

The background of the page is composed of numerous overlapping spheres. One sphere on the left is a vibrant red, while the others are a soft, matte white. They are arranged in a way that creates a sense of depth and texture, with some spheres in sharp focus and others blurred in the background.

AWARENESS PRECEDES INTELLIGENCE

BY TOM WENTZ

It was two weeks since
my meeting with the four sales
managers when I received an e-mail
from the chairman. He simply said,
“I have a serious problem. Give me a call.”

“A’s” facilitate new awareness in their customers as I have done with the chairman.

In our last article the four sales managers stayed up ‘til midnight curious about the difference between the “B’s” and the “A’s.” Mark’s career as a sales manager seemed to be on the line. Phil and Steve were very sure that understanding this difference was *serious*.

The chairman started our meeting with a chuckle. “I’m glad my e-mail got your attention. All the sales managers went home from your meeting and told their president that they needed to change how they sell — that selling solutions is wrong. I’ve had a palace revolt in the last week. This is *serious*.”

“I’m sorry that it caused a problem.”

He laughed and said, “It is serious in a very positive way. I now have their attention. It is hard to get their attention. They generally ignore me. It is exactly what you did to me with that gimme putt.”

He paused, got up and walked around his desk and continued, “I did exactly what you did to me. We had a meeting last week and I gave everyone the USGA Rule book. I asked them to show me the word *solution* in the book.”

He exploded with laughter. “The word *solution* does not appear in that book. You’re in a hazard and the book tells you the correct procedure for playing the game. It never talks about anything as a problem.

“You’re right — there are no problems on the golf course — maybe to the amateur, but not the professionals.”

I waited, as he was not done. He was searching for the right way to say what he wanted to say. This is the state that people are in when simplicity dawns!

“Rule books never talk about problems, do they?” He was not looking for a response from me. He was simply processing his new awareness. “If we were to write the rules of selling for all of our companies, why would we talk about selling solutions?”

As you read the rest of this article, always realize that awareness always precedes intelligence. The chairman was in a deep state of new awareness that is the most powerful learning experience of our lives. The conclusion from this kind of experience is what he said next.

“I think I get it. I think I understand, but I’m not really sure. Am I crazy or is this it?”

Before I answer his question, let’s hit the pause button. What you are reading about is the skill of the “A”

sales professional. “A’s” facilitate new awareness in their customers as I have done with the chairman. Yes, it often takes a while and sometimes they aren’t ready or willing to get it, but customers must discover for themselves that there is a different way to think before they will change their existing intelligence about the way they buy.

I asked the chairman to relate what had happened when he said, “palace revolt.”

“Universally, the presidents took the comments from their sales managers as a challenge to their own intelligence. The classification of ‘A’s’ ‘B’s’ and ‘C’s’ was easy for them to understand, but they were all upset at the insinuation that their salespeople were not ‘A’s.’ For the most part, they were confident that their people were far better than the competition and their products, or what they called solutions, were the best in their industries.”

“How do I tell them that their salespeople are not ‘A’s’? Some of them came from our competitors and they know that their people are the best. They are well-trained. They are extremely competent.”

He paused and invited me to answer. “I’m not surprised that the presidents would react that way. When people return from any meeting with new perspectives, it is generally interpreted as a confrontation to the current intelligence. That is the way problem solving minds work.”

For the next 15 minutes, I gave him a recap of my meeting with his sales managers and did a quick profile of the “A’s” “B’s” and “C’s.” I assured him that there was nothing wrong with selling solutions and having a stable full of really good “B’s.” I assured him that “B’s” will sell a lot of stuff, but they will struggle to open new accounts and seldom get invited into A-Level conversations.

He acknowledged that he seldom would waste his time talking about “F&B’s” or even think about going to a game with a “B.”

“So, how do we change the attitude of our salespeople?”

“It is not an attitude issue. It is structural. You change the underlying rules — get them to understand the rules — and be committed to playing by the rules. That is what is called having *structural integrity*.

“Most sales managers and executives believe that an increase in sales requires their salespeople to do more of something. They tell me that their salespeople are not good at something and that they need to do something

better and faster like fill their funnels with more prospects by making more calls. The basic cry is for more efficiency that leads to a more productive sales effort.”

He was now taking notes, so I continued. “This is incremental thinking based on the need to defeat time. This instinctive drive is in all of us. It is a normal part of being human. It is the driving force for a ‘B’ salesperson.”

“This instinctive need is an underlying structural force that has been deeply programmed into us at an early age. It is reinforced every day by parents, teachers and managers. In business we are taught time management skills in order to keep pace with this monster called time that controls our success. Thankfully, we are allowed to rest on the seventh day.”

The chairman interrupted and said, “I told them to *Drive ‘3.’* It almost drove them crazy.”

I reminded him that his experience was similar, but he was able for some reason to persevere and that the key to successful change is a conscious choice to slow down.

“One of the main differences between the ‘A’s’ and the ‘B’s’ is how they metabolize time. When the going gets tough with a customer, the ‘B’s’ become pushy. The ‘A’s’ slow down and seek to understand. It is a magic skill.”

“We have some very impatient presidents. You met Mark. He never listens.”

Realizing Potential

“Every ‘B’ has the potential to be an ‘A.’ They must experience a breakthrough in awareness. It is not an intelligence issue. It is a structural change. You know in golf, you’ll hear the golf coaches and caddies tell their players, ‘Stay in the moment — stay present — stay in the now.’ These are all commands to not rush ahead, to focus, to be disciplined to what the shot at that moment requires.”

Every time I used a golf analogy I could see his awareness peak. “This is the primary command of the ‘A’ sales-

person. When they are with customers, they never rush the buying decision or are in a hurry to get to the next appointment. The ‘A’s’ focus on what the customer is saying. They’re disciplined to execute the **business** of their *business*.”

He made a note and motioned for me to wait. When he looked up I continued, “This is very counter to the conventional wisdom of years of experience in selling technology that teach us to quickly qualify, create urgency and close. The solution selling approach is not wrong, rather it merely activates the rush ahead mindset and the truth is it meets with enormous objections that can not be handled at the end of any sales call.”

He interrupted and said, “The **business** of our *business*? You mean what business are we in?”

“Yes — How would any one of your presidents answer the question, “What is the **business** of their *business*?””

Without warning, he picked up his cell phone and placed a call. “Scott, what’s the **business** of your *business*? — No, I’m not sick. — No, you can’t think about it. — That’s it? — I’ll call you later.”

“What did he say?”

“Make a profit. What’s wrong with that?”

“Does he have a rule book for how the *Make a Profit* game is played, and has it been issued to everyone?”

He was a little taken aback by that question. He paused, pointed his finger at me and was speechless. Then he said, “That’s an amazing question.” There was silence for almost a minute. You could see his awareness developing. He then said, “We are playing a game without any rules. The budget would be the only thing that defines how that game is played and that’s our internal game, not our game with customers.”

He looked at me and said, “You obviously have a different take on this. What’s your point?”

“Making a profit is a worthy “objective” of every busi-

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ness. It is not the **business** of the *business*. The **business** of any *business* or organization or city, state or our nation for that matter, is to help customers get what they want.”

I paused, as this thought often meets with a cynical response. He seemed relaxed and I said, “Any salesperson should be able to comfortably tell a customer what business they are in. They certainly wouldn’t say, *‘Hi Mr. Jones, I’m in the business of making a profit for our company and a little commission for myself.’*”

His reaction was sudden and abrupt. “Some salespeople act that way. They’re arrogant and pushy. That’s why I never go to their golf outings. I almost didn’t come to your thing because I hate to be hot-boxed by those people.”

He was on a roll and had to tell me about an incident he had recently with one of their biggest suppliers. He ended that story by saying, “We cancelled their contract two days later.”

He then quickly asked, “Are you telling me we have some of those guys selling for us?”

“No! First, let me suggest that if you were to write a rule book for how you want all salespeople to treat your companies, would it start with ‘Make a Profit’ as the **business** of their *business*? Would you want them to be there to help you get what you want from them? Is that right?” I paused and quickly added, “Would you want them to tell you how their company is designed to help you? Would you want to know whether their story is true and check their references? Would you want to hear from those references that they deliver what they promise?”

He waved his hand and said, “Okay, I get it. It’s the total group game — right?”

“That’s right — but the help you want at your level and at the level of all of your presidents goes way beyond the solution to tactical F&B problems. You want innovative approaches to the economic issues you are facing. Right? Then you want to talk to an ‘A.’ ‘B’s’ can’t help you. Only ‘A’s’ can open new accounts. ‘B’s’ sell solutions to tactical problems and your companies can’t survive if all they have are ‘B’s’ selling solutions.

With a rather cold stare he asked, “Do we have any ‘A’ sales managers?”

“They all have that potential.”

“I don’t care about potential. Do we have an ‘A’ in the four you met?”

I promised not to betray the confidentiality of my meeting with the sales managers, so I cautiously said, “One — but the other three are ready to elevate their game. They need a new rule book.”

“That’s what I thought. Do you think Mark can make it?”

“That’s depends on the rule book he’s given by his president.”

He was silent for almost two minutes. Then he said, “I remember the day you handed me the USGA Rule Book and asked me to show you the term gimme putt. I wanted to stick it you know where. We’ve never written the rules for how we sell. I doubt if we even know how. Do you know how?”

“Yes — that is the **business** of *my business*.”

The chairman had to go. He was giving a speech at the Chamber about the New Business Environment. He picked up a copy of his speech and said, “I’m glad we talked. I can change some things and make it more meaningful for our members. We have a lot of work to do with our presidents. If you think the sales managers were a tough crowd, wait until you meet the presidents.” 