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Smile! And Other Free Ways to Increase Profit\$

By Denise Martin

Advice Squad is written by members of the Maine chapter of the Association for Consulting Expertise, a trade organization of 88 consultants around the state. This issue's column is written by Denise Martin, president of Good For You Coaching and Consulting, Inc., who specializes in behavior analysis and communication skills coaching.

The value of a smile -- it literally costs nothing and pays huge dividends. While it's impossible to put a figure on potential lost profits due to lack of smiling, it is so important. Why? A smile benefits both the smiler and the person receiving it.

When you smile at someone, his mirror neurons automatically return the smile. This mirrored smile back does the same thing to your brain; it's a win-win, as endorphins are released all around. The physiological effects of smiling have proven positive results on overall health. The business results of a positive work environment are also proven.

We simply like others who smile frequently, have a positive attitude and are pleasant to be around. While I don't recommend that you walk around with a foolish grin pasted on your face 24/7, I am suggesting that you perfect your social smile and get in the habit of using it regularly. Catch yourself smiling when you are alone; you will feel your attitude become more positive. Then pass those positive feelings on throughout the day, especially with new customers and people you meet, even if it's only a glance "meeting." That smile is a big part of the all-important first impression.

So, we like to do business with people we like. What other factors affect who we choose to do business with?

Sealing the deal

We also like attractive people. Studies have shown that attractive people have a distinct advantage -- they get lighter sentences from juries, they get elected into public office with less proven merit, they get better grades in school, they are more persuasive, they are more frequently helped, they are hired more (subconsciously decided within the first few minutes of the interview). Our efficient brains are bombarded by data, so we look for shortcuts to weed out and process all the data quickly. One such shortcut we employ is: good-looking = good. Unfortunately, the proof of this is in the Ted Bundys of the world.

Attractiveness has a 'halo' effect; positive characteristics dominate the way we view attractive people. Our brains tell us that attractive people are curious, cooperative, confident, happy, friendly, complex, talented, kind, honest, smart, perceptive and other positive attributes. So, fair or unfair, the attractiveness factor must be taken into consideration and has unconsciously sealed more deals than people realize. Hang around attractive people -- your attractiveness quotient automatically goes up (or down) with the company you keep.

How, you ask, can an “average Joe” become more attractive without plastic surgery? There are several ways, smiling being just one of them. Using humor is a related method, due to the endorphin rush we receive while enjoying a laugh. Because of this purely physiological response, we like to be around and find humorous people more attractive.

Posture, too, is important -- stand up straight, especially if you are male. Not only is posture a key factor in determining one's background, upbringing and social status, but taller men are considered more attractive (and drooping shoulders says you're depressed or sad). Mother was right, even if she didn't fully understand why.

Finally, we're attracted to people who remind us of ourselves. Be sure to point out any similarities, even small ones, with the other person. One way to ensure a similarity is to dress like the other person, utilizing the industry dressing standard. Good salespeople know the importance of dressing similar to a prospective client, but few can articulate why this bonding technique works. (Of course, good grooming goes without saying; you must be well groomed to be considered attractive.) Another way we have similarities is in our shared opinions. When we agree with another person's opinion, we become more like her and therefore more attractive in her view.

When all other relevant variables are in place (inventory, full staffing, efficient processes), the simple math becomes: attractiveness + likability + trust = profits. Increasing any of the factors on the left side of the equation will boost the bottom line. If you smile, dress well, stand tall and relate to others, you will close more deals, be more successful in negotiations and develop stronger professional relationships.

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