One of the great things that continues to draw me to this Association is that desire to serve. I saw it way back when I first came across the Residential Forum about 16 years ago, of which I am now President. Most of the discussions, presentations, and articles jumped out at me reminding me that the human person was the key to our businesses. This desire to raise up each employee to be the best version of themselves, and the desire to do what’s right for the customer was, and continues to be inspiring.

As I grew as an entrepreneur and manager much wisdom was gained as I learned to serve my crews in the field and family members involved in the business (MTS stands for My Three Sons). This wisdom has allowed controlled growth to serve our clients well, and pay our staff decently with very good profits. Now I’m gaining even more as I give to the industry that shared with me for so many years. It’s a great system: helped by others, and in turn help others: part of the circle of life I suppose.

Whether you’re being served or serving others, or a combo of both, be all you can be, and enjoy gaining wisdom as you flourish in this industry.

Thank You,

Randy Fornoff
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WOW, hats-off to the planning committee, the education committee, the National Champions, the awesome vendors who made the trade show and all the attendees who made this year’s EXPO something really special.

SECOND, congratulations to all the award winners, extraordinary work.

THIRD, thanks to all the vendors – both the tech & tools, and also the soft tool vendors – I’m really impressed with the business technology present at the trade show. I remember days when it was just brushes, sandpaper & tape. We’re in the fast lane now.

ENERGY – if I had to pick a word to describe the event, that’s my word! There was so much energy here, and so many new faces in the rooms – totally revitalized EXPO. Next-gen contractors were present and accounted for – and strong.

The speaker line up was great; I really enjoyed the thoughtfulness of Art Snarzyk’s talk on cultivating referrals; so much deeper analysis of what works and what to stop doing - RIGHT NOW; that talk was on the top of my “LIST OF 3” (I work on 3 things at a time after EXPO, or AST – as a rule, to avoid being overwhelmed and getting nothing done at all).

I wasn’t in Tom Reber’s talk, but I saw a video- he was on fire; a punch-in-the-face wake-up call for many of us who forget that we have rights too, and it’s ok to say NO!

Special thanks to Nigel Costoloe and Chris Shank for putting on a great show; it was concise, on-target, and really delivered bang for this members’ buck! Looking forward to Galveston Texas in 2018.

FINALLY, I want to thank Jeff Winter and Sherwin Williams for throwing a party on the Star of India. What an extraordinary vessel, what a great party. Thank you.
Vicky - MY NEW PAL

By: Mike Kelly
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We've had an answering service for about three years now. It was a paint contractor-focused service that we had pretty positive feedback on. Things changed and suddenly we were looking for an alternative. “Answering service” isn’t quite accurate – more “virtual receptionist”. What we found was VickyVirtual.com. Since signing with Vicky I’ve talked with other contractors that have had good results with answer.net and gabbeyville.com.

Lots of answering services want to answer the phone and take a message, but not much more. Contractor needs are different than a small law office or a realtor. In our case, we had four requirements that made a virtual receptionist essential:

1. Take contact info into a calendar booking form
2. Check for service area
3. Answer basic industry-specific questions
4. Call screening

In having these needs met a painting company can make an answering service a valuable and cost-effective part of its front-end business system.

First is calendar booking. If you haven’t checked into YouCanBook.me (the paid version, of course) you should do so right now. Go ahead – put down the Painter’s Rag, we’ll wait. Calendar booking really is the key to having an answering service (YCB has been written about in a previous Rag issue). A date and time are chosen, contact info is collected and it’s taken none of your company’s time.

Next comes service area. Say for example that you only paint trailer homes. You sure don’t want to spend much time fielding calls from McMansions, do you? Draw a Google Map for the answering service so they can quickly see your trendiest trailer parks. If one of those McMansions should happen to fall “outside of our service area” they’ll be referred to the nearest fill-in-the-blank paint company for some referrals. And BaDa Bing! - you’ve told them no without telling them No. And it’s taken none of your company’s time.

Third, what distinguishes a Plain Jane (i.e. not Vicky) service from one that should be considered more of a partner in your business is the ability to answer basic industry-specific questions. “Do you paint exteriors? Insured? Water towers?” With a well-planned Google doc shared with the call center everybody has access to that information.

- Call Handling - which calls go where: sales calls disposed of, personal messages routed, etc.
- FAQs - scheduling, business (payments, hours, etc.), painting (Yes churches, No machinery)
- Background - Key personnel, brief company history, links to company site, FB, LinkedIn, YouTube channel, etc.

Map of service area

An easy to scan list of key points will answer 90% of the usual questions. Reviewed and tweaked over the first few weeks, the list became more targeted and callers felt comfortable that they were dealing with a knowledgeable company employee. After six weeks we circled back and asked the service for feedback on the information provided and got several variations on “very helpful, don’t change a thing.” With a comprehensive Call Handling document you can handle routine inquiries efficiently - and it’s taken none of your company’s time.

Finally, if you’ve ever answered the phone for more than 12 minutes you know how much time is wasted with info-fishers, complete misses and tire kickers.
Do you guys do face painting?

Can you hang my pictures?

How much to paint my 5 by 9 concrete bedroom?

If 10% of all calls are this type of “are-you-kidding” calls then a virtual receptionist is the answer - and it takes none of your company’s time.

Call tracking is, at least right now, a weak point for Vicky. We get an email every time any contact is made but no segmenting between call types. Maybe nice to see from a trivia perspective but, really, the only important number is Cost per Estimate.

The monthly cost is almost always based on call volume. Currently, we’re at about $300 per month but that will increase a bit as volume rises in the summer. For some perspective, there’s a much larger painter in Seattle that pays about $850 per month for answer.net.

I know what you’re thinking: “we’ve already got somebody in the office to answer phones” or, even worse, “I can answer the phone myself.” How many nuisance calls do you need to answer before you start pulling hair out? My pal Vicky doesn’t get sick, doesn’t complain about the AC, doesn’t get grumpy. Even at $850 a month you’ve got a well-qualified, always-on professional for about $10,000 a year. And you just freed up your current call person for more important, revenue-generating duties like marketing.

The strategy is to segment your admin tasks and then delegate to a specialist. Some can only be done locally, others can better be done in Manilla. Answering calls is best done by a live American with a super-clear script and set of instructions. Vicky, you’re a goddess.
GIVING BACK CAN HELP BUILD YOUR BUSINESS

THE Second EDITION

More About How Giving Back to the Community Can Help You Boost Your Bottom Line

Dan Brady
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A LITTLE OVER THREE YEARS AGO I wrote an article for The Painter’s Rag on How Giving Back to the Community Can Help You Boost Your Bottom Line.

Now I’d like to tell you about the results of my latest charity involvement and encourage you to get involved in your community both to benefit the community and your business.

Last year I decided to do a fundraising swim to benefit the local Habitat for Humanity, which is one of my favorite charities. At first I set a goal of $10,000 to help my local Habitat start another home in The Depot Neighborhood in Traverse City, Michigan. Then I realized that $10,000 was only 10% of what the local Habitat for Humanity organization needed to get that home started. “Why not shoot for the whole $100,000,” I asked myself. So, with a team of support that’s just what I’m doing. The results — it’s not quite a year since I made the decision to fundraise but already we’ve raised OVER $72,000 in just two swims and we’ve drawn lots of attention to the good work that Habitat for Humanity does in our community. And Dan Brady Painting and Wood Restoration has also benefitted.

RISK VS. REWARD

Some business owners I talk with tell me my efforts sound like a lot of work with no guarantee of reward. They’re not sure it’s a good use of their time to do anything other than write an occasional check for a worthy cause — and they’re unsure of how much of that they should do. What I try to help those people understand is that getting involved with one or more local non-profits can give your business a big boost. Plus your efforts can help enrich the community where you live and work and that has great long-term benefits for business as well.

Here’s my story about my latest effort and the real benefits my business has received as a result.

SWIMMING FOR HABITAT

Like everyone I have a bucket list. One of the items on my bucket list is to swim the Straits of Mackinac where Lakes Huron and Michigan meet between Michigan’s Upper and Lower Peninsulas. As I’d drive over the Mackinac Bridge to get to my parent’s getaway home in the U.P. I’d look at the water below and think about how great it would be to swim under the bridge and see it from below.

That’s when I decided that I’d swim from Mackinac City to Mackinac Island. But a swim like this doesn’t just happen... it takes planning and assistance.

SURROUND YOURSELF WITH A SUPPORTIVE TEAM

When I approached Habitat for Humanity with my idea they couldn’t have been more supportive. But I didn’t leave off there. Many times the people you work with on a daily basis can offer support as can friends and family. Here’s what the team who supported me did:

- Researched any necessary permits or approvals that I needed for my swim sites.
- Built a webpage – danbradyswimsforhabitat.com - that could take donations online. That allowed me to reach out to friends and professional acquaintances across the country for donations while making it easy for them to give.
I’ve had a lot of people cheering me from the start. This was a project that required a lot of training. My swim from Mackinaw City to Mackinac Island took place on Labor Day weekend, but I started training last spring and swam nearly 10 miles a week all summer.

After successfully making the Mackinaw to Mackinac Island swim I kept training for my second swim which came in early December when I swam from San Francisco to Alcatraz and back. While it’s a shorter swim than the Mackinaw-Mackinac one it features chilly waters, strong currents and the potential for SHARKS.

Along the way I kept in touch with supporters and with the local media which covered the Mackinaw-Mackinac swim, including both local TV stations. One sent a camera crew to cover my preparation for the swim to Mackinac Island and one sent a camera crew the day of the swim. I was also recognized with a Paul Harris Fellow Award from our local Rotary Club.

For those of you who are going “Okay, but what’s the business benefit.” As a result of my efforts I got personal publicity in the local newspapers and on TV. In all the coverage my business was also mentioned. I couldn’t afford that kind of advertising and frankly don’t think any ad would be as effective at spreading the word about my business. I reaped THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS IN BUSINESS PROMOTION because of my commitment to Habitat for Humanity and additional publicity when the local Rotary International awarded me the Paul Harris Fellow.

I know this all makes a difference in my business in several ways. Because of the publicity my company enjoys greater awareness within the community and that translates to being called more frequently for quotes on jobs. BEST OF ALL – I’ve had clients tell me that they selected our bid — even when we came in higher than the competition — because they appreciated our commitment to helping others.

Giving back to your community is a WIN-WIN. Because I’ve been giving back for a long time — to Goodwill Inn and Habitat for Humanity — I’ve seen the difference it makes.

**HOW TO PICK A NON-PROFIT TO PARTNER WITH**

I’m a big believer in choosing an organization that is important to you. For me that includes organizations that fit with my business and helps people achieve their dreams either through the blessing of MEANINGFUL WORK like Goodwill or by OFFERING A HAND UP, not a handout like Habitat for Humanity.

As I’ve told many people who ask me about choosing a group to get involved with — if you want to add community involvement to your company’s mission, look around and see where there’s a need for help where you live. **What are the issues that face your community?**

Once you’ve chosen a community organization don’t hesitate to tell people about it. It’s not bragging but rather letting your customers know that you give back to the community and maybe offering them an opportunity to help as well.
Whether you haven’t missed an AST conference in years or it’s been years since you’ve attended, you’ll want to save the date for this year’s Annual Advanced Shop Talk Conference right now. While sunny San Diego may seem hard to beat, this year’s location and line up is one you really won’t want to miss. With new and improved “Contractor Spotlights”, where fellow business owners will share their stories and lessons learned, to a session on using company culture to your advantage delivered by John Kahl, the CEO of ShurTech Brands, and a networking reception hosted by Sherwin Williams at the one and only Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, AST 18 is sure to be one for the record books. So book your flight and hotel now and keep an eye out for the online registration, which is set to open in early April. We’ll see you in Cleveland!
At last year’s Advanced Shop Talk we heard from a contractor that was targeted by the EPA for lead paint violations. It was a nerve-wracking inside look at the bureaucratic process, the documentation requested, the golden nuggets from previous AST’s, who provided key advice (and reassurance) and the timeline for the whole mess to play out. But we didn’t hear the punch line: how did it turn out - wrist slap? Jail time? Join us at this year’s AST for a complete update. Gain valuable insight into what can be expected, understand how to level the playing field with “non-compliant” contractors and hear how this game is really played.

Online Conference Registration is scheduled to open in early April.

This is one you won’t want to miss!!

Book Your Room Now
Editor’s Note:
Suhaiba Neill
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I COULD (and MIGHT) write a book about all of the helpful things I’ve learned since taking my father’s seat in Vistage about a year ago. For now though, I’ll just share a GREAT MOTIVATIONAL TOOL if you’re looking to take your business and employees to the next level in the coming year. This was shared by a fellow member at the closing of a monthly meeting. We’ve put it to use in our company this year while rolling out our CORE VALUES (one per month). It all starts with water, hot water, water at 211 degrees, which is not quite boiling yet…

Sam Parker and Mac Anderson, authors of 212 – The Extra Degree use this metaphor to inspire us all to try a little harder, push a little further, and give a little more to make everything in our lives that much better. You can watch the video below if you don’t mind entering your email address, search for it on YouTube and endure a commercial in the middle, or purchase the book online for about $15, but I’ll share my FAVORITE EXCERPT here and leave the next steps up to you (pgs 68-69).

AND THEN SOME…

“The secret to anyone’s success is what I call “and-then-some” syndrome. The power of these words is captured in a poem written by Carl Holmes.

‘And then some… these three little words are the secret to success. They are the difference between average people and top people in most companies. The top people always do what is expected… and then some. They are thoughtful of others; they are considerate and kind… and then some. They meet their responsibilities fairly and squarely… and then some. They are good friends and helpful neighbors… and then some. They can be counted on in an emergency… and then some. I am thankful for people like this, for they make the world a better place. Their spirit of service is summed up in these three little words… and then some.”

VIEW VIDEO HERE
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