

What Makes

You

Valuable?

In today's market
success means creating value
and producing results, and that demands
a wide spectrum of attitudes and actions

VALUE ADDED HAS BECOME THE touchstone of business success. Every transaction, every product, every employee has to add value. In an era when global competition and global resources make efficiency a necessity, any process, activity, and person that fails to add value is history.

"In today's job market and economy, it is all about producing value and producing results," says Tom Lyons, corporate director of revenues for Lodging Hospitality Management in St. Louis. "Producing results is going to be even more important as we move forward."

Producing results requires a variety of skills, Lyons continues. Adding value

By Fred Gebhart

means showing leadership, inspiring trust, multitasking, communicating effectively, thinking creatively, and looking for opportunities to learn.

"The job you're hired for today will likely not be done the same way a year from now," agrees Mel Kleiman, CSP, president of Humetrics, a human resources consultancy in Sugarland, Texas. "As somebody said, change is inevitable, growth is optional. If you want results, don't hire people for today, hire them for next year."

The problem is spotting people who

will produce next year. Managers want to hire them and employees want to copy them. One method is to find people who have produced for another company and hire them away. But as ads for mutual funds warn, past success is no guarantee of future results.

Christopher Crawford, managing director of Longnecker & Associates, a human resources consulting firm in Dallas, has his own rule of thumb. He looks for people who read widely and aggressively.

"Good readers, voracious readers, always seem to bring something new to the table," he explains. "They make connections that people who don't range



as widely never see. People who read widely have an attitude that seems to breed success.”

The focus on attitude is no surprise to Nido Qubein, serial entrepreneur and newly appointed president of High Point University in North Carolina. A poster child for the traditional American Dream of hard work and success, Qubein came to the U.S. as a teenager with minimal English, no contacts, and \$50.

“Attitude is the one part of a person’s makeup that you cannot teach,” Qubein says. “Immigrants are four times more likely than their U.S. born counterparts to become millionaires for one very basic reason: attitude. They believe they can

succeed. Your beliefs pretty much determine your behavior and your behavior determines your degree of success.”

Qubein sees two broad factors that play into business success – critical thinking and communications.

Instead of accepting conventional wisdom, question authority. Carnival didn’t become the largest cruise brand in the world by accepting conventional wisdom that cruising is for the newly wed and the nearly dead; they rebuilt the cruise product plus its support and marketing systems.

“Don’t think outside the box, Qubein says. “Throw the box out the window and start thinking with a clean slate. In

today’s business world, if you are as good today as you were last year, you have already lost ground.”

The other half of the process is communication, the ability to listen, speak, and write. Qubein has his own formula for communication, SLOW for Speak, Listen, Observe, and Write.

People who add value to an organization do not jump to conclusions, he explains. They talk about an issue, then take time to listen, watch, collect information, think. Then they write to a conclusion.

Qubein sees the writing step as an exercise in logic and reasoning. When it

[continued on page 12 >](#)

continued from page 9 >

comes time to assess a plan, it is easier to see both strengths and loopholes in a written presentation than talking it through. Only when a program is solid on paper is it time for an oral presentation and Powerpoint slides.

When In Doubt, Fake It

Does the emphasis on communication mean you have to be extroverted and inspirational to be successful in business? Absolutely not, according to Robert Rubin, assistant professor of management at DePaul University in

Chicago. You can fake it and be a resounding success.

Richard Branson, one of the most successful businessmen of the age, is intensely private, introspective, thoughtful, and shy. But he leaps at the opportunity to

continued on page 14 >

What Makes You VALUABLE

Quick quiz: Which of the following personality traits are most valuable in the travel business today?

- A) assertiveness
- B) openness
- C) honesty
- D) friendliness

The trick answer is E, none of the above. Behavior builds value in business, not personality.

“Some of the most successful sales people and managers I have ever known just disappear into the crowd in terms of personality,” says Mike Marchev, sales trainer, consultant, and author of *Become the Exception* (www.Marchev.com). “They are absolute wall flowers. What makes them exceptional is that they have learned ways to behave that lets them excel. It is what you do, how you act, that makes you valuable in business.”

Every successful manager has a list of most-important skills and behaviors. The winning attribute most mentioned to *Travel Professional* was one that most business people have never heard of: critical thinking.

“Critical thinking is the ability to evaluate data, consider its applicability, and create actionable ideas,” says Michael Cipollaro, former president of Gerber’s international division and currently executive-in-residence at the Crummer Graduate Business School of Rollins College in Winter Park, Fla. “What I see is people who are heavy on information and light on evaluation and action. The top attribute in business is the ability to draw useful conclusions from information and act.”

Critical thinking has long been a staple in scientific and engineering development. Business and law schools hone thinking skills using case studies to de-

construct products and strategies that did and did not succeed.

Travel business guru Nola Burris, president of Visionistics in Vancouver, B.C., pegged consulting as the top skill. Not sales, which is matching customer and product, but consulting, which is matching customer and experience.

What’s the difference? Virtually all leisure travelers begin their vacation with Google or another search engine. Well over half search for an experience, not for a destination. The experience — romance, diving, fine dining, adventure, cooking school, sailing, castles — is more important than where they do it.

“No one calls a travel professional to be sold,” Burris says. “They call for help to find an experience. Find courses in consulting at a community college, a business school, seminars. Learn the consultative mindset and method and your value will skyrocket.”

Marchev’s list of winning behaviors has five entries: flexibility; listening; humor; creativity; and education. Each can — and should — be enhanced with training. Community colleges and business schools specialize in this kind of practical education. So does Marchev and other consultants who offer hands-on exercises in seminars and how-to books.

Flexibility is nothing more than learning to think of alternatives. A generation ago, mothers and managers reminded us that “there is more than one way to skin a cat.” The current version is a more succinct “Give me options!” The more options you can offer, the more valuable you become.

Listening skills are in short supply. Not just listening to words, but listening for how things are said, for what is not said, for emotion, for body language.

A sense of humor is a plus in any workplace, Marchev says. Humor can defuse tense situations, humor can teach or admonish without giving offense, humor can make long hours enjoyable, humor can build enthusiasm and focus.

Creativity is another key business skill, but learning to find new approaches is easier to describe than to do. Some business courses teach creativity, as do courses in art, writing, acting, public speaking, and education. Toastmasters can help hone creative skills by teaching members to listen carefully, think on their feet, and shift tactics in mid-argument.

Education is a tricky issue. Useful education is not presenting advanced degrees or specialized certificates, Marchev says. He looks for people who have a passion for learning, not a string of initials after their name.

“I want people who beg, borrow, and steal ideas and concepts from other industries, other disciplines, other areas. Education doesn’t mean you have a degree, education means you look for new ideas. It means you read voraciously, especially outside your own field. Those are the people who are most valuable in business because it is new ideas and people who bring ideas together in new ways that create the most value.”

What happens when you bring all these skills and attributes together? MP3 players have been around since Singapore-based Creative Designs developed the basic technology in the mid-1990s. But it wasn’t until Steve Jobs recombined existing components in a new way, added a shot of humor, and started tweaking concepts on the fly that the iPod created a new consumer product category. — F.G.

continued from page 12 >

play the extroverted showman, dropping his pants to lead a Conga line down the aisles of a Virgin Atlantic jetliner in designer underwear or showing off on the

cricket pitch despite early sports injuries. “It is less important to have a personality trait than it is to express the behavior that comes from that trait,” explains Rubin, an industrial organization

psychologist. “Personality tests say that 90% of professors are introverted. The most successful ones have learned to act in ways that say otherwise. They have learned to mimic successful behaviors. You can do the same in any job. The key is to identify the important behaviors.”

Identifying key behaviors is a huge task. Organizational psychologists have identified 18,000 different personality traits, Rubin says. He has distilled them into five categories that cover most on-the-job situations.

Conscientiousness is how diligently you work at a task.

Dependability is how reliable others see you as being.

Emotional stability is how well you avoid flying off the handle in the face of stress.


Agreeableness is how well you get along with others.

Extroversion is how often you take the lead in conversation and other interactions.

John Putzier, president of FirStep (www.firststepinc.com) and author of *Weirdos in the Workplace: Thriving in the Age of the Individual*, adds one more key category, flexibility. Job skills and attitudes that are successful with one company can be transferred to another company or to your own company. That is a vital realization in an era when even the best employees get laid off due to outside developments and factors.

“Trying something new is, by definition, uncomfortable,” Putzier says. “Resistance to change is built into most of us, but change has become the norm.”

There are courses in change management, but Putzier offers an easier solution: make a habit of changing something in your own life every day. It doesn’t have to be a big change, he says, it just has to be different and it has to be deliberate.

“The ability to take yourself out of the box is a skill that workplaces require all the time,” Putzier says. “If you practice change and flexibility on your own, it makes you more valuable than the next person who can’t see his way out of the rut.” 

SELLING *By the Numbers*

Does successful selling seem like magic, a talent that some people have and others can’t even imagine? Don’t tell Cindy Novonty, founder and managing partner of Master Connection Associates in Rancho Santa Margarita, Calif. (www.masterconnection.com).

Her firm conviction is that sales superstars are made, not born. After decades of successful selling for Westin, Disney, and herself, Novonty has distilled the process into seven behaviors. Learn the seven-step process now, while business is strong, and you won’t hit the wall when the market turns south again.

1. Act like an entrepreneur.

Successful sales people are always on, says Novonty, author of *Living With No Balance and Loving It*. Order takers go to work every day, then go home to live. Entrepreneurs – and successful sellers – never stop paying attention, making contacts, looking for clues in other industries.

2. Build relationships, even with people you don’t like.

It’s the outcome that counts, making the sale, not how much you like the customer. “You have to deal with customers in a professional way no matter what your personal feelings,” Novonty explains. “It is a business relationship, not friendship.”

3. Prospect and network for new business.

Successful sales people are always on the lookout for new customers because existing customers eventually disappear or become less profitable. Anyone who spends most of their time working existing customers is taking orders, not selling.

4. Manage your account base.

Every successful sales operation has a database, she says, and uses it non-stop. Whether it is ACT or ClientBase Plus for travel retailers, Delphi for hotel sellers, Salesforce.com for wholesalers, or other software support, the most successful sales people use technology aggressively to build and manage their sales pipeline. “Most sales people work on the low hanging fruit,” Novonty says. “They leave themselves very little time to prospect, which is how you build future business.”

5. Always present the product.

Don’t offer general advice to help the customer find a product, Novonty warns. Ask leading questions, uncover the customer’s needs and problems, then present a specific product that meets the need and solves the problem. Whether working one-on-one, presenting to a small group, or speaking to an audience of 10,000, successful sellers always present the product.

6. Close the sale.

Don’t wait for the customer to ask to buy, lead them into a decision, even if the decision is no. “If you wait for the customer to close the sale, you can be in for a long wait,” Novonty says. “You always move the customer to a place where the sales process can come to a close, with or without a sale. Selling is about managing relationships, not letting them stagnate.”

7. Start the process over again.

“Selling is the best profession in the world,” Novonty said. “If you’re good, you will always have a job and you will always make money. If you know the process, you can sell anything!” – F.G.