Bruno Bettelheim observed that life will only be a linked series of daily events, without meaning, unless a relevance or purpose underlies and motivates that daily activity.

Case in point; the harried painting contractor, running hither and yon, consumed by day to day operations, always reacting to the needs of the business. Ask this owner to step away from the business for a day or two of reflection and contemplation, and the likely reply is “It’s my busy season, I can’t get away.” This is also the owner who will blame externalities for their business fortunes, e.g. “the economy stinks, I can’t find good help, my customers are always looking for a deal, etc. etc.”

Counterpoint; the painting contractor who is motivated by an internal desire to build something of value, who appreciates the opportunity to step back from the business and recognizes the need for open, honest and forthright dialogue with other professionals.

Is your business designed to run without you? Is your business your legacy?

You can see where this is going of course; my challenge is to those of you who can always find a reason to make attendance at our Advanced Shop Talk conference subordinate to the immediate needs of your business. If you haven’t attended, you are missing the true value of your membership. (We could conceivably offer you a money-back guarantee . . . but won’t.)

This August, at AST9, I look forward to 2 days of intense, fruitful, exhausting and uplifting discussion on ways to improve my business. I hope you’ll join me.

Sincerely,
Nigel Costolloe
Catchlight, Inc

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**From the President**

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Not a moment was about to be lost! Five minutes more of such a defensive and the last roll call would sound for us! Desperate as the chances were, there was nothing for it but to take the offensive. I stepped to the colors. The men turned towards me. One word was enough- ‘BAYONETS!’

As painting contractors we face frequent waves of attack. Though, not as dangerous or intense as what many have faced in war, the lessons are still applicable to owning and running a business. Consider the battles we face on any given day. We fight for sales. We fight the schedule. We fight the weather. We fight to train and keep our people. We fight the insurance companies. We fight for dollars. We fight to be better because we care about how we are building our companies. At times, we are back on our heels. In 2008, we have additional economic concerns that are making the fight even more of an uphill battle. The housing market is struggling, borrowing is more costly and the cost of energy is rising quickly. We are in a fight that requires our attention.

In tough times, the tendency is to “tread water,” or “take things easy and be cautious.” It is easy to become paralyzed by the current situation and do nothing. I believe in always being on the offensive. This does not mean carelessly making decisions that are wrong for the company. It means staying alert and realizing that we are in a fight. It means having an intensity that will not settle for a tie and plays to win. Yes, the market is tough. Yes, the average job size is down. Yes, leads are harder to come by. And yes, we must fight for every inch of ground.

Consider the following on being on the offensive:

“Man who waits for roast duck to fly into mouth must wait very, very long time.” -Chinese Proverb

“Be not afraid of going slowly; be afraid only of standing still.” -Chinese Proverb

“Inaction breeds doubt and fear. Action breeds confidence and courage. If you want to conquer fear, do not sit home and think about it. Go out and get busy.” -Dale Carnegie

“I never worry about action, but only about inaction.” -Winston Churchill

These are just a few thought-provoking words on the subject. What does this mean for you? It’s simple. Make a decision to have the mindset of being on the attack. Choose to NOT be the victim. When your receptionist
says a difficult client is on hold for you, take the call. When a customer is trying to nickel and dime you, face it head on and be fair to your company. Return the difficult call immediately. Make that one more sales call even when you think it may be a waste of time. If an employee is not performing, have the talk now.

As leaders of our businesses, we set the tone for our companies. How we go the company goes. One of the most productive meetings you can have with your staff is the ‘How can we attack?’ meeting. Look at everything you are doing and find a way to make it better. Late last year, we at Jalapeno Paint Werx, made a huge effort to attack our gross profit. We talked about it with Crew Leaders, amped up our tracking of it, took a hard look at production rates and negotiated our vendors. We attacked it for months and it has improved greatly! It continues to be an area of our business that is under constant attack yet it continues to improve.

Being from the Chicago area I can’t write about these things without mentioning former Chicago Bear running back, Walter Payton. When asked what drove him to rush for so many yards (without much of a line for most of his career) and become one of the greatest football players of all time, his reply was “one more yard.” As he ran the ball he would say to himself “one more yard.” As he was getting hit and pulled to the turf his thinking was “one more yard.” As he trained, he thought “one more yard.” How can you be the fighter and gain that “one more yard” for your business?

There are turning points in war, in athletic events and in business. There are turning points in life as well. The common denominator, I’ve found, is the decision to advance, to attack, to refuse to lie down and die, to refuse to settle for a field goal instead of a touchdown. The decision does not need to be made like attendees of some loud, “rah, rah” event. It is a decision to be made in the quiet of your heart, without fanfare. For some of us, it may be the decision to get a consultant or to surrender an area of the business to someone better suited. For others, it may be time to simply push out of your comfort zone and ask for the order or make that follow up call one more time. Your turning point is one decision away.

The bayonet charge by the Union’s 20th Infantry is considered to be one of the key events leading to victory at Gettysburg. That victory had a major impact on the future of our country. What decisions need to be made in your organization? What victory awaits you?

“Once you make a decision, the universe conspires to make it happen.” - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Exceeding Customer Expectations via Veni, Vidi, Vici

by Justin Keane, Director of Operations, Catchlight Inc

Addressing the Roman Senate after having conquered Pharnaces II of Pontus, Caesar further insinuated himself into history’s embrace by confining his remarks to what might well be the earliest recorded sound bite: veni, vidi, vici (I came, I saw, I conquered). Three words, twelve letters, and a bravado the size of the Forum.

In the time since, Caesar’s words have come to serve within popular culture as cheeky shorthand for a job well done. I’m relatively sure I remember seeing a Bart Simpson veni, vidi, vici t-shirt a few years back, and if not, well, there’s your moneymaking idea for the week.

To the customer-centric business, however, Caesar’s words are guidestone…or epitaph. Bent on exceeding all of your customer’s expectations, how might you react once the job’s done, the survey results are in, and the customer reports, perhaps contentedly enough, that their expectations were merely met: that your crew did arrive, that they
did see, and that they did conquer—in short, that they did exactly as you promised they would, no more and no less?

The challenge is clear. Can you truly exceed a customer’s expectations without cheating your promise downward? That prospect may seem daunting, but I say yes you can, and here’s how:

Toot your own horn: in an industry where all too often promises aren’t made, much less kept, allow your business to be bold with its word. Don’t hesitate to clearly and succinctly remind your customer that you make promises because you intend your work to meet them. “We’re glad to hear that you found our work to merit our word” is a nice, understated way of reminding your customer that you cared enough to promise results and were good enough to back up your word with deed.

Ask questions: when a customer mentions that you met his or her expectations and leaves off there, don’t shy away from asking how you might have done one better. “How might we improve our service to you?” is one way of mining for that information; why not raise the ante even higher by asking a satisfied customer to tell you something they would have loved from your service this time around? Daring businesses ask daring questions…and often get thought-provoking and actionable answers.

Be rapid, diligent, and surprising in your follow-through: thank your customer for taking the time to share his or her impressions and make sure that thank you has been sent within 24 hours of receiving the completed survey. More still, address any specific comments completely while also taking the time to surprise your customer by sharing something you gained or learned as a business through completing the project. “Thank you for allowing us to paint your kitchen and dining areas! The design is stellar and we very much enjoyed working within the space; in fact, with your permission we’d love to use a photo or two of the completed cabinetry as a training aid for our newer painters.”

Even as the punchlist has been completed and your crew sent to their next job, the opportunity to exceed your customer’s expectations remains, its call as resonant as those Latinate words from so long ago. Conquer your tendency to stop short at a completed survey and ‘met’ expectations—be as bold as a Caesar and exceed, exceed, exceed! ■

Editors Note

What I most love about the Rag is the conversational feeling I get when I read each article. First of all, I know that someone out there cares enough about me and my business to share their instructive insights. I like knowing that I can pick up this conversation the day it arrives in the mail or a month later on a lengthy commute to a far-away land. I also like to hold it in my hands and turn the pages. With the cost of postage these days, it is very tempting to turn our beloved Rag into an e-newsletter. I hope that you appreciate the paper version. And if you don’t because maybe it’s not a very “green” thing to print paper copies, we’d like to know that too. Maybe one day there can be options for each individual subscriber. In the meantime, let’s keep up this conversation with the knowledge that we can always count on each other. Send article submissions in Word Doc format to Nigel at nigel@catchlightpainting.com or Julie at julie@signetpainting.com

Keep smiling and writing,
Julie Gehrke, Co-editor
Embezzlement?

by Lynn Bicknell, lbicknell@bicknellpainting.com, Fairfax, VA

If you have recently entered a bank such as SunTrust, here in Northern Virginia, you will see a large poster indicating that about 71% of all businesses are victims of fraud. This is no longer a remarkable percentage for me. My company’s office manager embezzled over $100,000 during a 26 month span while working for Bicknell Painting.

How can that happen? It is my intention to tell the story so that others might benefit. I loved Ronald Reagan’s, “Trust, but verify”. I trusted too much. I had had stellar office managers in the past, so I continued to run the business as before giving a great deal of authority to my office manager. She signed checks, paid bills, called in payroll and was given a credit card for charging paint, office supplies and other business expenses.

Here are some of the things that I did right. I had the bank statements sent home instead of to the office. I also made sure that company credit cards had individual numbers so one could determine who charged the various items on the statement. But, I failed to verify in some crucial areas: hiring, payroll and credit card charges.

When I hired, I did cursory reference checks. In talking to previous employers, I didn’t say the magic words of, “Off the record, can you tell me anything about the individual?” Nor the best question, “Would you hire this individual again?” It is shocking, but today’s legalities get in the way of candid recommendations. The person might have stolen money or done other illegal activities but if the company did not prosecute or did not officially put it on the person’s record, they cannot tell you about it.

We found out after the fact that Jamie, my former office manager, had forged a check and was being taken to court for identity theft. None of this information was given to us. During the proceedings with the police and prosecutor, we were informed that many businesses do not proceed with court cases because their books would come under scrutiny or they might have illegal immigrants for workers.

Our payroll was done through Administaff and since they were touted to be a supporter of small businesses, I presumed that some kind of check was in place for payroll. It wasn’t. It wasn’t until my wife, Trixi, scrutinized the payroll that she noticed discrepancies. It came to light that Jamie called in overtime for herself on a regular basis, giving herself quite a raise. Although overtime is not something we ever do, Administaff just went ahead and paid what she told them to pay. You would think I would see that in our QuickBooks accounts, but I didn’t because she dispersed her salary among all the employees so it would not jump out at anyone.

What she entered in the books was the correct amount but to come out correctly, she just padded the salaries of others in the company so that nothing would seem irregular. The lesson here is if you have a company doing your payroll; put something in effect where you would see what was done. If payrolls are done online, set up verification with the company. Do not just trust, VERIFY!
Many companies use credit cards and give authority to key personnel to use them, as I did. Hence, Jamie received a card for office charges which might range from office supplies, paint bills and other charges connected with the business. It certainly wasn’t meant for charges to Las Vegas; Ocean City; car repairs for her husband, who is a US Marshall; furniture for their new home; or varied other personal bennies. Jamie charged over $60,000 on our credit card. All of the VISA credit card records were destroyed and again the accounting records showed none of this. It showed more paint charges or other legitimate charges, but they were falsely accrued. When my wife discovered a discrepancy she called the credit card company for past records and it was at that time that we found out the extent of the embezzlement. Because the individual was authorized to charge on a company card, the credit card company HAD NO LIABILITY FOR BOGUS CHARGES! Because of that, we had no way to retrieve any of the money but through the court system. Here’s what I did right—every credit card in our account has a different number so it is clear who charges items. If this were not in place, our charges would have been very difficult to prove. Here is where I again trusted but did not verify! Looking back, I understand now that all credit card statements should have come to my home address, just like the bank statements. That would have allowed me to peruse the items charged prior to giving the document to the office manager for recording on QuickBooks. Another thing that Trixi instituted with the credit card companies was that no cash could be drawn out of the account, and everyone has a limit for expenditure per month. Jamie was clever and figured out how to get cash advances through the credit card at the interest rate of 24%. It is interesting to note also that the cash advancements are the last to be paid off so it is not until you are at “0” balance that you no longer have to pay the 24% on the cash advances. Ouch!

Believe me; I have learned a lot through this experience. Every time I share this story I hear a worse case of embezzlement. It seems to be rampant. So I hope you will take some of my lessons to heart and remember: Trust is good but you must VERIFY!
Contractor College – New and Improved!

Becoming a PDCA Accredited contractor is an effective method of setting your company apart from the competition.

PDCA is proud to have a great foundation of contractors who have obtained Accreditation status through PDCA’s Contractor College Program. These companies symbolize the best of the industry in both skill and commitment to quality. By pursuing Accreditation, each company has set themselves apart from the competition with a demonstration of their excellence. Below are some of the quotes the program has received regarding the educational training.

“With my current focus on the business end of the company, the technical side of the program was very good. The Environment course in the technical section was great. A lot of people are interested in the “green” technologies and this course gave excellent information on the materials and equipment to be used.” Tom Hester, Hester Painting

“The knowledge of new techniques is essential to our business and the painting industry. With the ease of on-line courses provided by PDCA Contractor College it is almost impossible not to learn the crucial knowledge and education that we need to succeed.” Judi Ricci, B. T. Builders

“I am pleased to add the accomplishment of Accreditation to our list of accomplishments. We believe that the task of completing the program will give all professional contractors in the industry a great advantage.” Greg Schnurr, Schnurr, Inc.

The PDCA created Contractor College to provide a quality source for education in the painting and decorating industry. The accreditation program from Contractor College provides top quality practical business educational opportunities for contractors on-line and through its vast local network. Contractor College instructors are among the best in the industry. They offer practical, state-of-the-art education that covers every aspect of operating a successful contracting business, including such topics as finance and banking, insurance, management and human resources, sales and marketing and products and equipment.

Accreditation is just one of the ways PDCA is striving to raise the raise and communicate the standards in the painting and decorating industry.

For more information visit http://train.pdca.org, email contractorcollege@pdca.org or call 800-332-PDCA (7322).
When legendary Vince Lombardi, from the Green Bay Packers, started his camps and practice at the beginning of the football season, he was renowned for getting back to the basics. He would reportedly hold up a football and say to rookies and veterans alike, “Gentlemen, THIS is a football…”

But what about the basics for our business? When the economy slows down and we are stuck in the throws of systematic approaches to our businesses that seem to yield smaller results, do we tend to the basics of our businesses?

If you were to start all over again, what would you do? How would you get the word out? Most likely, you would turn to your friends, family, previous customers, and those you knew and actively tell them you are in business and could use their help in getting business. I realize that most of us have grown our businesses to the point that we actually can choose our customers. But there comes a time when we need to rely upon the old adage that the squeaky wheel gets the oil. We tend to advertise “personal service”, but rely on impersonal mailings and advertising programs that seem to get lower and lower response results. How about getting back to the basics of the personal touch when it comes to networking?

Networking, first of all, should be spelled as net-WORKING. It IS work. But it is a basic element to any business in getting off the ground and rebounding. If business is slow, go through your list of customers and try to figure out where they came from. If they were referred, see if you can remember who referred you. You may find out that only a handful of people referred you several times. Go back to those people who referred you (we’ll call them A+ customers) and thank them with BOTH a quick phone call and a hand written note. If it seems awkward to call them because you haven’t kept in touch with them, send them an “apology letter”. These letters simply say, “Thanks for your support in the past, sorry I haven’t shown my appreciation previously, but I do appreciate your confidence in sending me referrals.” You might want to ask them, in the letter, if you could keep in touch with them on a regular basis. A week after you send the letter, you could call them just to say you appreciate the relationship you’ve developed and would love to service more people like them. “Oh, by the way…in case you know anyone who could use my services, feel free to give them my name and number, or I will be happy to contact them myself.” Oh…when you call them, you don’t need to necessarily talk to them. Just leave a message on their voice mail, and you’ll still plant a seed in their mind about you.

You may find that several old raving customers didn’t realize how valuable they were to your business. Also, most people don’t realize we often need business. Some people just need a prompting to remember that you need a constant flow of prospective customers. Some people think that your advertising is working good enough for you and you don’t need their help in getting your word out. It’s great to remind those around us that we appreciate their continual promotion of our business.

Zig Ziglar says; in order to get what you want, just help enough people get what they want. Help refer others, help them get business and remind them that you could use some more customers also.

Networking is really about developing and preserving personal relationships.

Ladies and gentlemen, THIS is a paintbrush…let’s do business.
Mood Assessment as a Tool to Empower your Company
Part 1 – Client Mood

By Mario Guertin, President, Painting in Partnership, Inc, President, PDCA Craftsmanship Forum

In late 2006, at the end of our monthly conference call, my business coach, Tricia Huebner, said: “There is an article you would really like to read; I will e-mail it to you”. The article, published in the March, 2006 issue of the Harvard Business Review, was titled “Taking the Measure of Mood”. The author, Patrick O’Connor, is the owner of The Inn in Little Washington, in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley, one of America’s most acclaimed restaurants. The article was about an elaborate system he created in the restaurant to continuously measure the mood of his dining customers – the premise being that if he and his staff could sustain an average score of 8.5 (on a 1 to 10 scale), they would achieve his customer service goal and maintain and grow the elite dining clientele.

I must say that I was absolutely inspired and excited by the reading of this article, because it addressed, in a novel way, the issue of delivering extraordinary customer service and empowering the staff to work as a team to produce that experience. The bulls eye, for any business, is to produce a powerful service experience, such that the customer’s life is enhanced, sometimes in a permanent way. From the consistent delivery of that level of customer service, a business fulfills its highest calling and benefits in some important ways as well: an inspired staff, customer referrals, repeat business, customer advocacy and, yes, fame, like in the case of The Inn in Little Washington. My point is, if you are committed to doing business in this way, the trumpets will be played!

Mood is defined as: the pervading impression on the feelings of an observer. That “impression” gives us information on the current state of mind of the people around us, including ourselves. Mood can travel through the whole spectrum of human emotion; it is the soup we all swim in every day, at every moment. For example, many years ago, I was on a project with one of my employees, working on a decorative finish in the client’s master bedroom. At some point, my employee tells me: “This is the fourth time I have seen her go clean the powder room this morning!” Upon getting that information, I approached the client to ask how the project was going for her. I found out that she was very anxious about the intensity of the finish we were going to apply on the walls. As a result of discovering that her mood was tentative and fearful, we ended up modifying the color intensity before engaging with that part of the work.

Often, it seems that we are at the mercy of mood. Sometimes, the wheels fall off on a project and we wonder what just ran over us and where it came from (sounds familiar?). However, upon investigating, there are always warning signs that were missed, that were usually clues for us as to what was really going on.

Acting on those early signs of mood can not only save the situation, but create an opportunity for extraordinary customer service.

The question is: how can a company systematize mood assessment and turn it into an empowering tool for the team to use in creating that “off-the-charts” service experience? There are two main obstacles to overcome. First, unconsciousness about the phenomenon of mood and second, the feeling of powerlessness we often have about being at the effect of mood (“There is nothing I can do about it!”). In reality, there is always...
something that can be done about it, if you become conscious of the mood around you and if a team approach is used in brainstorming ideas for mood improvement.

Having been inspired by O’Connell’s article, I started developing a Client Mood Assessment System that could be used in a painting business and I introduced it to my employees in March of 2007. The key to developing the tool was to think of simple clues that could be indicative of a client’s mood and be easily observable by field personnel. I grouped them in two categories:

**Mood Towards the Team**

- Client shakes your hand at project start
- Client is friendly with you and team
- Client points out location of bathroom
- Client offers drink source and snacks
- Client does small talk with team

**Mood Towards Company**

- Attitude towards being inconvenienced
- Attitude towards craftsmanship & work
- Attitude towards management
- Attitude towards price and add-ons
- Perceived level of trust and ease

Each mood item was given a -1, 0 or 1 score (0 being neutral). So the maximum mood score a client can get is 10, the worst score is -10. The mood assessment is made at the start of the project, at the mid-point and at the end. For large projects, an end-of-week assessment is made. Each phase of the assessment is followed by creating a list of actions taken by the team to improve the client mood as the project progresses. These assessments are faxed to the office on a form when they are taken. Each team leader is empowered to initiate actions using his/her own judgment.

When the “well runs dry”, or a serious concern arises, a call is made to me to brainstorm on possible actions.

For Example, we recently worked on a rather unusual project which involved the common elements for the owners of three condominiums on a whole floor of an exclusive building in Chicago’s Gold Coast. The start-of-project mood assessment came in at never-seen level of -4! The project manager, who was very concerned, called me early that morning to discuss the situation. The main condo owner we had dealt with seemed agitated about price and the cost of T&M work for the removal of the old wallcovering. Lacking more precise information, I decided to call the client to explore the situation. It turned out that the third condo owner did not share the extravagant taste of the other two condo owners. My main client had neglected to explain to the other owner that the wallcovering removal would be additional to the quoted price. The third owner was having a fit about the overall cost of the project. Basically, she had a problem and she did not know how to solve it! She asked if I would talk to the third owner, whom I had not met yet.

I called the owner up and set an appointment early the next day. Upon meeting him it was clear that he was having a problem with the project cost. I told him that I had come to find a good solution for him. I asked him: “Is there anything around your apartment you need painted?” He said: “Just this door.” I said: “How about if we paint your door and if we cap your T&M charges at $500?” He said: “That makes me happy!” I said: “Deal!” I then went back to the other client and told her what I had done. She was most appreciative of the actions I took to help her out. The cost of the action I took was a about $400 and preserved a $14,000 project and the goodwill of three clients! The final mood score for that project turned out to be a 9! Oh yes, we did get a referral as well.

I shared this story to demonstrate that a Client Mood Assessment System is not only a mood enhancer, but more importantly, a goodwill builder. It serves as an early warning system that enables you to intervene to diffuse potentially client-losing situations. Another great benefit is that it teaches field personnel that they have the power to understand and alter client mood, which can help enhance the client experience and reduce their personal stress on the job. That is a win-win! It focuses field personnel on what they can do to achieve the business’s primary objective: to produce an extraordinary service experience for its customers.

The complete implementation process of the Client Mood Assessment System into my company took nine months. For 2008, we have established targets for an end-of-project mood of 9 and a 20% mood improvement overall.

For a copy of Painting in Partnership’s Client Mood Assessment System, please visit the Tool page of the Craftsmanship Forum’s web site at pdcacraftsmanshipforum.com

In the next issue of DECO, look for Part 2 of this Mood Assessment series: “Team Mood.”

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Hello everyone. My name is Alissa Wertz. As the newest member of the Bissell Painting team, I could hardly turn down my boss’s request to submit an article to the Painter’s Rag. Not having much experience in the paint contracting side of the business I decided my submission would be about the different types of people I have encountered during the past 13 years of assisting clients in their color and design choices.

I have spent countless hours faux finishing walls, helping with design plans, selecting colors and selling paint coatings to more people than I can remember. Those people tend to fit into a few particular categories. Take a look to see if you recognize any of them.

1. The All Knowledgeable Client
This kind of client has done their research and will keep you on your toes. “Should you be priming that wall with a latex product? I heard that alkyd primers are the best”. “Can you tell me the ratio of proprietary resins to acrylic binders in the paint you use?” Umm… “How do the pigment molecules bind to the dry paint film in this product?” Yes, people have really asked me these questions.

Short of carrying a rolling file of MSDS/technical data sheets on the products you use, you need to be prepared and up to date on the lingo. Often armed with info gleaned from the web this customer can challenge your technical knowledge as well as your patience. If I don’t know the answers at the time I make a point to find out. Research benefits both of us.

When this type of client is satisfied with my experience and paint knowledge he or she will often turn out to be the best type of customer to work for. They appreciate the process, understand about quality and are willing to pay for a superior finished product.

2. The Keep Ahead of the Neighbors Client
This particular client is a great type to up sell your services to. They have seen something they like but want to put their own unique spin on it. I like to mention how every faux finish I do is different because it is tailored to my client’s specific wants and desires. Keeping up with color trends is key to assisting the client in making color and design choices. I like to keep them informed of upcoming color trends. This customer changes their interior decor more often than most, translating into more business for me. They like to be daring and try new things. Did I mention they also like to brag about how much they paid for an artist to paint their walls?

3. The Wishy Washy Client
“I like blue, no green, maybe lavender or how about yellow?” This type of client can seem to be all over the color map. Don’t be fooled by them. Deep down they know exactly what they want. They just want you to fish it out of them. My approach to this is to keep it light but start asking questions. For example, what made you decide to have this room painted? What kind of feeling do you want portrayed in this space? What colors have you always wanted to use in your decorating scheme?

Do you like a fresh and light palette or should we look at some of the earthier hues? And if I’m really getting desperate I’ll ask if there are any colors they really don’t like and narrow it down from there.

With some patience and good investigative techniques we will eventually get on the same page. I make a point to do a test board or two as extra insurance against indecision. This type of client really appreciates the time spent creating a color scheme and the time spent getting to know them.
4. The We Really Need a Marriage Counselor but We Have You Client

Can you picture this? After discussing some of the particulars about the painting project these clients have, we get down to the question of color.

The wife says to me, “We (read me, not my husband) really want to freshen up this family room. We are having a hard time choosing the right color, aren’t we dear?” The husband replies, “I don’t care what you pick. You’ll do what you want anyway. I just write the checks.” The wife says to her husband “Oh now honey, you do care. Remember we looked at those paint samples and you said you liked that wild pumpkin color?” The husband answers her “Which one was that? You showed me about 200 color samples. They all look alike to me.” The wife points out the wild pumpkin to him. “That ugly orange! I never agreed to that!”

I stand idly by pretending interest in the family photos on the wall. They both turn to me and say “What do you think?” Oh boy. “Uh, well...” It’s tempting to turn and run mumbling something about calling Dr. Phil, very tempting. It seems this is a no win situation. Who do I agree with? The one signing the checks or the one who called me in the first place? With some diplomacy I try to iron out this painting wrinkle by not specifically agreeing with either of them. “That’s a bold choice of color.” I may answer. “Let me show you another version of that hue. I recently used this in the spring Parade House. It’s a little softer, still orange-ish without being too overpowering and would really set off your woodwork”. To the husband I may point out how the new color could highlight the antlers of the deer mount on the wall. To the wife I’ll suggest giving her some larger paint samples to get a better idea of the visual impact of her color choice. When they figure out I am genuinely interested in both of their ideas, we all relax.

5. The Simple, Easy Client

“I want it all the same color I used last time. It just needs freshening up.” Having been exhausted and or invigorated by dealing with the previously mentioned client types, this customer is like a breath of fresh air. Because their space isn’t going to be radically transformed by new paint colors, I like to emphasize my commitment to quality, neatness and attention to detail. It never hurts to suggest an accent color. People tire of color more quickly than off white.

No matter what category your customers and potential customers fall into, they all want the same thing; a great paint job and a great experience with the painting process. We as painting contractors strive daily to give it to them. It’s why we are in this business.

If choosing paint colors and creating design plans is not your specialty, consider putting a color and design consultant on the payroll. It can free you up for other business related issues and expands on your service offerings. My boss prefers to be out on the job, painting like crazy. Hmm, maybe that’s why he hired me.

Now is the time for all good Forum members to come to the aid of their association to.....

Enter the National PDCA Picture It Painted Profession Awards and the PDCA Safety Awards!

Be recognized for your achievements and professionalism with a PIPP Award, presented at PACE 2008.

Go to www.pdca.org/awards_contests.htm
What I Learned This Year
continued from back cover

I have learned to hire the very best, most expert people I can find. I work closely with my business coaches to find out what things are really important for me to manage, we have increased our profitability to a great extent.

We have lowered our overhead by dropping people who were not as efficient as required. In the past we only had a gut feeling as to which of our people were profit generators and who were weights holding the whole team back. My office administrator, the most awesome Gala, produces monthly spreadsheets using Microsoft Access to keep monthly tabs on each foreman’s profitability so we can determine what kind of encouragement from management is necessary...a pat on the back; some training; or a boot in the rear!

We have systematized and binderized! Every time I create a new process, I create a binder to keep track of how we do things...for example: one of the first seminars I attended 10 years ago was Linda Leigh Francis’ seminar based on her book: “How to Run Your Business So It Doesn’t Run You!”. I was overwhelmed by all the opportunities that Linda showed me to improve my business. I am still in the process of implementing her ideas.

As you have seen from my previous comments, I have learned to be interdependent upon the gifted people around me. If there is one area of intelligence that I have, it is to recognize the giftedness of those around me! I used to feel less of a person if I could not figure out a business problem or complete a project on my own. But with hard experience and the wisdom of years, I have come to recognize that a hard-headed independence is not the best way to run a business! By surrounding myself with able counselors and co-workers on whom I can delegate and rely, my stress level has plummeted while our profits have soared!

I have learned to have a marketing mindset all the time. When business is slow, like this year, and weather is bad, it is not the time to start a direct mail program! There is a lag time between mailing and calls. Because we have mailed year round for a several years now, our prospects are calling even in the dead of winter. And it is not just mailers that will do the trick...marketing encompasses communication of the whole that is Peek Brothers Painting Contractors. What do I mean by this? For us it means clean, neat, professional field personnel; it means consistent and polite communication with the customer; it means quality proposals and follow up thank you letters. In short it means that every day and in every way, all we do at Peek Brothers is to be done so that the customer has: “A Quality Experience from Start To Finish”. When consistent marketing is done in this way, prospects call pretty much pre-sold because they have seen us in their mailbox or painting in their neighborhoods for their friends and neighbors.

I am a member of two wonderful best practices groups on top of going to AST and PACE ...so I get to hang out with some pretty awesome people. It is easy to get sucked into wanting to be “just like so-and-so” or get big like “so-and-so”...it is a very good thing to be around other successful people and learn, but, it is important to understand yourself and be sure of your own goals and aspirations...maybe you will find more enjoyment out of being small and profitable! I know many contractors who bring home $200k a year with a less than $1mil company and I know contractors who do well over that and take home a bundle...What size you are or aspire to be has to be right for you...Do not be mesmerized by others’ “success”! You need to be you! The jury is still out on how big I’ll be, but my self-awareness tells me my company’s growth will be slow but steady if not in size, at least in profitability!

In closing, I want to tell you all that long persistence in one direction does pay off. The trick is to be sure that your direction is correct. A ship traveling across the ocean often will set a course to its destination at the start. Along the way due to storms, currents or a slight defect in the rudder, it is easy for a ship to get off course just a little bit. If a correction is not made, after a few thousand miles, a small initial mistake can mean hundreds of miles away from an intended destination. To preclude this problem, small course corrections are made continually from an outside, steady source (The Global Positioning System or GPS) to insure a safe and timely arrival at the proper port. It is the same with our lives and businesses...are you going in the right direction and have you surrounded yourself with people you can trust, who will help you stay on course? Your friends in the PDCA are there for you...just ask!
Building a Recession Proof Company – Stop Blaming the Economy and Get Busy Building a High Performance Painting Company!

August 14 – 16, 2008
Sheraton St. Louis City Center, St. Louis, MO

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COST CONTROL
Improve efficiency and control costs. We will look for savings around every corner.

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BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
Where do you want your company to be in 5 years and how are you going to get there?

Keynote Speaker: Randy Sims
Overcoming Obstacles, and how we deal with the trials that life hands us is what sets us apart from the rest. Whether it is staying focused and positive during a work crisis, dealing with a personal issue, or needing to work through some type of sudden change in your life, hearing Randy’s story and ideas on how to cope, overcome, and succeed will leave you feeling like you just had a “breath of fresh air.”

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Sheraton St. Louis City Center,  
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- Cost Control  
- Estimating and Sales  
- Business Development

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### Registration Costs

*Includes all materials, paperwork, breakfast, lunch and snacks Friday & Saturday*

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<th>Cost</th>
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<td>Each additional person from the same Company</td>
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<td>PDCA Residential Forum Membership? Join today! Membership from 8/2008-8/2009</td>
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<td>Friday extra lunches x number of lunches (for guests – to get to know other guests for shopping or excursions)</td>
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<td>Thursday Welcome Party - Includes shuttle buses to PDCA headquarters and then on to Welcome Party - a great Barbeque x number of people attending. Buses will depart from Sheraton City Center.</td>
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**TOTAL DUE**

**PAYMENT OPTIONS:** Payment must be included with this reservation form to confirm your registration.

- Visa/MC # ____________________________
- Exp ______/_______ Security Code ____________
- Signature__________________________________

Fax to: 716-632-8437 or make check payable to PDCA Residential Forum and mail to: PDCA Residential Forum, 8560 Main St., Williamsville, NY 14221

*Confirmation and further details will be emailed to all registrants.*

**QUESTIONS? Please call the office at (800) 697-7322 – office hours 8:30 – 4:30 EST or email tony@pdcaresidentialforum.org
What I Learned at Work This Year

by John Peek, Peekbros@sbcglobal.net

Over the past several years, Peek Brothers Painting Contractors has been in a growth and learning mode. About 10 years ago, I attended a PDCA national convention and got my eyes opened to what I and my business could become. Since then have attended seminars, become a “Certified Residential Contractor” am now an “Accredited Contractor” and have served and continue to serve at the local, council and national level in the PDCA. As with working out physically, noticeable changes come slowly, but with persistence, changes become great and permanent.

This past year has been, by far, the greatest watershed for us as our many efforts have come together to allow us to continue to be profitable even in a down time.

So what have we done and what have I learned this past year? I have learned to always keep my ears and eyes open! By staying actively involved at PDCA, I get to rub shoulders with some very bright people! I have things that I can offer them and they bless me with their giftedness as well. I take these ideas back to my business and implement, as I am able. Which leads to…

I have found that I must always keep implementing; that is, putting into practice what I have learned. Never, never, never give up in the process of looking for new, more effective ways of doing things. As we like to say, “Just keep eating the elephant one bite at a time!”.

I have learned not to stress out so much on not being where I want to be but instead, I have learned to make a plan to reach my dream and then emphasize the enjoyment of the process of getting there.