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**CUSTOMER SERVICE CULTURE FORMATION AS THE BASIS OF
COMMERCIAL AWARENESS OF ENTERPRISE’S EMPLOYEE
ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ КУЛЬТУРЫ ОБСЛУЖИВАНИЯ КЛИЕНТОВ
КАК ОСНОВЫ КОММЕРЧЕСКОЙ СОЗНАТЕЛЬНОСТИ
ПЕРСОНАЛА ПРЕДПРИЯТИЙ**

***Summary.** Commercial awareness essentially means understanding the business environment within which an enterprises and its clients operate. For employees, it is the ability to understand a client’s business needs and provide advice which helps the client meet those needs. It is also about understanding the business needs and drivers of enterprises. Whichever area of business you decide to go into, you will need to demonstrate that you are commercially aware in order to convince enterprises that you are going to be able to help drive their business forward, beyond just securing contract.*

***Key words:** commercial awareness, employee, enterprise, clients, relationship.*

***Аннотация.** Коммерческая сознательность по сути означает понимание бизнес-среды, в которой работают предприятия и их клиенты.*

Для сотрудников это способность понимать бизнес-потребности клиента и предоставлять консультации, которые помогают клиенту удовлетворить эти потребности. Речь идет также о понимании потребностей бизнеса и движущей силы предприятия. В какой бы сфере ни работало предприятие, персоналу необходимо демонстрировать коммерческую сознательность, чтобы убедить руководителей в том, что он способен помочь развивать бизнес, а не лишь заключать контракты.

Ключевые слова: *коммерческая сознательность, персонал, предприятие, клиенты, взаимоотношения.*

Introduction. All knows how businesses grow from private companies into public ones, the purpose of takeovers, the importance of strategy and the role of money as the lifeblood of business as well as being the measure of how well a business is doing. Managers've got a feel for the international nature of the financial markets and how companies access them, the impact of inflation and interest rates (macro-economic factors as they're called) and the big issues challenging big business. This is all very interesting. But it's not the most important thing. The most important thing is: the people you encounter in business.

However big or small the clients that your firm or employer deals with, you will not be dealing with faceless organisations but with people. One of the most rewarding things about business: getting to know, and dealing with, different types of people. Clients of mine have over time become good friends. After all, we spend so much of our lives working we might as well use it to forge good and lasting personal relationships.

The purpose of the article. The article looks at clients as people and how you can relate to the enterprise and employee commercial awareness.

Research results. It is assuming that, whatever your chosen professional field, you have the basic knowledge and competence required to succeed in it: in

short, you know your subject (or are on the way to learning it). That's what all of your learning and training has equipped you with. But you also need to develop your 'people skills'. All of the information I've given you about business will provide you with topics you can engage clients with, in order to find out more about them and their business, and how what you do for them helps their organization achieve its aims. This is what commercial awareness is: the ability to contextualize the advice you give so that it is useful to clients because it helps them achieve their goals [1, p. 28].

Having this business knowledge should give you the confidence to ask questions. It's only by asking questions that you will find out what your clients want you to do and why. And you need to know the 'why' without which you won't have a proper idea of the 'what'.

Professionals start off with one huge disadvantage. We think of ourselves as experts who give advice. And that means we think we only give value when we are imparting advice or information. And that means we talk either 'to' clients or, even worse, 'at' them (so severe is this trait that the French have coined the term *deformation professionnelle* for any walk of life that produces its own distinctive idiosyncrasies - so I guess we should be flattered) [2, p. 722].

Think of the last date you went on. Who do you think enjoyed it the most? You or your date? Then ask yourself: who did most of the talking? When we talk we tend to enjoy ourselves. When someone is talking at us all the time it gets tiring - even if we find what they say interesting.

Listening and asking questions. The key to getting off on the right foot with a client is to listen and ask questions. As the saying goes, God gave you two ears and one mouth: use them in that proportion.

The more you understand what your client is trying to do and where the advice you give fits in that picture, the more you will be providing advice and assistance that your client really appreciates. And the funny thing about business is that clients don't value the professionals who know the most or who are the

most expert; they value those advisers who enable them to get to where they want their business to be. So you don't have to be the most brilliant person in your year to be a hero to your clients. Usually the professionals with the best client skills aren't the most brainy or learned of advisers. They are the ones most closely attuned, and sensitive, to their clients and their needs. And anyone can develop the skills to do that.

How to conduct a conversation. You might think this pretty obvious. But let me give you two tips. First, use open questions. An open question is one which begins with a word like How or What or Why or Where or When. It is 'open' because it allows the other person to fashion a reply in whatever style and to whatever length they like. It opens them up. A closed question is a direct question implying a yes or no answer. 'Do you feel OK?' is a closed question. 'How are you feeling?' is an open question. Closed questions are necessary sometimes, for instance to check your own understanding of what someone has said. Open questions are good when starting to get to know people [3, p. 58].

Second, there's an acronym called EARS which I find helpful. It encourages what is called active listening:

E - Engage: look people in the eye, smile, nod

A - Ask: use questions (see above)

R - Restate or reaffirm: this is about checking understanding, especially when taking instructions from a client, by playing back to them what they have said - this is when closed questions can be useful ('Am I right in thinking that...?', 'So what you are saying is...?')

S - Silence: allow people time to think and respond; don't try to fill the space (journalists use this a lot, letting people blunder on to fill the space) [4, p.556-557].

The key here is to let people speak. I am very bad at this. I get excited and start interrupting. Don't do that. Let people end their sentences. Otherwise they

feel rushed and start to speed up. Let the conversation develop its own tempo. If, like me, you have a butterfly mind, try to train it and keep it under control.

Be interested not interesting. One of the challenges young professionals face is that clients are often a lot older. It may be difficult to relate to them (especially if they are in their 50s, married with a family and heavily into football and you are in your early 20s and a single woman with no interest in sport whatsoever). But you're not trying to make an impression on them by showing how interesting you are. You are trying to impress upon them how interested (in them and their business) you are. By the way, older people naturally like talking to younger people and only a small minority are too driven or impatient to want to try to help you increase your understanding of business in general and theirs in particular [5, p. 214].

So ask questions rather than talk at people. But be careful. I find I ask people too many questions. As a former journalist I find people interesting and try to find out as much about them as quickly as possible, often subjecting them to a barrage of inquiries. Friends complain that they feel 'on camera'. So don't interview people: it makes them uncomfortable and they suspect your motives [5, p. 215].

Incidentally, one aspect of NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming - which has many good things to say about behaviour) with which I disagree is the suggestion that to build a relationship with someone you might mimic their body language. It is true that you can detect a lot from people's posture and the way they express themselves if you watch and listen closely enough. But if you consciously vary your behaviour in response to theirs, it can appear artificial and even manipulative. People see through it. The purpose of my suggestions here is to give you confidence to get off on the right foot with people, not to inveigle them into liking you.

So what about the people you are conversing with? If you are going to make the best impression with a new client, then you need to make a quick

assessment of the sort of person they are. As you can imagine, there is a lot of theory about how to do just this. The trouble with this theory is that it is at best superficial, people being the wonderfully complicated creatures they are, and at worst manipulative).

So the test of whether these theories or models are worthwhile is whether, on balance, they help rather than hinder, rather than whether they are comprehensive and always applicable. See what you think.

The top two (Analyst and Commander) tend to be task-oriented, the bottom two (Amiable and Expressive) tend to be people- focused. Those on the left (Analyst and Amiable) tend to ask questions. Those on the right (Commander and Expressive) tend to issue orders and tell people what to do. Many professionals are Analyticals; many businessmen are Commanders or (like Richard Branson) Expressives [6, p. 168].

Commanders (Task/Tell) are action-oriented. Typically they want options and solutions, succinctly expressed. Many corporate clients tend to be like this. Applying two rule-of-thumb tests - what do their offices look like and how do you do lunch with them - their offices tend to be sparsely furnished and uncluttered (Lord Weinstock of GEC was famous for having nothing on his desk and requiring proposals on a single sheet of paper) and you do lunch with them by asking them what they want to do, if anything (lunch often not being in their timetable, being for wimps) [6, p. 168]. So, with them, be brief and to the point; stick to business and skip the chit-chat; and persuade them by citing objectives and results.

Expressives are big picture people. They get bored by detail but like enthusiasm and energy. They want to know what the effect of something will be and they drive things along through sheer personality. Their offices have pictures on the wall of them meeting important people. You do lunch with them by making a booking at a flash restaurant where you are well known to the maitre d' who shows you to your favourite table and, en route, you introduce

your guest to other local worthies sitting at theirs. So, with Expressives, entertain, stimulate, be lively, ask them for their opinions and keep your eye on the big picture and don't flood them with technical detail.

Analysts (Task/Ask) arrive at decisions by asking questions and evaluating options. An Analyst wants lots of detail, so always go prepared. Their rooms tend to be untidy (although they know where everything is) and you do lunch by offering them the options (five minutes to get a sandwich, 15 to go to the staff canteen, 30 to have a pizza) so they can decide what suits them best. So, prepare your case in advance - attend to detail; be clear and avoid emotional argument; and draw up action plans [7, p. 4].

Amiables (People/Ask) are badly named. In fact they are often the most important people in an organisation. They ensure the place holds together. Their concern is for the people in it and the impact of actions upon those people. They ask questions accordingly. They can be quiet but strong in their resolve. Their desks carry photos of family and friends. They use lunch to meet others and explore concerns. So they will like the opportunity to meet new people over a bite to eat. With Amiables, take your time and learn the whole story, ask 'how' questions to draw out their opinions and emphasise the people aspects.

Now, here's the crunch. Commanders and Amiables don't usually get on and Analysts and Expressives don't usually get on. But when occasionally they do, they get on famously. Let me explain. You can see that people who are Task/Tell are hardly going to tolerate those who are People/Ask; nor will those who are Task/Ask likely have much in common with those who are People/Tell. But just occasionally any one of these types may realise that the person they most need to rely on, to make up for their own orientation, is an opposite. Richard Branson (Expressive) famously surrounds himself with senior managers (Analysts) who actually run his businesses for him [7, p. 6].

The purpose of this model is to enable you to make judgments (however superficial) about others. Actually, if that were all it did, it would have been

discarded years ago (how accurate are such judgments?). What it actually does is to make you think what other people are like and at least to factor that into your thoughts and actions - and possibly to ask colleagues about them before you meet them.

The aim is to start to build a personal relationship. You don't have to become their friends exactly. Some clients don't want that. They have no small talk and have no interest in you. And any attempt by you to find out about them may risk being seen as intrusive and inappropriate. But you have to get on their wavelength. And one way of doing that is by asking them about their business and their role in it. People in business tend to like to talk about it. It takes up all of their time and it turns them on. So asking them about their business and their role in it is a good way in.

So, you're beginning to think about what a client may be like and how to approach him or her (which personality types do you think entrepreneurs might be?). You also need to know what they do.

Commercial conflicts. The more a PSF gets to know a client organization, its business and strategy, the greater the risk of a commercial conflict with other, similar clients it serves. An actual conflict is where a PSF is barred from acting for two entities for regulatory reasons. For instance, a law firm acting for two parties suing each other or an investment bank acting for both the target and the bidder. There are usually regulatory bans on these things happening, laid down in law or in the regulations affecting a particular profession.

A commercial conflict is different. It's OK for a law firm to advise two companies which are head-to-head competitors but neither of them may like the law firm knowing its business while acting for the competitor [8, p. 421]. Nowadays clients are sensitive to commercial conflicts and will tell their professional advisers who they can and can't also act for. But there has to be some trade-off - for instance a guaranteed flow of work, otherwise the PSF may find itself locked into an exclusive relationship that doesn't reward it financially.

Conclusions. Commercial thinking can be developed in any employment setting, particularly if your role allows you access to the rationale for decisions made by your employer. For example, in the engineering industry, you might learn about the challenges faced by enterprise growth. If you work in retail, logistics or warehousing during your holidays, you could develop an understanding of, say, the seasonality of demand or just-in-time purchasing principles.

Another option is to consider the types of client that you would be dealing with in a corporate firm and try to gain some experience (eg, in a bank or financial institution). If you can gain insight into how potential clients run their businesses, this will be a strong selling point at interview. Alternatively, think about how a corporate firm is run and the skills you would need to work there (ie, working on large complex deals as part of a large team). Use this basic idea to think laterally about other organisations which would allow you to work in the same way.

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