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How to get yourself all alone in Yankee Stadium

By Ron Kitchens

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Whether you think you can, or that you can't, you are usually right.

~ Henry Ford

I will let you in on a secret: Businesses are succeeding all around you. Unfortunately, many people have fallen into the trap of believing everything is bad and no one is succeeding. Too many times when I meet people, they seem to want to compete for who has the worst story about how bad things are.

What separates the companies that are succeeding from the others? The successful companies:

- ◆ Focus on their existing clients. They are asking their clients what their needs, wants and desires are, and they are finding a way to provide exactly what the customer asked them for.
- ◆ They go after new customers with a passion. They are not waiting for the phone to ring or cutting their travel budgets. They understand that their best chance for a new customer is to take it from their competitors, and they are doing it.
- ◆ They innovate their products or services. Great, successful companies are not only improving their product or service through innovation but they are doing it at a lower cost. With that going for you, how can a customer say no?
- ◆ They focus on the little things. Great business people know what it takes to succeed. It is a lot like the line by Crash Davis in the movie "Bull Durham," "Know what the difference between hitting .250 and .300 is? It's 25 hits. Twenty-five hits in 500 at bats is 50 points, okay? There's 6 months in a season, that's about 25 weeks. That means if you get just one extra flare a week -- just one -- a gorp ... you get a groundball, you get a groundball with eyes ... you get a dying quail, just one more dying quail a week ... and you're in Yankee Stadium."

So where do you start?

- 1) Call every, not most, but every single person in your database, Rolodex or name on a scrap piece of paper in your pencil drawer. Ask every one of them the same question, "What are your needs, wants and desires and can I help you solve them?"
- 2) Create solutions for their needs, wants and desires and go see the customer to present the solution. Can't afford a plane ticket? Drive. Can't afford gas? Buy a bus ticket. It does not matter how you get there even if you have to walk. Just get in front of the people who have the power to buy your product or service.
- 3) Next, call all of your competitors' customers and repeat numbers 1 and 2.

Don't know who your competitors' customers are? Here's a hint: If they are not your customers already, call them.

I do not mean to be trivial or underestimate how tough it is to succeed in today's business world, but I also do not want to grant any excuses. It has always been hard to succeed; that is why the rewards are so great. Embrace the difficulty. You are not only creating opportunity for your company, but you are distancing yourself from those competitors that are too lazy, too ignorant or just don't care to compete.

And, my friends, that is when you will find yourself all alone in Yankee Stadium.

Ron Kitchens is CEO of Southwest Michigan First in Michigan.