



# Tips FROM THE Top<sup>®</sup>

Business insights  
from those at the top  
for those at the top

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## ENTREPRENEURSHIP

### My Father Would Have Been a Great TAB Member

Hank Zelnick, 1927-2007

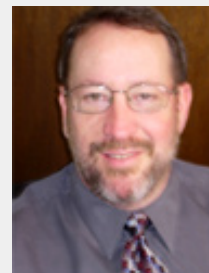
My father passed away earlier this month after a long illness. He was a genuine entrepreneur. I felt it only fitting to share some of what I learned from him in this month's newsletter.

In his early 20's my father was a route salesman for Metropolitan Tobacco in New York City. He sold candy, gum and cigars to bodegas in Chinatown and Little Italy. My brother and I got to go with him sometimes, and it seemed like these bodega owners were his best friends. He was always joking with them, talking about their families. They gave him gifts like fireworks and even my first guitar. They liked him as a person and so they wouldn't object if he put his stuff next to the register or high on the racks. It wasn't because of the price or product, it was because of the *experience* of buying from him.

He won all the clocks and turkeys that went to the best route salesman. My mother convinced him that if he could sell little things well, then he could sell big things well. On nights and weekends, he started selling the original telephone answering machines (Record-A-Phone) out of our



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basement. My mother got company names out of the Yellow Pages and my brother and I stuffed, sealed and stamped envelopes with the brochures. *He went out and sold.*

My father would accost trades people on the street and demand to know who was answering the phone while they were out plumbing, wiring or constructing. He would ask them, "With a \$200 machine, *how much more business would they be able to do?*" They couldn't resist and soon he was able quit his route job and started The Audio Phone Corporation. After a year, he moved to a one room office in Parsippany.

He was selling intercom systems also and one day was delivering one to a bank. Recent legislation had required all banks to have some kind of camera. The bank customer asked my father if he could install a camera system. My father in essence replied, "Sure. How many do you want?" He then went on a desperate hunt to find someone who had a clue about closed-circuit television. He found someone to install the systems and *he went out and sold.* They were now in a two room office.

Someone told my father about a golf outing for the New Jersey Bankers Association. He talked the Executive Director into letting him videotape each person as they teed off and later replay the tape back at the clubhouse. This was in the late 1960's, long before camcorders. I remember having to lug extremely heavy, very non-portable equipment out to the first tee. But I got to watch a master at work.

His concept was brilliant: He got face-to-face time with almost every bank president and executive in New Jersey. He collected their business cards for a raffle (and database) and was able to create a very memorable impression. I got tired of hearing some of the same jokes over and over but the executives didn't know these were the same jokes. By the end of the day he had a pretty good routine down. These folks got to see themselves swing on video, unheard of at that time. In short order his company owned the CCTV business in New Jersey, and became Custom Video Systems. He hired a service manager, my mother got office help and *my father continued to go out and sell.* They now needed a three room office and a garage.

One of his first bank customers asked my father if they had any kind of special cabinet to house the big reel-to-reel time-lapse recorder and TV monitor. He replied in essence, "Sure, what color would you like?" Once again, he went on a desperate search to secure the resources to fill the need, looking for someone to make one. It turned out that one of his service guys liked woodworking and worked all weekend to be able to deliver one to the customer as promised. They kept this guy so busy making cabinets that they hired a full-time cabinet worker and custom security consoles became a significant and very profitable part of the business. They had to move into a larger space that also could hold a

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### TAB MEETINGS

**Wednesday, July 11, 2007**

**Bottom Line Board Meeting**

**Thursday, July 19, 2007**

**CEO Board Meeting**

**Arthur's TAB Board Meeting**

**Wednesday, July 25, 2007**

**President's Board Meeting**

**Thursday, July 26, 2007**

**Strategic Board Meeting**

## QUICK TIPS

### Praising Employees

Being a high "D" on the DISC behavioral assessment, it is difficult to remember to give praise to my employees. I set a goal each day to praise or compliment five people by starting each day with five pens on the left side of my computer. When I praise or compliment an employee, I move one of these pens to the right side of my computer with the goal to move all five to the right side by the close of the day.

*Chris Wohlbrandt*

*Midwest Title*

*Naples, FL*

large woodshop.

In the 1980's, the company went beyond CCTV to proprietary, computerized security management systems. We created a showroom with the latest technology to do demonstrations using our own building. The marketplace was getting crowded and we realized that our competitive advantage was our people and the *experience* of working with my father and the company. This couldn't be shown in a proposal or brochure. At this point our key clients and prospects were national and international companies, with a concentration in financial institutions.

Consider this selling experience for a prospect: We would send a stretch limo into New York to pick up the Security Director and maybe another official to bring them to our new (17,000 square foot) facility in Rockaway. After demonstrations, we would serve them a lunch made or prepared in our kitchen. While I'm ashamed at the apparent ethnic profiling, if they were Jewish or Italian, my mother would serve the food and insist that they keep eating. We would bring in important staff to break bread with the prospect. My father would then take them into his *chatchke* closet where he had tons of logo items and trinkets. He would then ask for their business. Directly.

The \$200 for the limo was a very minor expense as the business we were seeking was usually several hundred thousand dollars. The driver was also a friend of ours and he would tell us what the prospects talked about on the way back to the city. If it was an individual, he would ask all kinds of questions so we would know what they were thinking. (Was that wrong?)

The business kept growing and this was never because we offered the lowest price. We were never even close.

Why was my father a successful entrepreneur?

1. He made dealing with him an *experience*. He worked hard at making sure every interaction was human, fun and memorable. The company became an extension of his personality which included perfectionism. He always said the effort for the difference between mediocre and first class was really very little.
2. He could make deals on a handshake and would rather lose a years pay than sacrifice his integrity. This led to extreme customer and employee loyalty.
3. He (and my mother) structured the business so that my father *went out and sold* and built relationships. He surrounded himself with very strong people, technically and operationally. His job was to sell.
4. He always asked for the order. He always told me, "The business goes to he who asks for it."

## Obtaining Supplier Discounts or Extended Terms

If you know the quarter and fiscal year-ends of your suppliers, you can contact them just prior to the end of those periods and, in many cases, they will give extended terms or deep discounts on new purchases.

Norine Carlson Webber

Alpha Source Inc.

Milwaukee, WI

## Now Available:



Click on the book cover at left to order your copy of the #1 business book best seller\* the **7 Secrets of Great Entrepreneurial**

**Masters** by Allen E. Fishman, Founder and CEO of The Alternative Board®.

\*800 CEO Read, Aug. 1st, 2006.

5. He wasn't afraid to take chances.

He was a one-of-kind and I will miss him.

*Bob Zelnick*

#### STRATEGY

### Just Three Important Things

It is true that you build success on the three foundations of skill, systems and attitude. However, the three most important points in the foundation are attitude, attitude and attitude. Every year businesses spend millions of dollars on skills training and new systems to make employees more efficient. But, no matter how much training and systems you add, an employee with a poor attitude will not improve. Next time you plan to send someone for a \$1,000 training course, first buy them a \$20 book on the topic. If they don't read the book, it's a cinch they will get little from the training.

*Phil Linden, Linden's Propane, LaGrange, OH*

#### MOTIVATION

### Employee Rewards

Consider an alternative to the traditional types of employee rewards, such as cash bonuses, paid time off and gift certificates. Instead, solicit merchandise, gift cards and coupons from your local merchants. The merchants benefit by increasing their opportunity for future sales and expanding "goodwill." You, the employer, benefit by offering non-traditional rewards and perhaps save part of the cost of a reward system.

*Gary Allietta, Bromley Financial Group, Grand Rapids, MI*

#### STRATEGY

### Knowing Your Customers' Issues

I am sure you have nagging concerns that keep you awake at night, or at least you think about first-thing in the morning. I believe it is important we know what those issues are for our customer. To do this, we need to become students of their business, which includes reading the trade journals, newsletters and periodicals they read. Furthermore, we need to become active members of their trade associations. That does not mean you just send your membership dues in annually, but go to the meetings, volunteer for committees and dig deep into what is going on. You will also begin to learn their language, knowing what is important to your customer, and learning their language will enable you to be a better provider of your product and service.

Mark Thelen, Landmark Landscapes, Atlanta, GA

## SALES

### Trade Shows

When my company participates in a trade show, I arrive at least an hour-and-a-half before the opening of the show. This early arrival allows me to have time to obtain leads from the attendees, to visit the booths that I will not be able to see while I am manning my booth, and to have the opportunity to change the location of my booth should it be undesirable.

*Stephen Levin, Weblin Design, New York, NY*

## SALES

### Unanswered Calls

Having trouble getting a sales prospect to call you back? Call their cell phone, but do not leave a message. Then they will call you to find out who called and did not leave a message!

*Arthur Milgrim, Oak Valley Farms, Voorhees, NJ*

**The Alternative Board® brings business owners, CEOs and presidents of non-competing businesses together in boards, where members can present challenges and opportunities to the board for seasoned, practical advice from other owners who understand one another's perspective and contribute meaningful solutions. The boards consist of up to 12 members, meeting monthly under the guidance of a TAB-Certified Facilitator. Over 300 TAB Boards are operating each month across the United States, Canada and South America. Since its inception, thousands of businesses have benefited from membership in The Alternative Board®. For more information on The Alternative Board®, visit [www.TABBoards.com](http://www.TABBoards.com)**



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