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January 2016

STRAIGHT TALK

ABOUT SMALL BUSINESS SUCCESS

The newsletter designed to keep you on course to build a successful small business

HAPPY NEW YEAR! Welcome to the very first issue of the *Straight Talk Newsletter* for 2016! We have a jam-packed newsletter to start off this year.

In our opening article, *The Customer's "Buying Journey" Explained*, we'll give you some insight into the mindset of your prospective customer. As a small business owner, you don't want to skip this article. Have you made your New Year's Resolutions yet? In another article, we tell you how you can involve your family members in your resolutions.

A lot more informational and light-hearted articles await you in this month's issue. What are you waiting for? Dig in!

Until next month,

Robert Goodman, CPA, MBA



The Customer's "Buying Journey" Explained

You may have heard some buzz around the concept of the customer's "buying journey", but what is it, exactly?

The customer buying journey is a decision-making process that a prospect goes through before, during, and after the purchase of a product or service.

Since we're all customers of something, we all have familiarity with this journey, whether or not we recognize it by its marketing label. Marketers have studied the buying journey in an effort to be more persuasive and make a more effective connection with target customers.

It's important to note that not all buying journeys look the same.

For example, the decision process that an office manager goes through to purchase a photocopier will be very different from the process experienced by a twenty-something woman purchasing a wearable fitness tracker.

For explanatory purposes, let's focus on that fitness tracker purchase. What would the customer's buying journey look like, broken into steps?:

- 1. Interest is Piqued.** The buyer is made aware that fitness trackers exist and her curiosity is stirred.
- 2. Seeks Information.** The buyer sets out to learn more about how a wearable fitness tracker can help her.
- 3. Considers Options.** The buyer explores various options for increasing her level of fitness and tracking her progress.
- 4. Decides to Buy.** The buyer has learned what she needs to know about fitness trackers and is ready to choose



and buy one.

You may be wondering what's so important about breaking down the buyer's journey in the first place. When we know how and what our potential customers are thinking

in every stage of their buying process, we're in a better position to address their concerns and are more likely to make the sale.

Here's an example of how a buyer's journey might be put to work in practical terms. Imagine a company that sells software enabling non-profit organizations to easily create their own websites.

The company has studied the buyer's journey of their target customer, and here are a few things they found out:

- ✓ First, they know that their typical prospect is a non-profit administrator who is often being pulled in many different directions.
- ✓ They've also learned that software purchases by non-profits are not simple decisions, because there's usually a board of directors that has to approve a big purchase.
- ✓ They also know that not all non-profit administrators have the time or focus necessary to read and digest content on how to use their software.

Armed with this insight, the software company can design a series of emails to be sent to prospects after they've expressed initial interest in the product. Their subject lines might read:

- ✓ We know you're being pulled in 20 directions.
- ✓ Need help convincing your board to buy our software?

Continued on page 2

Buying Journey *Continued from page 1*

✓ Not a big reader? Check out our how-to videos and webinars.

As you can see, the emails are designed to coincide with the specific states of mind of the buyer throughout his or her journey.

When you understand the customer buying journey, you can tailor your marketing content to address common problems and overcome potential objections, giving a prospect every reason to buy your product or service, and eliminating any reason not to. ♦

Include Family In Your New Year's Resolutions

Making New Year's resolutions with your family is a great way to nurture everyone's growth throughout the year. Consider these goals for the next 12 months:

📌 **Cut down on activities.** If your family is busier than ever, make room for consistent togetherness time. Suggest cutting back on work and extracurricular activities so everyone can eat dinner together most nights.



📌 **Strengthen your children's confidence.** Some parents spend a lot of time pointing out their kids' weaknesses. Remember that successful people focus on their strengths, and do the same for your kids. You'll give them the confidence to tackle their weaknesses.

📌 **Make personal resolutions a family affair.** If you've decided that you need to do more charitable work, consider making your personal goal a family goal. Volunteering as a family is a powerful way to build self-esteem and establish a sense of community in yourself and your children.



"We decided to get some unconventional help with our stock futures!"

Are You In Need of a Qualified Tax Pro?

If you are not my client and would like to explore whether we might be a good fit, please contact me. As a qualified tax professional, I not only know all the rules, but can also help you deal with the IRS and help you decide how far to push a dispute.



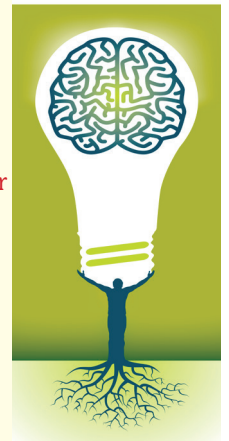
Do You Have A Tough Accounting / Tax Question You Want Answered?

I love hearing from my small business clients and friends who enjoy reading my monthly newsletter. I'm always looking to answer pressing questions you might have relating to small business.

If you have a question, tip or idea, please call me at (617) 964-4766 or email me at bob@rgcpa. Perhaps I'll feature you in a future issue!

GET TO THE ROOT OF PROBLEMS

When you can't solve a seemingly impossible problem, do you just throw your hands high in frustration and walk away? Most of the time that's not an option. Try reframing the problem with these suggestions from Tina Seeling, author of *Inside Out: Get Ideas Out of Your Head and Into the World* (HarperOne):



♥ **Revise your question.** Turn the problem around by re-examining your real goal. Instead of "What new product will make lots of money?" ask, "What do our customers buy, and what do they avoid?" or "How can we offer more of what already works?"

♥ **Look for bad ideas.** You can unleash your creativity by flipping the process. Try to identify what doesn't work, what's failed in the past, or what would completely capsize any solution. You may be able to adapt a seemingly impractical solution, or eliminate a factor that's holding you back.

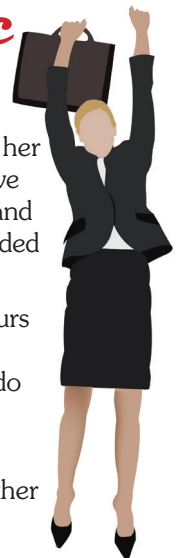
♥ **Question your assumptions.** Many of us fall into the trap of assuming that the answer we're seeking will look like solutions that have always worked. Take a close look at the problem, your organization, or your industry and identify practices that have never been questioned. Ask, "Why are we doing it this way?" You'll often find a new approach by going against the conventional wisdom.

A Winning Tactic

Cynthia applied for a job at a debt collection agency, but she had no experience. The manager was impressed by her determination and energy, though, so he gave her the name of one long overdue account and told her she could have the job if she persuaded the account to pay up.

He didn't expect her to succeed, but two hours later Cynthia returned with a check. "That's amazing!" the manager said. "How did you do it?"

"Easy," Cynthia said. "I just told them that if they didn't cut me a check, I'd tell all their other creditors they paid us."



NOT IN SALES? THESE TIPS WILL STILL HELP YOU SUCCEED

Even if you are not personally involved in selling, you can learn a lot about success by following the advice of top salespeople. Here's some wisdom from legendary sales guru Tom Hopkins on the *Inc.* website:



❑ **Manage your time.** Plan your day so you don't waste a minute on unproductive activities at work. Spend the first few minutes of every day setting priorities, then get started on them right away.

❑ **Develop your own mission statement.** Your organization has a mission statement, and you should, too. It should express your dreams, values, and tangible goals.

❑ **Associate with the right people.** Find colleagues and friends with similar goals and a positive outlook. Support them as you learn from them.

❑ **Follow up.** Don't make promises you can't keep. Do what you say you're going to do, and always check in to make sure the other person is satisfied with the results.

❑ **Follow your own path.** You don't have to listen to the conventional wisdom or do what everyone else in your profession is doing. Look for new ideas, and don't be afraid to strike out in your own direction.

❑ **Deal with rejection.** You won't get every sale or win every contract. When you're rejected, learn what you did wrong so you can improve in the future. Then put it behind you and move on.

❑ **Help people feel important.** Don't become so obsessed about your own success that you forget the people around you. Show respect to everyone. Help them achieve their goals and dreams, and they'll be more willing to help you with yours.

Quotes: *Every time you tear a leaf off a calendar, you present a new place for new ideas and progress.*

— Charles Kettering



The difficulty lies not so much in developing new ideas as in escaping from old ones. — John Maynard Keynes

At the height of laughter, the universe is flung into a kaleidoscope of new possibilities. — Jean Houston

Your success and happiness lies in you. Resolve to keep happy, and your joy and you shall form an invincible host against difficulties. — Helen Keller

There is only one of you in all time; this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and it will be lost. — Martha Graham



Set Goals Together For Maximum Performance

When employees share in setting their own goals, they're more committed and involved in achieving them. Follow this four-step process for participative goal setting:



➤ **Take the lead.** Yes, you're working together, but as a manager you still have the main responsibility for identifying performance targets. Start by suggesting a goal. Ask your employee to evaluate it for anything that's unclear or inaccurate. Revise the goal if necessary.

➤ **Formalize the plan.** Once you've agreed on a goal, write it down so neither of you misunderstands what's supposed to happen. Make sure you both know how you'll measure the employee's efforts.

➤ **Follow up.** Ask the employee to check in with you regularly. Agree on follow up intervals at the outset; plan on at least four if the employee is entering new territory where his or her skills may not yet be up to par. Put a reminder on your calendar to check in if the employee doesn't come to you with a progress report on the specified date.

➤ **Evaluate the process.** Once the goal has been completed, meet with the employee to discuss what worked well and what didn't. Ask for suggestions about how to improve things the next time.

Play These Roles When Developing Ideas

Thinking creatively requires different mindsets at different stages of your project. If you can shift gears yourself, do that; if not, bring in a colleague to help you sort through the issues. Focus on these key roles as spelled out by **Walt Disney**:



✓ **Dreamer.** Don't limit your vision at the outset. Let your mind roam widely as you explore concepts, ideas, and solutions. You don't have to be practical at this stage—just allow yourself to daydream as you think about what you want to achieve.

✓ **Realist.** Once you've got a plan or idea you want to put to work, start narrowing it down until it's doable. You may end up eliminating the less practical aspects, but if you keep your mind on the core idea, you'll come up with a plan that satisfies your goal while succeeding in the real world.

✓ **Critic.** Poke holes in your plan so you can patch them up effectively. Run a test or set up a pilot program before rolling your solution out completely. Don't think of obstacles as failures; use what you learn to make your idea viable.

TAX CORNER

Softening a Potential Tax Blow by Pulling Out Your 2014 Tax Return

Nobody likes surprises at tax time. One way to soften a potential blow is to do the following:

▶ **Refund or payment due.** Did you owe on your 2014 tax return? Have you made the necessary adjustments to lower the payment for 2015?

▶ **Did you withhold enough?** If you didn't send in enough dough to cover your 2015 tax liability you may get hit with an underpayment penalty.

▶ **Look for tax drivers.** Look at your 2015 income and tax deductions. Focus on the larger amounts. Is anything here worth reviewing and different than 2014?

▶ **Any major changes?** During 2015, did you add a dependent? Lose one? Any change in your marital status? Any age changes that may help you?

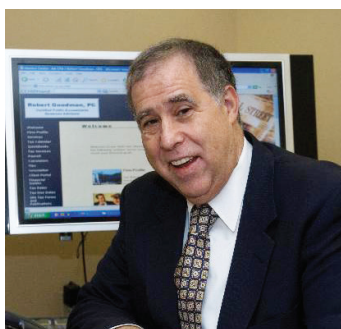
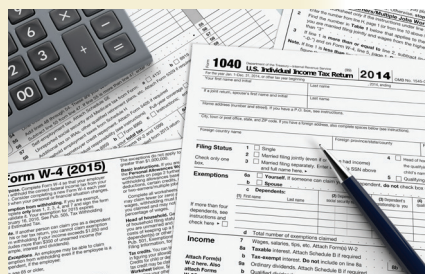
▶ **What deductions did you take?** Look at the deductions and credits taken on last year's tax return. Will you qualify for all of them again this year?

▶ **The disappearing act.** A number of deductions last year may be disappearing for this year. They include the educator's expense deduction, mortgage insurance expense, and sales tax itemized deductions. If any of these were taken on your 2014 tax return, and they have disappeared, you'll need to plan for this change for 2015.

▶ **Year-end tax moves.** Time may be running out, but there's still time to make moves to reduce your tax burden. Here are a few suggestions:

- Give cash and property to charitable organizations
- Make a 4th quarter estimated tax payment by January 15, 2016
- Sell investments to take losses
- Shift deductible expenses to optimize your tax benefit
- Contribute to a tax deferred retirement plan

Most of us can't wait to put away last year's tax return the moment it's filed. But by taking a moment or two to review it now, you can head off potential disappointment and even take last-minute actions to reduce your taxes for 2015.



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See What's Inside...

The Customer's "Buying Journey" Explained

Include Family In Your New Year's Resolutions

Get To The Root Of Problems

A Winning Tactic

Not In Sales? These Tips Will Still Help You Succeed

Set Goals Together For Maximum Performance

Play These Roles When Developing Ideas

Softening Taxes By Pulling Out Your 2014 Tax Return

"Successful Business"

Check out Successful Business for great ideas to grow your business.

Tip #37 Say 'Thank You'

For more great ideas on how to grow your business, call or email us for your free copy of Successful Business.