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What's Your Job?

By **Julius Rhodes**

Often I will ask a person, "What's your job?" In response they will begin to tell me the specific title of the position they hold. In the past this has been everything from floor sweeper to CEO. In addition to providing me with their title, they also share with me the specifics of their role such as, "I am responsible for making sure that all debris is removed from the floors on a regular basis." Or they might reply that they are in charge of ensuring the needs of the organization are met.

While these responses are accurate, as far as they go, they don't go far enough. The reason I contend that they do not go far enough is because they fail to describe the true essential nature of every position a person has held or will hold. Frequently when we give answers to questions we only scratch the surface of what the question truly entails.

Whether you are a parent or not, think for a moment of any small child who asks you a question. What is the one constant in their query? It's the word "why." In fact when you are involved in these conversations they ask why so often that you or others eventually say something like, "That's just the way it is," or "Because I said so." The repetitive asking of the question "Why?" is certainly not out of any malicious intent but more so, I believe, out of a desire to reach real understanding.

This leads me back to the question, "What's your job?" The simple and most complete answer for all of us is, or should be, "My job is sales." Early on in my career I was involved in manufacturing and I often heard people say that if you don't make it or sell it, you're expendable. I agree with that statement and I think it is an axiomatic lesson that our government needs to remember, but I digress.

Regardless of our title or position or the essential requirements of our specific jobs in order to make our organizations better both in terms of its internal and external perceptions we all have to regularly engage in the art of sales. This is particularly true of individuals in the library sciences and related professions because of the lack of knowledge that far too many people both internal and external to our operations have about what we do, how we do it, and why we are needed.

I am aware of one situation where the headmaster of the institution told a highly regarded librarian at a very prestigious private school that she was not a teacher. The justification for this obviously erroneous statement was that the individual did not 'teach' a specific class. All of us know that whether you are in an institution of higher education or serving as a librarian in a public capacity that teaching is part and parcel of what you do and that it has nothing to do with a 'formal' classroom.

I believe it was Abraham Lincoln who said, "I will prepare myself and I hope my chance will come." Well, one of the ways that I believe we can prepare ourselves for the challenges all of us will face now and in the future is to understand our ability to effectively engage in sales activity. By doing so we will in large measure determine the success of our profession, our organizations and, in turn, ourselves.

This can clearly be seen from the old analogy that waste flows downhill (or something to that effect). In order to succeed we have to promote the profession, then our organizations. If those entities flourish then as an individual we will also reap some rewards.

When we talk about sales, I do not want you to conjure up the worn image of the stereotypical used car salesman, who in their attempt to sell you any 'old beater' on the lot is willing to promise the moon and deliver considerably less. Instead I want you to look at your sales role in the same vein as that of a leader. You see when you think about your ability to engage in sales, if you are behaving appropriately, you are taking upon yourself a leadership role in helping

your profession and your organization move forward.

Now I understand some of you might be asking, but what do sales and leadership have in common? While there are many responses to this inquiry I would like to focus on three areas. First, leadership and engaging in sales require that you know your audience. That means knowing and even researching to whom you are speaking or who will observe your behaviors. In this case it is important to know that regardless of what you say, people will always look to your behaviors as the clearest indicator of your real intentions. Second, you cannot lead or sell if you are not aware of who you are. Remember the famous quote – to thine own self be true? Third, in attempting to lead or sale others you must utilize your knowledge of others and your knowledge of self to affect desirable outcomes for all parties involved. If your primary objective is to promote your personal agenda then your ability to lead or sell others is compromised.

When you engage in leadership or sales activity you need to go beyond image (what people see you as) and go to integrity (what your behaviors show you to be). Hopefully all of you understand you can say or present yourself as anything. However, if you do not believe it and live it and if people cannot observe it in you on a consistent basis then the truth of your behaviors will betray your words.

As you go about engaging in the activities designed to serve as a sales vehicle for your profession, your organization and yourself, you need to be astute at discerning clues from others as to their needs. Even though you are primarily engaged in sales, you cannot assume that based upon your past experiences with others that you can always use the same approach when dealing with anyone. This is not to say that you cannot use your past knowledge because you certainly need to have a source of information to draw upon.

What I am saying is that you cannot let your past knowledge or assumptions blind you to the fact that you will need to use different sales techniques when you deal with different individuals.

Let's go back and think about individuals you have dealt with in a retail sales environment. Have you ever dealt with someone who had an idea of why they thought you should buy a particular washer, dryer, stove or other major appliance and as a result they did not listen to you? Instead they tried to sell you on what they believed to be the benefits of a particular item (usually one at a higher cost). When you talk about benefits you are making an assumption that you know what a person wants based upon a belief system (sometimes arbitrary) that you have regarding what they need.

Now, if you want to combat this potential pitfall here is what you have to do. You need to flip that scenario so that you are responding to that individual's expressed needs. But, how do you do that? Here's how and you need to pay close attention because if this secret gets out then everybody will know. *What you need to do is take your past knowledge of other situations that you have been involved with and insert fact-based criteria regarding your sales efforts.* Your ability to incorporate facts that are relevant to the individual's expressed needs versus benefits, which are usually personal judgment calls, will provide you with a much greater likelihood of being successful in your sales activity.

The final best practices that you need to remember when engaging in leadership and sales behavior are these: First, make certain that you ensure commitment and gain support by asking for the individual's involvement. Second, and related, make sure that you don't leave the person out of the process. People may forget what you said, or what you did but they will always remember how you made them feel.

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