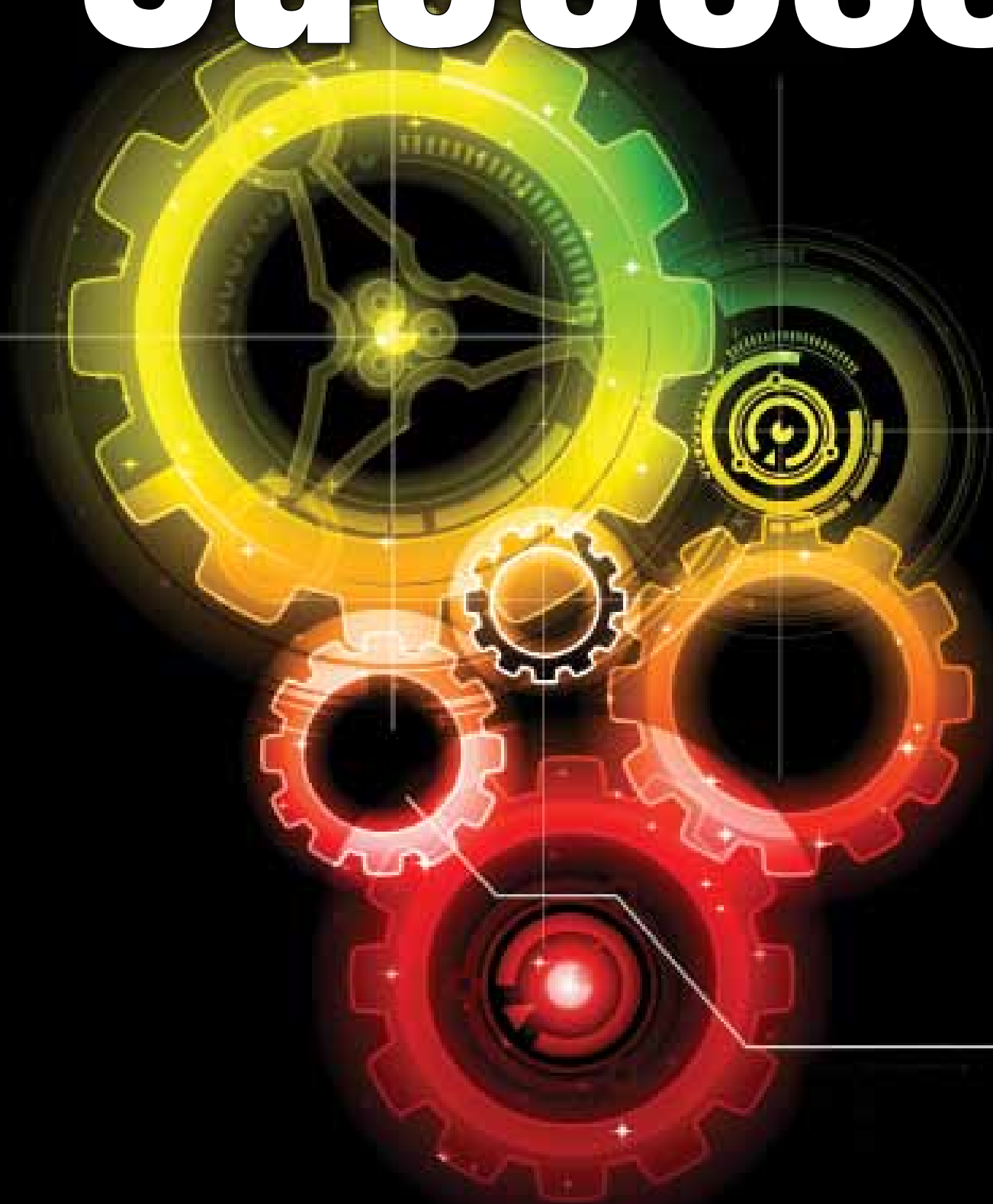


Success



Can Be Found in Waging Peace

BY TOM WENTZ

Before my next meeting with the chairman, I asked and received permission to speak with some of his company presidents and top sales managers. It was important for me to hear what they thought was the gap between the customer satisfaction rating of “7” and “10.”

The phone calls were lengthy—some lasted two hours. I spoke with five top-performing presidents and three sales managers where the customer satisfaction scores were at least a “7.” All interviews revealed the same answer. Everyone believed that it was unrealistic to ever close the gap between “7” and “10.” In their minds there would always be problems between what the customer wanted and what the factories could reasonably be expected to deliver.

The important issue was that the customer expectations that seemed unrealistic had nothing to do with the quality of the products. The “problems” were in the “relationship” dynamics — logistics, billing, delivery, parts, application support, service after the sale — were often mentioned.

Consistently, the sales managers saw the problem in the factory and the factory saw the problem in the false promises of the salespeople. Neither accepted responsibility for the problems. Without accurate forecasts it was impossible to deliver on time and the ability to get accurate forecasts was impossible. The war between sales and the plant managers yielded customer satisfaction ratings between “5” and “7” and neither side was to blame.

When I asked them to “Just suppose it was a ‘10,’” they frequently spoke about greatness. They all had attended a leadership conference where *Good to Great* was

the theme. There was an obvious tone of cynicism when I asked what “greatness” looked like. No one really knew or even seemed to care.

No Need for Sales Training

The sales managers confirmed that their salespeople “knew how to sell.” They had been through many well-known sales workshops. They had little interest in more sales training.

The sales managers who sold through independent reps were experiencing mind-share problems. They were all feeling out of control and their strategy was to offer more technical product training to get the reps to believe that the products were new and innovative compared to the competition. Their frustration was that only the young salespeople were sent to the training.

I also visited the web sites of all of his companies and could see that the communication technology was very good. There was, however a consistent theme of solutions associated with the offerings of all of the companies.

The chairman e-mailed me to confirm our meeting today at 10 a.m. His agenda for our meeting was to know what I found from speaking with his people and how to *wage peace* with customers. He wanted to know how to “close the gap.” He honestly believed that peace would exist at a “10.”

...many people believe that the
opposite of telling the truth is lying.
In most cases people simply don't know the truth.

Closing the Gap

The chairman had become very contemplative. He admitted that the *gimme putt* experience had significantly changed his leadership style. As we started the meeting, I noticed he had *Leadership and Golf* on his desk and it was open to Chapter 7, "The Business Model." He started the meeting by saying, "This chapter clearly defines the gap we are experiencing. How do we close the gap?"

I didn't want to beat around the bush so I said, "It can't be closed. Peace is a condition where truth prevails, and your people don't know the truth about the new business model." I stopped to let that thought sink in. "Your people are clearly at war and totally invested and committed to executing the old business model. They can't wage peace while they are at war."

I was very fortunate that he had a contemplative mind as this comment could have ignited a confrontational response. He asked, "Truth prevails? In your interviews with my people did you not hear the truth?"

This is a very tough question because many people believe that the opposite of telling the truth is lying. In most cases people simply don't know the truth. They live in the aftermath of yesterday, react to circumstances and try to defeat time every day.

"Your people know *about* the truth. They told me of the leadership development experiences you've provided for them. They know of 'greatness,' but they aren't able to visualize the possibility of 'greatness.' They believe that working the 'good' harder will get them to 'great.' They are very linear in their thinking."

I paused as I could tell he was replaying the *Good to Great* process in his mind. We talked for 10 minutes about the leadership concepts described in *Good to Great* and how the book was very clear that going from good to great was a "transformational change" not a linear "work smart" and do "more with less" exercise. I suggested that peace was on a scale of "11–20" and it would take a transformation of his business model to achieve it.

After a pause, he said with some conviction, "Why are we at war internally?"

Waging Peace

He asked the question in such a way that I could tell he

wasn't looking for justification to fire someone. He really wanted to know and understand the structural reasons for being "at war" versus waging peace.

"Your people are at war because there is an enormous personal, positive and immediate payoff for being at war. The payoff is an excuse that justifies their old behavior. When we can blame problems on the ineptitude of other people, we can avoid responsibility for changing our own behavior." I paused and he remained silent. It is wonderful to work with a leader who has the potential to really understand and embrace waging peace. It takes great willingness to understand the underlying structure that drives behavior.

"The payoff is to retain control. When a leader is able to keep the conflict between two warring entities alive and unresolved, they retain control. Your presidents are confident that they are in control of the situations in their organizations and that the problems will be resolved just as soon as some entity gets something done. They have all discussed the problems with you in The War Room and are committed to resolving them this quarter. But, as you know, the problems will persist on into next quarter because the IT system is still not fixed. They'll have an excuse for keeping the war alive with you that you can't defend."

He could have easily become defensive at that comment but in his contemplative way asked, "What about the sales managers?"

"Your sales managers are clear that they know how to sell and the low customer satisfaction ratings have nothing to do with them. They are justified in blaming all the problems on the factories. Things would be fine if everyone else would just do their jobs."

His contemplation ended abruptly. He stood up and said, "I know this. I've heard it for years. We've talked about teamwork until we can't mention it again. Our bottom line is healthy and our products are innovative, but why the war?"

"If they lose their enemy, no one would know what to do."

He sat on the edge of his desk and looked down at me in that rather intimidating way that I saw when I challenged him about the *gimme putt*.

In self-defense I continued: "Being 'at war' is the only

way they know how to behave. What would one of your quarterly planning meetings be like if you changed the name on the door of the War Room to Peace Room? What if you didn't have an enemy to defeat? What would your meetings be about? What would be the tone of your meetings? What would be the urgency of your meetings? If you were at peace with your reps, what would be the agenda at the next rep council meeting? Would your meeting be about blaming them for lack of mind-share or would it be about how you serve the customer together?"

He sat down and was silent. Then jokingly he said, "It wouldn't be any fun. I love beating on the presidents because as you suggest it keeps me in control. Frankly, I never thought of it that way but you're right. We constantly try to breed toughness. You know, *when the going gets tough, the tough get going*. There is nothing weak about our companies. We have some really great people."

So, I suggested, "Keep doing it."

Play or Surrender

Fortunately for me his contemplative style kicked in. "I hate this game. I'm tired of the excuses. I'm tired of the phony bravado we have in many of our salespeople.

They are like Ron on the golf course. They trample the inside people. In companies where we sell through reps they are leaving us out of their selling activities. They have a weapon we can't defeat. It's mind share. We can't hold them hostage any longer. They have other alternatives. Many of them are tired of our game and they know we can't sell direct. We have to change the 'at war' behavior now. How do we do that without appearing like we're caving in or weaklings?"

I acknowledged that when you've been at war for a long time, beginning to wage peace can appear like surrender.

"You must start by simply deciding that you have no enemy to defeat. It has all been an illusion. You think the enemy is the competition, but it is really the illusion of time. You believe that if you don't hurry and get the tough going and your salespeople don't strain harder, the competition is going to get it all. No professional ever gets to be a professional by defeating time. I'm sure you wouldn't want to go into surgery with a surgeon who is trying to defeat time in order to get to the next patient." That hit home, as he was planning knee replacement surgery in three months.

"Being 'at war' is the only way they know how to behave."



“The customers are setting the speed limits and your salespeople can’t violate their rules and try to fill their funnel faster.”

He then asked, “Where do we start?” I said, “Drive 3.”

He had a blank look on his face. “You need to learn that your body needs to digest time just like it digests food. How you metabolize time determines how quickly you will age. Peace by any definition is impossible to achieve if you can’t live in the now. You know this when professional golfers talk about ‘staying in the moment.’”

“Internally your people will need to learn to go only as fast as the slowest person. Alignment can not be achieved if some people are rushing ahead, promising what can’t be delivered.”

“Drive 3? What does that mean?”

“When the speed limit says 65, drive 63. When it says 55, drive 53. When it says 35, drive 33. You need to know the truth that driving below the speed limit won’t ‘cost’ you anything. You will not lose out on anything. The guy that blows by you will not get everything before you arrive. In fact he may die trying to get enough.

“You need to know that violating the ‘speed limits’ is not legitimate, just like the gimme putt. It becomes a habit to speed just like gimme putting. Just like the professional golfer, you need to self-police even though it is totally possible for you to cheat the speed limits and no one will know and no harm will be done. You’ll need to develop a lot of very different habits, and this will be your second test. You passed the gimme putt test. Waging peace requires self-policing, and you need to trust that your people are really committed to live within the customer speed limits.”

I also suggested that he try coming to a complete stop at all stop signs and red lights and count to 3 before proceeding. “It doesn’t matter that everyone else speeds or doesn’t stop or turns right on red without stopping. A peaceful person and company lives and operates by a very different set of principles. It is not a sign of weakness. You’ll need to feel whether you feel weak when you do it. I know what it feels like for me. It may be very different for you.”

He asked, “What is the business relevance of ‘3’?”

“The world is totally different today. The customers are setting the speed limits and your salespeople can’t violate their rules and try to fill their funnel faster. That will only keep you chained to the game of ‘7.’ Never forget

that in golf and in selling, *slow controls fast*. Buying today is very slow. The quick deal and the fast buck of the past are gone.

“Operating in real time does not mean you have to go fast. The other people on the road are not your competitors although people with road rage believe that you are holding them back from getting enough. Professional golfers slow down when the going gets tough. They know that *when the going gets tough, the tough are helpless*.”

I paused as he picked up his pen and began to write something. When he put down the pen, I could tell that his contemplative brain was dead. He had to go to another meeting and said, “I’ll drive 3 today and see how it feels.”

My manufacturing friend called two days after my meeting with the chairman. He said, “Are you crazy!! We all have to drive 3 this week. We’re waging peace, whatever that means! That’s insane. We’ll never get done if we have to do that!!”

I laughed and thought to myself, “*It’s not about getting done — it’s about getting started. He is very confused.*”

I’ll tell you more about the chairman’s experience with waging peace next time. Until then, try driving 3 and stopping 3 and see how it feels for you. Also, turn off your cell phone and radio. Silence is peaceful. 