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Blizzard holds lessons for salespeople and others

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The recent blizzards will go down in history as a great case study for business. They tested personal and professional mission statements, creativity, problem-solving and customer service.

Take a look and see how you and your team have weathered the storms.

- Mission Statement and the Golden Rule -- Many people claim to live by the Golden Rule, which means to treat others the way you'd like to be treated. And it was tested during the December blizzard.

Many individuals added something: "Treat others the way you want to be treated, unless it inconveniences you." These individuals drove by cars, stuck in drifts, with a silent promise that tomorrow will be a better day to honor the Golden Rule. These same individuals owned snow blowers but didn't bother asking their neighbors if they could lend a hand.

On the other hand, there were hundreds of people who honored the Golden Rule by pushing out cars, digging out driveways and sharing groceries. I'm sure the people who pitched in are the same ones who help other team members at work, give referrals to partners and play well with other departments.

Business mission statements were tested. Companies state that the customer is their most important asset, and blizzard conditions are a good time to test that theory.

There were taxicab drivers who chose to gouge their best asset by overcharging for rides. I hope customers took pictures with cell phones, posted them on the Web and asked potential riders to boycott.

On a brighter note, a local distribution company understood that customers are the only reason they're in business. They rented hotel rooms and asked customer-service employees to stay so out-of-state orders could be fulfilled.

A colleague was stuck in Dallas and prepared to pay the \$50 daily rate for the American Airlines Ambassador Club. Once American discovered he was from Denver and stranded, it waived the fee. (Maybe American Airlines can do some customer-service training for the cab companies.)

Companies that pass the character test pass up making a quick buck just because they have temporary leverage. They use the opportunity to build good relationships and lifetime customers.

- Problem solving and creativity -- Paul Stoltz, author of "Adversity Quotient," has done extensive research on resilient people and organizations. The common denominator of all high-performing organizations is their ability to overcome adversity.

One of the top four common denominators in highly resilient people is the willingness to take control of the outcomes, regardless of who or what caused the problem.

There were two types of responses when DIA closed. One was "Well, nothing I can do about it" -- true in some cases.

There were just as many situations where people got creative, booking tickets into non-affected airports and renting cars so they could make it home for the holidays. They took charge and controlled their outcomes.

Companies have "blizzards" every week. And the organizations that own the outcomes disregard excuses and focus only on results. Instead of asking, "How come this happened?" they ask, "How do we make it happen?"

Instead of saying, "There's nothing we can do," they embrace the mantra, "There must be something we can do."

- Adapt and adjust -- A blizzard is a great time to test the lemonade theory. Instead of worrying about what's not getting done, focus on what can be done. Blizzards provide a great time to slow down, recharge your battery, and allow time for creative and strategic thinking.

Adaptable salespeople took advantage of the down time. They created business plans, identified new targets and cleaned up sales pipelines.

Highly successful sales organizations know how to adapt when life deals a curve ball.

- Lessons learned -- Let's face it. Denver flunked the snow-removal test. The real test will be the lessons learned and actions applied.

No one cares that there's a task force assigned to anything. They care only that the streets don't continue to be an exercise in picking the best rut.

People and customers are no different. They don't care about your intentions; they care about the solution.

Take responsibility, find the buck, own the lessons and figure out how to prevent or fix.

Are you and your sales team ready for the next sales blizzard?

About the Author

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