

Kids (Young Adults) Ask the Darndest (Great) Questions!

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Recently, I was honored by Joe Miller, President/CEO MANA (Manufacturers' Agents National Association) to be selected to speak at Ohio University College of Business.

The course, "MKT 491: Current Topics in Sales/Executive in Residence" by Dr. Barbara Dyer, Assistant Professor of Marketing and Director of *The Sales Centre* at Ohio University. The seminar agenda consisted of an informal dinner with the students the evening before and several small (one hour) breakout sessions the next morning, then informal lunch with the students. After lunch my two hour seminar lecture began - followed by several more breakout sessions! A full day I assure you! A very rewarding day!

The students, their thought process, their energy and especially their insightful questions - was truly impressive!

Question: "Since we are in the computer EC (electronic commerce) age and rely so heavily on this medium what can we do, in sales, to prepare for the inevitable crash of our equipment?" The reply, you go back to the basics. The same as when your calculator goes dead you go back to the basics -do it manually - by hand. The same is true in selling, you have to know the basics of selling, which we ran through. They were shown the example of how to sell anything in less than one minute plus, in each seminar breakout session (4) we performed the "pen test". They did pretty well - one especially well.

Question: "What is the future in sales with EC (electronic commerce) upon us?" The reply has been covered in this column several times (i.e. the Bruce Merrifield response, "Death of a Salesman", EVA (economic value added), etc.) - the point? The point is their questions (many more than included here) were great, so great that I wondered why people in our own safety industry aren't asking these same or similar questions and discussing these and other issues regularly (more on this topic next time).

Then it became apparent that these young adults have only the future to consider - they have no past or current business concerns, only future business concerns - and really, that's why we were there and they were prepared - man, were they prepared.

One of the other exercises was to participate in resume reviews. A batch (15 - 25) was studied and it was determined that they all looked very good (but looked pretty much the same) ... But it was suggested, as an employer, none really stuck out any more than others. They were urged to try to personalize their resumes more - to be different (not goofy or silly tricks) but unique to them to stand out. Today individuals (and companies) need to differentiate themselves from others. And maybe more important for them to customize their resumes. In today's business climate to additionally differentiate ourselves we must customize sales presentations, training sessions, etc. So it is with a resume - make yours appear to your interviewer as if it's the only one you're doing and customize it to that company. Do your homework on the company - pull up their web site - they'll be impressed. Today with technology we have those abilities to personalize and customize and more. We talked about Tom Peters' theory - "The Brand You!" which fit in well. It's not one thing - it's a thousand things and doing them all well.

They seemed to like the seminar (and fortunately I was asked back for next year).

We really had fun and learned a lot, together - I encourage you - if you have the opportunity - if not make the opportunity - to give back to your industry. A local university is a great way to give forward to the future generation.

The final thought left with them was "you can know about the past, but you cannot influence the past. But, you can influence the future and selling is an excellent opportunity to influence the future and cause change. Peoples' needs cause change - not products - and products need to be proactively sold by people to people - when everything else is equal people make the difference -you can too!"

Think about it.

George J. Hayward