

# Commercial Culture in 90 Days

How every employee can boost your bottom line



*Authentic behaviours that sell*

# Commercial Culture in 90 Days

How every employee can boost your bottom line



A practical guide on how to create a phenomenal customer-focused commercial culture, where every member of your staff contributes to superlative customer experiences that will drive growth

*Authentic behaviours that sell*

Every single person in your company should be aware of sales. Whether they are on the reception desk, working in payroll or drawing up staff contracts, they need to know that every day is a sales day. To sell is very human and great things start to happen when your organisation is tuned into selling.

This doesn't mean your employees must stop what they're doing, pick up the phone and start aggressively pitching clients. What it does mean, is that regardless of job title and where they are in your organisation, everyone needs to be committed to providing a fantastic customer experience, one that drives revenue into your organisation. We call it a commercial customer experience.

Every employee is the voice and face of the company. Anyone who comes in contact with a customer can therefore make or break a sale, and understanding this is the basis of a winning commercial culture.

Creating a commercial culture is vital for your company's success. It can lead to new and repeat business, drive growth, vastly improve turnover and profits and put you far ahead of your competitors. Regardless of the industry you are in, a commercial culture can improve performance in the short, medium and long term.

So what exactly is a commercial culture? A commercial culture is one where commercialism, or sales opportunities are switched on (activated) in your organisation. Minds are tuned into the realities of driving new business growth, not because 'we have to' but because we want to. It is not about being salespeople; everyone plays their part, including non-sales staff. Think of it like this: you can play tennis without trying to be Rafael Nadal, but you can still be switched onto the game, know the rules and how you can support and cheer on a win.

When you have this, truly wonderful things can occur, such as new pockets of revenue opening up and databases growing quickly with an expanding network of prospective clients. Up-selling and cross-selling becoming the norm, rather than a special event, and staff feel proud of their wins. They celebrate their contributions, knowing that they count towards the company's achievements, rather than being a drain on resources. We all own success, happy in the knowledge that we are satisfying very real human needs of achieving, winning and growing success.

**This paper describes:**

- How to put the customer at the heart of everything you do
- The shift that is needed in the mentality that drives your organisation
- The steps involved in creating a commercial culture – helping the customer to buy and understanding the new buyer-seller relationship
- How every employee is in sales and can be a revenue generator within 90 days
- The right time to focus on sales skills
- How to refocus your sales force to best serve today's information empowered customer

The process is intuitive, straightforward and very achievable.

## Putting the Customer at the Heart of Your Operation

# 37%

of the business professionals surveyed described their companies as having a poor sales culture.

The economic pressures, increased competition and global uncertainties that have conspired to create a tough business environment have also provided a stimulus for growth. Smart leaders are capitalising on opportunities by getting closer to the customer. It is a winning business strategy, no matter the financial climate.

A report by the Australian Institute of Management<sup>1</sup> revealed that companies with a strong sales culture were twice as likely to report very good and excellent sales as those firms with a poor one. The firms that fared poorly were those that rated sales and customer service as low down on the list of management skills. In fact, 37% of the business professionals surveyed described their companies as having a poor sales culture.

Forward thinking companies put the customer right at the heart of their thinking, decisions, ideas, marketing and much, much more. They may sell phenomenal products that are always the latest, fastest and best, but then so do their competitors. Superlative products are no longer enough to get the tills ringing; they must be accompanied by a culture that puts the customer first. In *Rich Dad Poor Dad*, American businessman and investor Robert Kiyosaki, said: "The world is filled with fabulous products, but the money goes to the best communicators." If this is true, then it seems that more money should be spent on customer communication than product development.



These days, the world's most successful companies have a wonderful 'warts and all' window into their organisations via their blogs and social media channels, and customers really warm to this earthiness and realness. Successful companies communicate with their customers in a very personal and effective way. When they make mistakes they 'fess up and don't try to sweep it under the carpet. They explain what went wrong and how they are seeking to make things better.

## NETFLIX

In 2011, Netflix attempted to introduce a spinoff service called "Qwickster" that would actually end up costing customers more. Reed Hastings, the company's CEO apologised for the mistake, addressed complaints and ultimately abandoned the service. He wrote: "I messed up. I owe everyone an explanation". He then went into a full mea culpa "In hindsight, I slid into arrogance based upon past success" and explained the steps he was going to take and why. Such disarming honesty and full and frank explanations won many fans, probably for life. He did so by putting the customer at the heart of his message, rather than himself.

A commercial culture should be instinctual, something that is not only deeply embedded into the fabric of the company, but also entwined in the DNA of every single employee. We all have in built mechanisms to serve, to please and to warm our hearts by helping others. That's a customer service culture. The commercial twist is that we should also be proud of selling stuff to clients who need it. And let's not forget that it is fantastic fun to buy stuff! It makes us feel good all over. So you can make your customers feel great by helping them to make a purchase. Win-win!

The result is that a companywide customer-centric approach becomes as natural as breathing. It is not a case of turning on the sales patter when the clock hits 9:30 am and switching it off once the last call of the day has been made. Nor is it turning out a company of unfeeling, unthinking automatons adhering to a 10-point customer service charter. It is a way of doing business that supports customers, not sells to them or makes them uncomfortable. Sure, you will still have sales projections, milestones and targets, but a company-wide commercial culture will get you there quicker and with better results



### Achieve Culture Change without Pain

We know what you're thinking: "It took two years for us to change our culture about leaving dirty dishes in the sink, let alone changing everyone's mind-set and behaviours around selling." You're right; getting your stony-faced mail room guy to notice a sales opportunity might appear to be the equivalent of climbing Everest. Changing an organisation's culture is one of the toughest challenges a leader will ever have to face. However, moving toward a customer-centric commercial culture can be a natural transformation that doesn't have to be fraught with major dilemmas.

Irrespective of the number of people in your organisation, whether there are ten or ten thousand on the payroll, the change is not as drastic as you might think. That is because we are all in sales now. Every single one of us spends a large part of our time selling, and that includes your company's accountant, cleaners, secretaries, personal assistants, mailroom personnel and office managers

Rarely a day goes by that we do not draw on the fundamental skills, attitude and behaviours of a salesperson in both our professional and personal lives

The first step to change is simply an awareness and recognition that we are doing them every day.

Convincing a loved one to go to the movies? That's selling. Trying to get some punters along to your kid's concert? That's selling. Listening intently to a friend in need? That's selling. Offering someone some advice to get them out of a rut? That's selling. Noticing something that you don't usually notice about what's around you? That's selling. Being positive, present, energised and happy? That's selling



Tapping into the innate sales abilities of every employee is a powerful way of improving customer experiences and your bottom line

This concept is explored in great detail in Daniel H. Pink's book *To Sell is Human: The Surprising Truth About Moving Others*. The underlying premise of this fresh and welcome look at the art and science of selling is that we are all selling, that is moving people to give us something we want. And that includes your non-sales staff. We will look at this concept in a little more detail later in this paper, but suffice it to say that the ramifications can be truly powerful for your company.

If customer interactions are only confined to your marketing and sales departments, then you are probably not achieving your potential. Tapping into the innate sales abilities of every employee is a powerful way of improving customer experiences and your bottom line.



Jeff Bezos  
Founder and CEO of Amazon

» Image credit: wikimedia commons

### Changing Your Company's Mission to Create a Commercial Culture

**"We see our customers as invited guests to a party, and we are the hosts. It's our job every day to make every important aspect of the customer experience a little bit better."** Jeff Bezos, founder and CEO of Amazon.

Jeff Bezos is holding court in a conference room in Amazon's Seattle HQ. High level conversations about new directions swirl around the table, and at one end there sits an empty chair. It is the focus of the discussions and by far the most important thing in the room.

Bezos, perhaps more than any other entrepreneur understands the philosophy of delivering a flawless customer experience. In so doing, he has made Amazon one of the most profitable companies in the world. The multibillionaire CEO is famous for bringing an empty chair to meetings so that his executives can concentrate on the one crucial person not present in the discussions: the customer. He may well run the company, but he knows, as does every Amazon employee from the boardroom to the dispatch room, that the customer is the ultimate boss. Amazon's success comes from a commercial culture that homes in with a laser-like focus on customer needs and then works backwards, ensuring those customer insights pay off.

### Help the Customer to Buy

Close your eyes and imagine for a moment an organisation with a commercial or sales culture. What's happening? Are there people running around with headsets on in a 'boiler room' scenario? Are there staff members ringing bells when sales are made? Or are there smaller, more subtle sales culture related activities going on? Is it as simple as a recognition program in place when non-sales people cross-sell, or up-sell or refer a friend? Is there more transparency, a window into the commercial departments of an organisation? Is there more of a link between sales and delivery?

A commercial culture is not one where salespeople use high-pressure tactics to strong-arm their clients into making a purchase. It is an ethos where the customer is fully supported, not harassed until they have emptied their wallets. Companies can drive growth in revenue and profits not by selling things to customers, but by helping them to make purchase decisions. It is a paradigm shift in psychology that is centred on solving problems and meeting needs rather than selling more widgets, although that of course is the end game. Increased sales come from shifting your perspective to seeing the world through your customers' eyes.

“Here in the shower, we’re thinking about how we are going to invent something on behalf of a customer.”

**Jeff Bezos**  
**CEO, Amazon**

In a 2012 interview in Fortune magazine<sup>2</sup>, Jeff Bezos from Amazon neatly summed up the difference between a sales driven and customer driven mind-set. Making reference to CEOs of other companies, he said: “When they’re in the shower in the morning, they’re thinking about how they’re going to get ahead of one of their top competitors. Here in the shower, we’re thinking about how we are going to invent something on behalf of a customer.”

Putting the customer at the heart of everything you do is not some mantra that each employee can recite by rote. It goes much deeper than that, because it is part of the fibre and fabric of an organisation.

#### **Understand the New Seller-Buyer Relationship**

To truly serve and support customers involves an understanding that the relationship between sellers and buyers has changed in our information rich age. It is where the seller no longer has the monopoly on product related knowledge.

Advances in technology combined with the power of the internet and social media are giving greater power to the customer, changing everything about the business and customer relationship. Today’s customers are more demanding and better informed than ever.

Before making a purchase, customers will research product information, check price comparisons and consult social media networks, online communities and review sites. They have high expectations, often know more about the market than you do, and will have a strong idea of the real value of products. They are more likely to ask focused, narrowly scoped questions rather than basic ones and they expect you to know the answers, or if not, be able to get them quickly.

Customers have the power. But with this knowledge, so do you. You know that you need to make them feel good, and valued and happy. And you can strengthen your customer-centric approach and make it truly world class by uncovering problems and providing solutions, rather going for the close at the first opportunity. This involves:

**Empathy:** This allows you to understand customer concerns and respond to them quickly. It is not a manufactured sentiment, but a genuine understanding of how your customer experience affects customers and makes them feel, and a desire to make them feel great. You can increase your empathy for customers by asking them questions about everything that brought them to this point. Empathy comes from asking the tough questions as well. For example you are much more likely to understand how a customer is really feeling by tuning in to their body language, rather than just their words.

**Improving Customer Experiences:** Every employee from top to bottom of your organisation is focused on delivering outstanding customer experiences, from the freshest intern to the executive management levels. Initiate training programmes for all employees, not just those who come into direct contact with customers. The focus must be on listening, understanding and then acting to fulfil customer needs. Illustrate training programmes with stories of great customer experiences. Most organisations can find them within their teams and departments. Stories are inspirational and educational, and by unlocking these examples of greatness you show that they are real and achievable. Understand what’s great about them and discuss how they can replicated and applied to future customers.

Customers have the power. But with this knowledge, so do you

Rather than give up, he carried 5 kilos of fish for over a mile of very tough walking terrain, so that he would not be letting his loyal restaurant owner down

#### Here are a couple for starters

A regular customer of a Gaylord Opryland hotel in the USA was enamoured by one of the features in her hotel room, an alarm clock that played light music. For three years she searched everywhere to find the make and model, but to no avail. During one particular stay at the hotel, she messaged the company's Twitter page asking where she could buy the clock. In their reply, Gaylord Opryland explained that the exact model isn't available to the public and they provided a link to a similar model. That was helpful, but it wasn't the end of the story. Returning to her room one day, the guest was surprised to find a present. The hotel gave her two clocks and a thank-you note for following them on Twitter.

A family staying at the Ritz-Carlton hotel in Bali brought specialized eggs and milk for their son who suffered from allergies. However, en-route to the hotel the food was ruined. The hotel manager couldn't find any special ingredients locally, but his executive chef knew of a store in Singapore that sold them. So he contacted his mother-in-law who lived there. She bought the items then flew to Bali to deliver them. Wow!!!

Bidvest Fresh deliver, among other things, beautiful fresh fish to UK restaurants. During a particular snowstorm, a driver could not access the road for the last mile of his journey. Rather than give up, he carried 5 kilos of fish for over a mile of very tough walking terrain, so that he would not be letting his loyal restaurant owner down. That was 4 years' ago. Guess who the restaurant is still using as their sole supplier of fish today?

Stories like the above are both everywhere and nowhere. Meaning that they probably happen several times per week in your organisation, but they never get 'unlocked' from the people or division they are in. Yet when they do get unlocked, stories can develop a life of their own, and they form part of a proud, strong and resilient culture, just like stories retold today from human tribes thousands of years ago. That is why an integral part of developing a commercial culture is to encourage everyone in your company, from Receptionist to CEO, to share their great stories!

**Solving, not Selling:** Most customers will know about your products and services before they come to you, so it's not about selling anymore. In this new environment, salespeople need to think of themselves as customer advisors, ensuring their experiences are great and staying in touch with them through multiple channels, such as emails and the company's social media platforms. Think about it; nobody wants to be 'sold at'. So, solve customer problems (even if it is outside your direct business focus), educate, inform and add value. Concentrate on their needs, not on your need to sell

**Improving Accessibility:** Companies say they are customer-centric, but then undermine their boast with a website and phone network that are difficult to navigate and an email support response system that operates on geological timeframes, if at all. Make it easy for customers to get in touch with you. Remove obstacles, and give them a great story to tell their friends





### Say Good-bye to Commissions

In a commercial culture where sales people are no longer ‘talking brochures’, is it time to do the seemingly unthinkable and jettison sales commissions? Proponents of such a drastic move believe that commissions don’t serve the overall business goals. They create unnecessary friction between employees and are based on short-term solutions and not long-term strategies (service, customer experience, happiness). They can also be the enemy of innovation with employees focused on the next sale, unwilling to try anything new.

In an interview with the New York Times<sup>3</sup>, Craig Gorsline, President and COO of Chicago-based software company ThoughtWorks, explained how commissions were getting in the way of his company’s mission and purpose. So the entire sales force was put on a straight salary instead of commissions. The result was that the annual growth for ThoughtWorks increased between 18 and 22 percent in each of the subsequent two years.

In the same article, Terry Ortynsky, the founder and owner of the Royal Auto Group, a car dealership in Saskatchewan, Canada discussed why he stopped all incentive schemes for his employees. “There was a conflict between doing what was right for the customer and an individual who wanted to earn a higher salary.” Explaining that the aim is to forge relationships with customers, he added: “It’s a team effort, and you can’t really divvy (divide) up commissions in that situation”.

Some organisations that have done away with commissions have opted for company bonus plans where a share of the profits is divided between employees at the end of each year.

A great example of a companywide bonus structure is the John Lewis Partnership. All permanent employees are “partners” and from the chairman to shelf stackers and shop assistants, all receive the same percentage pay out from the retail group’s bonus pot.

Perhaps not surprisingly, every employee feels incentivized to help the business grow, and they do that by providing a stellar customer service that includes partners asking customers what they want, listening to their needs and feeding back the results.

Not only are profits soaring (operating profit increased to 62.2% percent during the first half of 2014)<sup>4</sup> despite the straightened economic climate, but the company has picked up a slew of customer service accolades in recent years. They include Most Trusted Organisation and Britain’s favourite Retailer.

Again, we see the strong link between customer experience and financial results

Ultimately, a commercial culture is one that acts in the best interests of its customers, if not, the company will crash and burn. By doing away with commissions, proponents argue, the focus automatically shifts to enabling the customer. The dog-eat-dog sales environment is replaced by one where customer needs are prioritized



### Everyone is in Sales

In *To Sell is Human*, Daniel Pink reveals that 1 in 9 American workers earn their money from sales. The statistic may or may not surprise you, but if you haven't read the book, the next one probably will. And that is that the other 8 in 9 are also in sales. They may not be involved in direct selling but they do have to influence, convince and move others to make some kind of exchange. He calls this "non-sales selling".

Sales gets a bad rap. Most people will bristle their shoulders when told they are in sales. They imagine sleazy, unctuous and aggressive types who would sell their grandmother if there was a dollar to be made. The negative connotations are powerful and deeply entrenched in the public psyche.

However, this clichéd view is out-of-date, a relic of a time when the seller had much more information than the buyer. This unequal relationship was fertile ground for customers to be ripped off and may have worked in the past, but this is not the world we inhabit today. Sales is no longer a dirty word - it is now fundamental to making the customer experience better. So, what does this mean for a companywide commercial culture?

Every interaction that everyone in your company has with a customer or potential customer reflects on your brand and reputation. Every employee should be a walking talking advert for you.

A customer is not always going to buy when you or the company accountant wants them to. They are going to go away and think about their potential purchase, chat with friends, family or colleagues, read some more information and consult a batch of online reviews. Just like you do! During this time, you are not being forgotten about.

They will be thinking of you and every conversation, email and face-to-face experience, not just with your sales staff, but with everyone and everything they interacted with that represents your company

Sales is no longer a dirty word - it is now fundamental to making the customer experience better

And don't think that your brilliant products and services will be enough to attract and keep customers, because unless you are ultra-niche, customers can get what they want from your competitors.

Customers expect more from the people they do business with and so you must change your approach. Every single employee

**Sales is no longer about a sales team working in a vacuum, but a companywide collaborative process**

counts. All play a direct role in contributing to your sales and growing your profits.

So how do you turn this knowledge into a thriving commercial culture? Here's a simple plan that will help:

Define the commercial culture – clearly state what you want the commercial culture to be and what the customer experiences will be like. What you come up with must be clear, simple and communicated to all your employees so they can answer the following questions in a similar way:

- Why would a customer come to us over and above our competitors?
- What do we do that is different?
- What experiences do we want our customers to enjoy when they come to us?
- What do we need to do to attract new customers and retain existing ones?
- What are the company behaviours we would like to reward?
- What are the behaviours that might be currently undermining a commercial culture?

Flush it all out. There is no point embarking on a program until you have unblocked minds and unlocked arms.

**Improve the customer experience at every point of contact** – the customer experience does not begin and end with the purchase of goods or services from a website or salesperson. It starts way back when a customer first becomes aware of a company's existence, and it encompasses multiple interactions known as touch points. A touch point is any point of interaction that a customer has during their relationship cycle with your company. Everyone can influence their perception of your brand and everything you do, make or sell. They include emails, marketing messages, telephone

conversations, meetings, brochures, the cleanliness of your office and even online reviews.

Look at how you can improve your commercial customer experience touch points across your entire organisation. Draw up an inventory of your touch points, identify their purpose, assign ownership and leverage each one to ensure a consistent and positive commercial customer experience.

**For example:**

When customers sign up with your services, you can ask about their birthday, favourite food, favourite genre of books, or simply their opinion on a topic closely related to your core purpose. These little snippets of information can be so valuable later on when you would like to reward them for being great. For example, sending out a local restaurant voucher, or the new Malcolm Gladwell book; something related to the individual person that you know they will love based on the information they have provided.

What happens when customers receive their invoice from your accounts department? Does the invoice look like something straight out of 1995, or is there a cool, wonderful, personal message on it? Or maybe even a mention of your latest sales promotion, which can be backed up by the warmth of the Accounts person's voice - if Accounts has been trained in commercial culture that is!

At the Hoxton Hotel in Shoreditch London, they call their invoice The Damage, which is in keeping with their modern, slightly irreverent brand. The Hoxton, created by Julian Metcalfe (creator of London based restaurant lunch brands Pret-a-Manger and Itsu) is essentially a strong sales engine, with everyone aligned to a strong commercial culture message from day one of his or her employment.

An inconsistent customer experience feels strange to the customer, while a consistent customer experience will generate many more commercial opportunities such as up-selling, cross-selling and referrals.

**A consistent customer experience will generate many more commercial opportunities such as up-selling, cross-selling and referrals**



This is Natural Training's Power of 4 Commercial Culture Process, which encompasses 4 dynamics to teaching your people, from Reception to CEO, how to be more commercially aware. The key part of this program is that the fourth element, skills development, is saved for last, and only when the other three have been achieved. That's the Natural Training difference.

Here's how to change to a commercial culture:

### 1. Belief in your own natural style

Before we can change a culture, we have to start from within, and that means we begin with an individual's awareness and belief in their own natural style. Your people need to believe in themselves, what they stand for, and their core purpose with the customer at the centre point - which all act as a foundation for the next three stages of the commercial culture change process.

The word belief here is critical. At Natural, we have some clever learning techniques to help people fall in love with the idea of providing an amazing customer service experience. This helps your people to feel more deeply committed, engaged, and confident. This is a powerful development in the world of training. Starting with the heart first truly makes the difference! Your customers will buy into the warmth and personality of your people, while your people gain a new found level of confidence and courage to bring their 'A Game' to customers, every time.

A key driver to this is story telling. As previously outlined in this whitepaper, stories have the ability to motivate a generation of individuals to go the extra mile and develop a strong, lasting connection to your company.

There's a wonderful example of this during a visit by President Kennedy to the NASA space centre in 1962. JFK interrupted his tour to speak to a janitor, asking him what he was doing. The man replied: "Well, Mr President. I'm helping put a man on the moon." He clearly understood the importance of his contribution and was energised by his role in the vision of the organisation that he worked for. Imagine the motivation and extra belief that this story gave others at NASA!

Stories inspire belief, and belief inspires change. Which takes us neatly onto the second dynamic of our Commercial Culture Change Process – your Business.

### 2. Strong links to the reality of business

Once eyes have been opened to the power of natural style and belief, then the next stage of the change is to focus on your business. It is crucial for your people to truly believe in what you

stand for – your brand, your products, your services and your people – and particularly, what their wider role is in that. We show employees how they contribute to the bigger picture every employee needs to understand exactly how they build the commercial culture and success of the organisation. Most people want to feel that they are part of something bigger than just their job. We proudly use the word Sales, and not try and disguise it in a 'non-dirty' word. The idea is to help your people to really understand the beauty of selling, which partially satisfies the appetite that your non-sales people have to learn exactly what your Sales department does, what sales is and what sales people do and what they don't. That's why, when you are changing to a commercial culture, learning about your business is such an important component.

If the perception is anything other than a recognition that without sales there will be no company and therefore no jobs, then you could be heading for trouble. Maybe you could help your non-sales employees understand sales by having them spend a bit of time with your sales team. Perhaps you could have an employee ambassador from every department who could report back to their team on what happens in Sales. Allied to this should be an education initiative to show each person how they contribute to the work of the sales team.

Foundational business skills are very important too. We encourage non-sales staff to know the basics of a balance sheet, and the way money flows in and out of your organisation. For example, a simple bit of mathematics can demonstrate 'the multiplier effect' – how a series of say 5% marginal gains in metrics can lead to 50% revenue gains in your organisation. So, we help everyone learn about those key metrics, such as up-sells, or shortening delivery lead times, or obtaining a new referral. Additional revenue into existing relationships is quite often referred to as 'the cream', and for good reason.

You have already paid your customer acquisition costs, and the fixed costs of servicing them, so everything above the expected revenue amount is of course the most valuable revenue of all.



This stage is essentially a company-wide education programme to show each employee, irrespective of whether they have direct contact with customers, how their role is important to your company's mission and growth. The emphasis is on demonstrating how everything they do influences a customer's

Every interaction with a customer is a chance to talk about industry trends, news about your company, great ways to use your products, product innovations and so on.

In order to provide an outstanding customer experience, your people will need to see the world from the eyes of the customer.

Image credit: wikimedia commons



### Commercial Culture in Practice: The Oberoi Hotel in Bangalore

Every morning at 5:30am, every staff member gathers at the 5 star Oberoi Hotel for a 10-minute slideshow like no other. During the slideshow, each guest is profiled with a picture, their name, their room, duration of stay, and if available, purpose of stay. Throughout the day as customers walk around the superb facilities, it is not uncommon for a gardener, or a waitress, to say hello to them by name, and offer to help in any way. While this clearly makes guests feel special, it also serves a commercial purpose. The more conversations guests have, the more Oberoi staff learn about their preferences and are able to cross-sell other services such as spa and car hire.

decision to do business with you, customer satisfaction and retention, and other metrics that are pertinent to company success.

### 3. The Customer

Now during our development programmes our hearts are sold on our individual natural style and purpose, while eyes and brains are now wide open to the reality of business and sales. Now we can move with confidence onto the Customer, because we need a strong empathy if others are able to buy into us. It's important to use customer interactions as learning tools every conversation and email exchange can provide insights into how customers think and what their current pain points are that require solutions. All of this is valuable information that may be fed back into the company to improve the customer experience and enhance your ability to meet their needs. The most commercially aware business cultures never shy away from the truth about what customers think – in fact, they seek out opinion with a tremendous hunger.

Seeking this knowledge and acting on it will always yield a solid return on investment. It is also a two-way street. As much as customers are educating you, you can educate them.

The word for this is of course, empathy. True empathy can't be faked. So, during our training programs, we have some innovative methods to help your people to get really close to your customers. What drives them? What are their challenges? What do they want? What do they REALLY want? What are the 3 things that you do that annoy them, or delight them, more than anything else?

It's also important to encourage creative techniques that foster proactivity – being slightly ahead of the customer curve!

Once we believe in our hearts, our business, and our customers, now we can move on to some skills-based training to drive phenomenal customer experiences.

### 4. Skills

The fourth, and final part of the Commercial Culture diagram (above) is the skill development. It is usual for a training program to begin with skills, but at Natural Training we believe that skills can only be effectively

developed once the previous three dynamics are already in place – belief in ourselves, links to our business, and customer empathy. Skills are much more easily taught when the desire is firmly in place.



The best skills develop natural talent, and go way beyond the standard cheesy customer service and sales lines and behaviours. Clever skills development helps your people to uncover the cornerstone skills of phenomenal commercial customer experience, such as:

- Making a body language connection
- Showing an interest by asking questions
- Establishing a natural common ground rapport
- Listening as though you are hearing it for the first time
- Providing outstanding expertise, advice and value
- Speaking using your unique cultural words, phrases and language – not borrowed from a book
- Handling conflict in a natural, satisfying way
- And beyond everything else, being proud to fuel a customer experience by meeting customer need by upselling and cross selling the range of product and services you have to make them happy.

## 6 More Habits of Commercial Cultures

1. Everyone inputs, no matter how small. From Receptionist to CEO, they realise that their customer interaction DOES make a difference.
2. Everyone is really close to customers. They know customers inside out - analysing feedback and internal and external data, plus actively seeking feedback, and success stories. Companies with a strong commercial culture utilise strategies such as producing a customer experience newsletter that proliferates stories and brings departments closer.
3. Everyone knows what they sell. ALL employees have at the very least an awareness of your products and services, which greatly assists
4. There is an effective feedback loop. It is simple for an employee at every level of your organisation to feed back opportunities.
5. Ideas are crowdsourced. Crowdsourcing is based on the premise that good ideas can come from anywhere and anyone inside and outside an organisation, regardless of their knowledge set or background. Invite your non-sales staff to brainstorming sessions with the sales team and advocate a culture that is open to ideas and suggestions from anyone on how to improve sales. You never know where the next brilliant innovation will come from.
6. Hire candidates for their ability to 'sell' the company. In addition to your usual selection criteria for non-sales positions, add another, and that is how well the person fits your commercial culture. How well are their personalities aligned with your mission and values? The interviewing panel can ask such questions as "How have you interacted with salespeople in your previous jobs?", "How do you see your role having a positive impact on sales?" and "What would you do to promote the company to friends and family?"

However, you may also have to factor in new hires as part of the culture change you are going through. For a commercial culture to truly deliver, you don't want employees who just turn up to work to watch the clock ticking by. You need people who buy into what you do and what customers want.

Establishing a strong commercial culture is a great way of supporting people more to use their natural talents and skills to deliver great customer experiences. Our commercial culture approach at Natural Training, centred around Business and Belief first, is market leading born from sound techniques applied in the right psychological sequence to change the behaviours that matter

### What can your sales team do to bolster your commercial culture?

When organisations see a slump in sales or a fall in profits, the tendency is to exert pressure on the sales team or to put some juicier carrots in front of them in the form of bonuses. When this doesn't work, companies spend a lot of time and resources on providing tools and training materials to sharpen up the skills of their sales team – forgetting the commercial potential in the organisation as a whole. The trouble with all of these approaches is that if they work, they only do so for a short while.

Sure, you may achieve a few quick, and let's face it easy wins, but it is so superficial. You can bet your bottom dollar that it won't be long before the problems rear their ugly heads again. Addressing only sales skills, with the sales team, doesn't go deep enough. It masks the underlying causes and perpetuates the difficulties created by having a sales team that only concentrates on its own success, operating as if a separate entity within a company.

The problem with a lot of sales training today is that it turns out production lines of robots. Yes, these employees will do what they are told, but unless they really feel and believe in what they are doing, the results are going to be far less than stellar. "Would you like fries with that?" is a classic up-selling robot phrase. Furthermore, just because knowledge is imparted, doesn't mean that it is going to be retained or even used.

Salespeople don't need more courses on product information or ones that only aim to improve some of their rusty skills. The way forward is something more thorough and deeper than a typical skills-based approach. As we explained previously, at Natural Training, we usually leave the skills to the very last. That is because we need to set some very important commercial culture foundations in place first.

If your sales people can actively demonstrate aspects of commercial culture to other areas of the business, then your path to success will be faster



### Empathy is key for sales people

Sales people need to put themselves in their customers' position and see their business through their eyes. They need to build empathy with them – putting their own needs to the side in order to get an accurate picture of the customer's world. In so doing, they will be well equipped to give them what they need. Some questions to ask sales people:

- Who is your customer?
- Who is your customer's customer?
- How do they like to buy?
- What do they want their experience to be like?

If your sales people can actively demonstrate aspects of commercial culture to other areas of the business, then your path to success will be faster. The biggest gain will be for your sales people to show how they appreciate customers' desires, pain points and wants.

For example:

If a decision maker you are selling to describes herself in a certain way on their LinkedIn profile, for example using words like 'strategy', 'process' and 'structure', then those words reveal so much about their personality. They will naturally be less motivated to work with you if your words are looser, or conceptual, or lacking structure or direction.

If your customer sells fresh flowers nationwide, the chances are their whole network is alive and humming at 5am in the morning. If you

want to get them when they are on top form, try getting hold of them at 7:00 am and not when it suits you at 11:00 am! Sure, it might not suit your style, but empathy is about suiting their style.

9 questions to help you get closer to your customer: How easy is it to get what you want/need from us?

- How easy is it to find information about products and services?
- How good is that information?
- How easy is it to contact us?
- How long does it take for you to get what you want when you deal with us?
- How are your complaints dealt with?
- How much do you like doing business with us?
- How could we make your experience with us even better?
- Will you do business with us again?



#### Employees as Ambassadors

In the London Olympic Games in 2012, a massive army of 70,000 volunteers was called and trained to become ambassadors. It was their job to be 'in and around' the Olympic venues, transport athletes, welcome visitors and help out behind the scenes. Their relentless enthusiasm and energy were a huge part of the outstanding success of the games.

Motivated and energised employees will speak with confidence and passion about your company to partners, suppliers and customers. They will become powerful ambassadors for you, and enthusiastic in their dealings with members of the public. Successful sales relies so much more than delivering a product or service, it is about the culture and environment you create, and done well, will have long-lasting effects.

### Supercharge your Commercial Culture

Installing or improving your commercial culture therefore should be your top priority. You cannot just change the culture with a few mantras and by putting a poster up in the lunchroom. You need to supercharge your culture with your vision, your beliefs and a new energy with departments competing for who can provide the most amazing customer experience.

However, Bull Durham wasn't exactly right. Build it and they don't always come. You need to build it, and then also give everyone some commercial awareness training so that they proudly and bravely make the link between great customer experience, and great money-making customer experience. Until everyone understands the importance of the customer and how they help to enhance their experiences, you will just go on operating the same old way.

Once you have adopted a "How can we best serve our customers?" mind-set, you will also see fantastic cooperation between your employees. The culture takes on a life of its own as everyone strives to work hard for those who buy from you. Successes are talked about by water fountains. Awards for great commercial input are given. Customers enjoy more meaningful exposure to other people in your organisation who are more curious, interested and aligned with their business.

You must also regularly check your progress to see how well your commercial culture is working. You can look at such tangibles as:

- What is our customer retention rate?
- Are employees more satisfied and fulfilled?
- What are our customers saying about and to us now?
- Has revenue gone up?

### Four of the most fundamental ways to measure Commercial Culture Success:

1. **Cross-sells:** Leveraging existing customer relationships to ensure that a measured amount of customers buy at least one more completely different product service than they otherwise would not have prior to culture change.
2. **Up-sells:** Leveraging existing customer relationships to ensure a measured amount of customers upgrade from their existing option to a more valuable one. Emphasis will be on higher margin up-sells. Also called Share of Wallet, up-sells give you more ways to satisfy clients and drive revenue.
3. **Repeats:** Customers who repeat their experience with you over and above what they were planning to do anyway, within a defined time period.
4. **Referrals:** Customers who refer a friend, acquaintance, colleague or family member within a defined time period as a direct result of an initiative by one of your staff members, in addition to the normal amount of referrals and as a result of the program.

### Do You Want to be Mediocre or Do You Want to be Phenomenal?

When a commercial culture is established at your organisation, great things start to happen. Customers become central to everything you do. Everyone is switched on to become more aware of the importance of driving 'the extras', the small ideas that can make a massive difference to the bottom line. Departments align as they realise that 'we are all in this together'. Up-sells and cross-sells become the norm, rather than the exception. There is a higher customer retention rate and you boost your team's ability to drive sustainable long-term profitability and growth.

One thing is certain: the sooner you can switch on this important element of business, the quicker you can join the growing group of our customers at Natural Training who are reaping the rewards of a thriving commercial culture.



#### References

1. Australian Institute of Management, Sales Culture Survey (2013).
2. Adam Lashinsky, Amazon's Jeff Bezos: The Ultimate Disrupter (Fortune Magazine, 2012).
3. Stacy Perman, For Some, Paying Sales Commissions No Longer Makes Sense (The New York Times, 2013).
4. John Lewis' 62% Profits Soar Offsets Poor Waitrose First Half Results (The Drum, 2014)