



## **WHEN BUSINESS STINKS! 8 SURE SIGNS THAT THINGS SMELL BAD**

Remember the last time you drove by a dead skunk in the road? You know you can smell them before you actually get near them, and then it lingers for about a mile as you go down the road. Simply rolling up your windows won't help either—that's like denying the inevitable. Now I've fallen victim to a dead skunk or two in my life, but last month, there was not one, but three within 1000 feet of each other. I was reminded of a CEO I met in January, who categorized his past year, like this by saying, "Business Stinks!"

As he talked with me, the signs in his operation that had led to an unsuccessful, unprofitable year were revealed, unwittingly by him. He started naming people who fell short of their goals; plans that had gone awry and wound up with the usual "blaming the economy" for poor performance and productivity. People who get things done don't blame others or circumstances but press ahead to overcome the pitfalls. They look for external motivation within themselves and their organizations to succeed. They know how to read the signs, sniff around and head off problems before they rise to an unmanageable level. Are there unmistakable signs that things smell bad in your organization? Is your business heading around a dangerous turn in the road that you can smell in advance? What are the signs that your business stinks?

**Untrained People** – A well-oiled machine has parts that work together. Parts in the right places. Parts that do what they are supposed to do. Parts that function properly when needed. People can be trained. Processes can not. Anyone can learn something when the right motivation is put before them and it is delivered in a manner consistent with their learning style. The problem is, most organizations don't take this into account and try use a cookie-cutter style of training that treats everyone the same. People are different and the formula holds true:

- 1. To understand teams you have to understand individuals.*
- 2. To understand individuals you have to understand their personality and behavior styles.*
- 3. To initiate change you have to learn adaptability.*

One final question on training: Are you planning your annual "once-a-year training event," but you haven't seen exponential increases in productivity in past years from this event? Start seeing training as a process (i.e., an ongoing growth plan) instead of an event

(a one-shot experience). You'll see the results in your profit margin. Well-oiled machines require regular service plans by trained technicians, not yearly check-ups by shade-tree mechanics.

**Unfocused Management** – Leadership is the key to everything in life. Leadership without focus is like a ship without a rudder. If you don't know where you are going you are destined to get there. Poor managers can be spotted by the dodges they use to replace their leadership abilities. These can include but are not limited to: withholding information, access or key assets to maintain their power; killing great ideas that they can't be in control of; not following up on their own directives; wandering staff meetings; insecure responses to subordinates with initiative; maintaining a territorialism mindset; and poor self motivation. The worst are managers so focused on pleasing their employees that the workers do what they want, knowing the boss is afraid to act or lead out. I had a sales manager tell me one time that he feared "aggressive" sales people in his organization. Why? He didn't like to be shown up, and he didn't want to ruffle the feathers of a complacent sales staff. His territory struggles because he keeps a lid on growth through resistive management.

**Unmotivated Staff** – Nothing un-motivates a staff like unfair rewards or leaders who won't lead. Leaders without any leadership ability often compensate by attempting incentive programs that wind up pitting employees against each other. Then to make matters worse, they don't show the guts when poor performers aren't weeded out or are rewarded the same as everyone. If you can't motivate your employees to excel, then get someone who can. Believe me; everyone can see a lack of initiative on the part of their own managers. When rewards are not given out fairly or slack workers are paid the same, something stinks and everyone already smells it. It is time to quit attempting to stoke "fire in their bellies" while pouring cold water on their heads. A manager told me that 20% of his sales people actually turned a profit last year--and he considered that the norm! He should have higher expectations and his sales force, in turn, will respond better. He unwittingly has set the bar low by settling for a 20% success rate.

**Unknown Sales Processes** – I am surprised at the number of sales people I meet who have no clue how to do basic sales: get their foot in the door; network; ask leading questions or how to close the deal. They don't carry business cards with up-to-date information, or multiple contact methods to get in touch. They don't look for opportunities to network or find prospects. They don't know their organization's sales process (if there is one at all). Most organizations have a process but don't know how to instill it in their sales force. They think everyone knows how to do it but look at the number of producers versus the number of non-producers and you will soon see who gets it. It's sad but true; after a basic course in sales, management thinks everyone has the tools to do the job; but most sales people are threatened by using the tools given them so they fall back on their own comfort zone. This kills sales and the ROI for the training you put into them.

**Disorganized Organization** – How well do you know your organization? How hard is it to get something through the bureaucracy, the processes, the rules, and the "red tape?" Is

it easier to kill an idea than to birth one in your organization? If your employees don't know who is in charge of what, how to walk an order through or receive poor service from internal service providers they are telegraphing their frustrations to every customer they come in contact with. Clear methods and processes are the jugular vein of your business. Try calling in anonymously and getting to the right person (yes, past their wall of voice mail). Now you know how your customers feel and you can be sure your staff senses this. People who work for great companies and love it will do anything to get the job done. They possess the dream. They consider it their organization, their reputation and their sense of pride and they do will whatever it takes to succeed. They know that if the company profits, they will profit as well. No doubt about it.

**Mediocre Seminars** – The number one comment I hear as I lead training around the country is how bored people have been with previous seminars. They seem grateful for an enthusiastic and content-filled presentation. An attendee in Denver told me: “I have spent my share of time in public presentations and even some seminar work. You managed the short amount of time and small environment incredibly well.” Another speaker told me that a participant congratulated him after a seminar by saying, “I learned more in the last four hours than I did at OSU in four years!” Anytime you planned a training program for the least amount of money, you got exactly what you paid for. If you are willing to pay a lot on the front end of any process, it will cost you less in the long run. Does your training instill values that people WANT to go out and apply right away? Does it have a way to reinforce the skills and habits learned for months (and years) to come? If not take a look at the lack of enthusiasm your people show in attending seminars. They are telling you something you need to hear. Mediocre seminars lead to lackluster performance.

**Poor Customer Service** – Remember the last time you went to a restaurant with poor service? Now let me ask you this: If the management there changed would you go back? Most people will say, “No.” There are two restaurants near me that have gone through several managerial teams and face lifts but to no avail. When customers are burned they not only don't return, they tell their friends to stay away. One of the restaurants was completely torn down recently and a vacant lot sits in a prime retail area. But no one will go there because the corner has a bad reputation—plenty of parking, just bad service at whatever restaurant opens at that location. You can have all the resources in the world. You can have the best training in sales that money can buy. You can have the best location in the world; but unfriendly, poor service will chase every customer away.

**Lack of Cooperation Between Departments** – Ask your sales team what they think of the Customer Service Representatives. Have they been supportive of the customers and promises the sales people made? Ask the CSR's how they feel about the Sales Staff. Do they think the sales force is just out to do anything to close a deal? You may be surprised to find out there is a silent but active war going on between the two groups. Disrespect for each others roles in the business success process kills your clientele. Have you ever been at someone's house when they had an argument just before you arrived? How did you sense it? Do you think a cold atmosphere or an adverse relationship within the

organization shows? It does. Remember, your customers make a choice every time they do business with you and if they are dissatisfied, they will choose to go somewhere else.

These are 8 Sure Signs that things aren't on the right track. Watch for them. Sniff around continually for the odor of complacency. The leader who plans ahead will outthink, outmaneuver, out-train, outsell and out-serve their competition. A t-shirt that I saw on a teenager at Disney World last month said it all: "The only time Success comes before Work is in the dictionary." She gets it. One day, if she applies this truth she will probably own a successful company like Disney, rather than just visit it.

Keep Sniffing!

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