



November 2017

Volume 25, Number 1

In the season of giving, are you *giving* your customers what they need? Do they leave your business with a smile on their face? Are you *giving* your employees ongoing, constructive feedback? Or are they receiving a generic report at the end of December on their performance? As a panel moderator, facilitator, or speaker, you need to *give* your audience a strong opening so they can have confidence in you from the start. This month's articles will *give* you some insight into the importance of giving.

Kristin

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EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK FAUX-PAS: ANNUAL PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL FINDINGS

- by Joseph Sherren

I often speak to executives about how the obsolete and ineffective Annual Performance Appraisal has outlived its usefulness. And yet, I still receive pushback from their HR professionals who believe that trimming the bushes of this dead plant will somehow bring it back to life. It won't.

There have been too many bad experiences coupled with negative social conditioning surrounding the process from managers and employees, that those efforts are futile. Now, before anyone goes ballistic, I'm not saying to scrap the performance appraisal and do nothing. People actually want meaningful feedback – and often.

Employees do not want to be assessed once a year, subjectively placed on a five-point scale and plotted on a bell-curve distribution, and to have the results determine salary, bonuses, and promotability. I have been informed by managers that these reviews can cause work disruptions, anxiety, and even de-motivate employees.

In a recent [survey conducted by Adobe](#), 43% of men and 31% of women reported to have looked for another job after the annual evaluation. But even more alarming is that 28% of men who were surveyed, and 11% of women have quit following the review. So how does this benefit the employee, the manager, or the company?

Additionally, much of the workforce will soon be made up of two

groups, millennials and retired workers who are returning to the workforce. When I interview them, the majority say that they will not be a part of an organization that forces this annual ritual.

Instead, what these workers are looking for is regular (monthly/weekly and sometimes daily) feedback and guidance on their efforts, behaviors, and accomplishments. They are looking for guidance as well as encouragement.

Instead of an assessment, why not provide meaningful discussion on how they can improve, and in turn, what support they feel they need from management to achieve their objectives?

The Adobe survey concluded that reviews drive competition among co-workers, increase personal stress and result in dramatic reactions including crying and quitting.

Findings include:

- Office workers and managers consider performance reviews an unproductive use of time.
- On average, managers spend 17 hours per employee preparing for a performance review.
- Almost two-thirds of office workers (64%) and managers (62%) agree that performance reviews are outdated ways of managing performance.
- More than half of office workers said they feel that performance reviews have no effect on how they do their job (59%) and are a needless HR requirement (58%).
- 57% of office workers said performance reviews put them in competition with one another, and 61% said their managers play favorites.
- 61% of millennials would switch jobs to a company with no formal performance reviews, even if pay and job level were the same.

When coaching and feedback sessions are not “used to judge,” people are more receptive to constructive feedback on where they need to grow, and in the long run, it will be far more effective and productive.

However, to make this work, it is necessary for companies to utilize appropriate hiring assessment tools to ensure that potential employees have the talent and potential to succeed. As well, organizations must institute mandatory and effective management training, timely employee orientation, and a culture of ongoing coaching from a trained and competent management team.

What is your organization doing to improve relations between managers and employees that encourages growth and engagement?

MAKE AN “SOS LOCKER” TO ACE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

It seems like everyone is talking about the customer experience these days. Employers are exhorting their team members to put a smile on your customers’ faces (internal and/or external) and create small, magical moments that turn into memories worthy of posting on social media.

But how do you do that when you are juggling a dozen different tasks, trying to get all your work done in a theoretical 8-hour workday? The key is to make it easy and effortless to do.

As you are chatting with your customer, really listen with interest to the details of their lives. What’s their passion? What are they currently celebrating? What do they like to do? And, easy enough, what do they like to drink/eat? When you establish a true connection AND have an “SOS locker,” then it’s easy to show your customers how much you care!

Okay, so what’s an SOS Locker? It’s a “Stash of Stuff” – drawer, cabinet, or other

storage area that has all kinds of things that (once personalized by you) will put a smile on your customers' faces:

Greeting Cards with a handwritten note – anniversary, birthday, condolence, congratulations, get well, holiday, new baby, wedding – signify that you care. A simple handwritten thank you card is always appreciated!

Gift Cards to a shop or store that you know they frequently visit e.g. Starbucks, Panera Bread, or a cherished local vendor – it doesn't have to be a huge sum of money, either! (Try to stay away from an impersonal Walmart or Home Depot card – unless you know that they are moving into a new house or remodeling their current house!)

Toys for the kids. Keep the kids engaged with balloons, a coloring book and crayons, a model of something that represents your brand (e.g. a model car for an automotive dealership), animal crackers, etc.

Trinkets. A small gesture that ties into the occasion: A stuffed teddy bear or a “onesie” for a new baby, a bottle of champagne for the nuptials or anniversary, and the list can go on...depending on who your clients are!

Online. Perhaps the occasion warrants something a little more special. Godiva chocolates delivered to your home or workplace? Flowers? A personalized card with a picture of the two of you on it? Develop a relationship (and an account) with an online (or local) retailer who will make it easy for you to send a special something with a personal note.

What are some of the items you keep in your SOS Locker to delight your customers?

HOW TO START A PANEL DISCUSSION TO ENSURE PANELIST SUCCESS

The first few minutes of your panel discussion are absolutely critical. Although people shouldn't judge a book by its cover, they do. The audience (and panelists) need to know that they are in good hands.

- **Be Confident.** You've done your homework. You have a solid process in place. You know the panelists. You'll do great!
- **Start Strong.** You practiced these first few minutes and you *know* you are setting the tone, pace, and energy for a powerful panel discussion.

The opening typically consists of five parts:

1. **Topic Introduction.** Welcome the audience and lead into the topic with a short, interesting hook that grabs their attention. DO NOT repeat verbatim what is in the program. Give it a fresh spin that rephrases and focuses on the promise.
2. **You and Your Role.** Take just a few moments to state your name, your affiliation, your qualifications to moderate the panel and a short definition of your role as moderator. 30 seconds, TOPS.
3. **Agenda and Process.** Let the audience know what is going to be covered, general guidelines about the process, ground rules, timing, and when and where to direct questions.
4. **Housekeeping.** There may be some announcements that need to be made, depending on your unique circumstances:
 - *Handout Availability.* “There should be a handout for each participant as you walked in the door” or “These slides will be posted on SlideShare.net or the organization's website tomorrow.”
 - *Recording Instructions.* “This presentation is being taped so if you are asking a question, please step forward to a microphone.” Or “If you don't want to be videotaped for this panel discussion, I suggest you sit on the left side of the room – out of the view of the camera.”

- *Breaks.* For long panel formats, make a break schedule.
 - *Phones.* Remind the audience to silence their cell phones, tweet with a hashtag, take pictures, etc.
5. **Panelist Introductions.** Regardless of whether you are doing the introducing or they are introducing themselves, you set the process in place. Remember, the whole point of doing introductions is to connect the audience with the panelists – who they may or may not know.

Either have all the panelists seated or bring them up one at a time. Make sure the panelists are viewed as competent and valuable. After all of them have been introduced, leave a summary picture/bio slide up so that the participants can easily recall which expert is speaking.

Watch for Snags. While all of this is going on, you need to be the eyes and ears of the audience. Can they hear you? Can they hear each panelist as they begin to speak? If at any time you have doubts, ask, “Can everyone hear?” Don’t hesitate to ask your panelists to talk closer to the microphone, if necessary. Ideally, the A/V staff, support staff or microphone runners can make you aware of any malfunctions as well.

When you confidently start your panel discussion, you’ll set the panelists up for success and let the audience know that they are in good hands.

FROM THE BOOKSHELF: BUILDING A STORYBRAND: CLARIFY YOUR MESSAGE SO YOUR CUSTOMERS WILL LISTEN

I first heard Donald Miller share his StoryBrand concept at a conference a few years ago. I was mesmerized by his thoughtful approach to creating interesting and compelling marketing messages that differentiates you from a crowded marketplace. I was energized to look at all my marketing materials through this lens...and then time passed. I didn't have the follow-up materials nor the inspiration to sustain my efforts.

Well, now I do! [This book](#) is just like Donald is talking directly to me. He has a methodology to look at the story that you are putting out there and to at the very least, bump it up a notch! Or completely re-write the story, which, actually is not as daunting as it seems. In one weekend, I have already written "the story" for my brand and am currently re-evaluating my marketing materials. I can already tell that they are clearer and more concise!

So, as I launch into a refresh of my website and speaker demo video in 2018, I'll be using these principles to help shape my messaging!

NOTE: NEW ADDRESS

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