

Creating Customers for Life

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In the spring we often think about growing gardens and the process of planting seed and fertilizing and cultivating the soil. The same is true of your prospects and clients. In a society where people are pressed for time and pulled in many different directions, it's vitally important that you keep your name in front of them.

By cultivating your prospects and clients, you build long-term, mutually profitable relationships that are so critical in order for them to see you as a resource. Cultivation of your prospects and clients accomplishes three things:

- It conditions people to buy. By staying in touch with them, you are able to identify their needs so that they want to do business with you.
- It establishes who you are in the mind of the prospect. With all the messages they are receiving and the number of financial advisors that are trying to approach them, cultivation will differentiate you and help you stand out.
- It lowers resistance to your ideas, products, and services. By becoming aware of who you are over a period of time, prospects will begin to see the value of what you do and clients will be more likely to purchase additional products and services from you.

There are many ways to inform and inspire your clients and prospects, however, in order to reach them on a regular basis you should maintain an accurate list of information about them. Today's computer technology makes it easy to load all your targeted prospects and clients into a database. Enter each person's name with a market code, record the date entered along with any special dates such as birthdays, purchase dates, or business anniversaries. You could also include the mail you've sent or telephone calls you've made in their record. Having this information in a database makes it easy for you to stay close to your niche market prospects and customers. You can communicate with them through the ways they associate and communicate with one another.

You can gain access faster by timing and tailoring your information message to match your market segments. To move forward, ask yourself how you can inform and inspire and cultivate the prospects and clients in your targeted niche markets. The following tactics are designed to help you answer that question.

Send articles of interest to your prospects and customers. Look for articles of interest in various magazines, newspapers, and general-interest periodicals. Obtain permission to reproduce them, and send them to your target market prospects and clients. There are really two criteria for success with this tactic:

1. The article should inform your readers about their industry, interests, or recreational activities.
2. It should be accompanied by a simple note card that says, "I thought this would be of interest to you." You could also use a Post-it note to make it appear even more personalized.

Sending articles not only informs, it shows your interest in prospects and customers. In turn, this stimulates their interest in you.

Create a list of 20 ways to make your prospect's life or business better. Send this list to the prospects and customers in your niche. A marketing, sales, or other business idea that furthers their sales or profits is always welcome. In recreational market segments, golf tips or tennis tips would be helpful, as would school safety ideas, or fundraising or meeting ideas for special-interest segments.

Inspire prospects and send them a thank-you note for saying no. When individuals don't buy from you now, that doesn't necessarily mean they won't buy sometime in the future. Let them know that you're always open to work with them, irrespective of present circumstances. A thank-you note for saying no could be something as simple as, "Disappointed we're unable to do business now. Look forward to working with you in the future. Always feel welcome to call." A thank you for saying no helps open closed doors in the future. After sending the note, call

back in 30 days and ask how things are proceeding. You'll often find that prospects are still uncommitted. As a result, the door of opportunity will reopen.

Send a thank-you note after the sale to inspire future business. Frequently after a sale, agents simply say "thank you," shake hands, walk out the door, and move on to the next sale. Remember, a thank-you note sent to the decision maker helps continue your relationship and ensures future access and sales.

Send a personal note to inspire. A lesson learned from former President George Bush. Each day, send a warm and friendly note to 50 to 10 of your prospects and clients. Omit any sales literature; just send a personal tone that cultivates, informs, and inspires. It should be no longer than three sentences or it becomes a letter that requires an opening, middle, and a close. Mention something interesting, or simply give them a word of encouragement. It will demonstrate that you value their business in a personal way. These notes, over a lifetime, enabled George Bush to create support for his nomination as Ronald Reagan's Vice President.

Be sure your voice mail message informs and inspires. Be sure that your greeting is not just a dry, cumbersome "leave a message at the sound of the tone." Instead, use your greeting as an informative message about your practice that, at the same time, encourages the individual that has called you. For example, "I'm so glad you called. I look forward to making a difference in your financial picture. Please leave your name and number at the sound of the tone, and I will return your call either later today or first thing in the morning."

Finally, pay attention to little things. Today, value is determined by the buyer and not the seller, and it's the little things that make a difference, particularly in relation to how you build a mutually rewarding, long-term relationship with them. It's not just how well a brochure or mailer is designed or how professional it looks. Sometimes it's just the fact that you've taken the minute to write someone that counts. It's the cup of coffee that you buy, it's the chocolate or cashews that you bring to the secretary, it's the thank-you notes you send, it's asking about the children, it's finding out about how the wife or husband is doing, it's telling someone you're going to pray for them and then letting them know you have; it's all these little things that make

a difference. All these things help people in your niche markets know you in a special way. We know that people are less brand-loyal that we must concentrate on what want to cultivate to grow our business and theirs.

C. Richard Weylman is an expert in marketing, selling and communicating to affluent and high net worth people. He is the author of "Opening Closed Doors, Keys To Reaching Hard-to-Reach People," as well as numerous sales, relationship and marketing and management audio and video education programs. To discover the many resources he has to offer you and your organization, including his speaking topics, free weekly marketing tips (emailed to you), free articles and much more, go to www.richardweylman.com or call 1-800-535-4332 to schedule Richard to speak at your next event.

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