

Make the best use of your decision to run a home-based business. When boundaries are clear and strategies are well thought-out, you will be much more successful in creating a profitable home-based business. When you start to struggle, ask for help. Seek out like-minded individuals. Then you can have the best of both worlds.

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