

preface

By Charles S. Stuart

We don't sell paper clips...we give you the time to go to your son's first Little League game!

My first selling experience, other than the corner lemonade stand, was in Dad's retail office supply store. When customers came into the store, we made sure that every question was answered and that they left with the product they needed. Our "sales training" consisted of product information and real-world experience. In fact, we were expected to know details about every product – all 5,000 of them. Including the paper clips.

Can you imagine knowing how to differentiate between paper clips? The scary thing is – I can.

Paper clips come 100 to the box, 10 boxes to the carton. They sell for 25 cents a box, \$2.50 a carton. There are 36 gauge and 41 gauge clips. Steel or tin clips. Brass, vinyl or polished finish. Clipped or cut. Any questions?

How did I learn all that? From the manufacturers. Their training consisted of product brochures and a few dry product demonstrations. As if, knowing all there is to know about paper clips – including the manufacturing process – is what the customer cared about.

It was years later, when selling office supplies door-to-door to businesses that I learned that customers don't care about paper clips. They care about fastening paper together. Then, I learned the decision-maker-buyer doesn't really care about fastening paper together, they care about saving time, reducing headaches, increasing efficiency and raising profits and lowering costs.

For instance, a law office receptionist doesn't really care about fastening papers; she cares about getting what she needs to do her job in a simple, quick and easy way. Her supervisor, the office administrator, doesn't care about fastening papers, she cares about having a happy employee and saving time each week for other pursuits.

The principal partner doesn't care about fastening papers; he cares about having an office administrator who spends more time improving office efficiency and staff morale. But what he cares most about is keeping the firm's costs low, and creating more profits to share with his partners. In a phrase, who cares about paper clips? The paper clip salesman, that's who...and no one else!

When all the time what the customer really cares about is saving time, reducing headaches, increasing efficiency and raising profits and lowering costs.

In other words...we learned that marketing success only comes when you "Don't Sell What You Deliver!"

When all you talk about is the product (paper clips) the only thing left to discuss is lowering the price.

We found that talking about a customer's most critical business and personal needs sets us apart and gives us significantly more opportunities to demonstrate our added value.

However, we also found it much more difficult to talk about these needs for a variety of reasons, such as the customer's inability to talk about their needs; the uncomfortableness created by discussing these things; and the sales person's lack of skill at getting to the core needs facing the customer.

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Does it work? You be the judge. One of our clients who markets information technology supplies to MIS departments was having difficulty getting the undivided attention of the manager of the prospect's MIS department. After weeks of effort, he finally got an appointment for 4pm on Monday. The sales person had learned that he was not selling diskettes, ribbons or paper – but discovering and solving the buyer's real need.

When the sales person arrived at 4pm for his 45-minute appointment he was empty handed – no catalog, price list or brochures. Just his pen, a pocket note pad, wits and a talent for caring about the buyer's best interests. After the opening pleasantries, the sales person asked, "What one or two things do you wish you had time to do that you find hard to get done?"

Without batting an eye, the buyer said, "I wish I could get to see my son's first Little League game."

"Oh?" the sales person said. "When is it?"

"Today at 5," responded the buyer. With that, the sales person closed his pad, put it in his pocket, stood and walked to the door, held his finger over the light switch and said, "I'll turn off the light...as you walk to your car...you can just make it by 5."

The astonished buyer said, "No, no...I promised you 45-minutes and I want to hear what you have to say."

"Nothing I have to say is as important as your son seeing you in the stands," the sales person said. "Go on. Get up and go."

As they walked to the parking lot together, the buyer suggested that he had a few minutes in the morning if the sales person could stop back by...and the appointment was set.

The next morning, the buyer, full of gratitude for a "once in a lifetime event," explained that his biggest problem was spending so much time managing the acquisition process for the supplies used in his department. He asked, "Do you have any ideas about how we could streamline the bidding and procurement process to save me time and save us money?"

That is how the sales person was able to draft the proposal process, including some special delivery requirements, that benefited the buyer and was core to the supplier's business. A few weeks later, the sales person was rewarded with a \$100,000 per year contract to supply the buyer's needs.

All because of a Little League game? No, of course not. But, it didn't hurt, did it?

But, aren't paper clips a commodity product?

That depends on what a commodity product really is. A commodity product is an item that is readily available, identical to others, available at the same price from virtually every source, and doesn't have added value benefits.

So, when paper clips were introduced decades ago they were novel, innovative and helped the office worker. Over the years, as paper clips became common, the customer took for granted their uniqueness, and as the perception of their value fell...so did the price. Voila, paper clips had become a commodity.

Then what? The only answer to de-commoditization is changing the item by adding features that produce new benefits, or adding non-item value through increased pre- and post-sale services. And what happens if differentiation cannot be achieved? Then the item has become a commodity and the issue is no longer price – but volume.

Price cannot be moved because it is dictated by the market...so all that remains is increasing volume in hopes that a higher market share will yield economic efficiencies that produce a lower delivered cost and reclaiming a price advantage. Whew! That sounds complicated, and risky, doesn't it? For most companies, though, it is simply not possible to respond to true commoditization.

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We don't sell dry cleaning...we make sure there's no stress when you pack!

Does caring count? "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." An old saying, and truer than ever today.

I travel for a living presenting half-day, full-day and keynote programs across North America. One of the most stressful times of any trip is packing. Where is everything? Are my shirts clean and pressed? Where is my shaving kit? Which shoes to take? Did I remember socks? What about my tie? How will all this fit into that little bag? Have I got all my props; can I get them into my luggage? Oh, my mind hurts just thinking about it now.

Finally, one day while shopping with my teenagers – well, actually I was walking the mall while they tried to avoid being seen with me – it dawned on me, while browsing at a luggage store, how much stress I could alleviate with a few packing tools. That day I bought a bag big enough for a week's worth of clothes, including shoes. I also picked up an extra shaving kit and the items to fill it. Finally, I bought a tough plastic case that is used in distribution centers to ship my props.

When I got home, I typed a clothing checklist from my feet up, from outside in – shoes, socks, pants (dress & casual), belt (matching shoes), shorts (I am from Florida, you know), underwear, jacket, tie, shirts (dress & casual), undershirts, pajama boxers, comfy T-shirts (to remind me of home), and dress watch.

Next, I packed all my props into the plastic shipping case, carefully arranging and re-arranging the items until they fit "just so", then made a careful mental note of how the big items went in so I could repack it without thinking.

With that done, all I needed to reduce my stress was to make sure that my clothes, especially my shirts, were clean and pressed and ready to go. Earlier, the solution to making sure I had shirts ready was to buy lots of shirts. So, gradually over a period of months, I purchased over a dozen dress shirts thinking that would solve my problem. After all, with so many shirts there was bound to be a few ready when I needed them – or so I thought.

Long ago I had been taking my shirts to the dry cleaner instead of washing and ironing them at home. It makes sense to me to let others do what they do well, to save time for more productive endeavors. Plus, this pleased my wife who works two full-time jobs - one as my wife and mother to our three teenagers, and as a director at a large community hospital.

The dry cleaner I used for years (let's call it DryClean One) was one of a national chain. Located on the major traffic route I take into town, it promised "next day" service and 99 cent shirts. But, from the beginning, I began to pick up "you're just a customer" messages. I admit, I should have changed right then. But, no...I wanted to give them another chance.

The strip mall store was always hot – dry cleaners in Florida's summer can be very hot. The person behind the counter never seemed to be quite sure what to do, and was overwhelmed handling more than one customer. Hearing, "Thank you," was out of the question.

But most curious was the quality of the cleaning. The shirts came back on hangars pressed flat like they had been run over by an earth smoothing machine. I asked for light starch; but the shirts didn't appear to be starched at all. On the form, you circle light, medium or heavy starch, and all they had been circling was "light starch." When I asked why the shirts didn't appear starched the counter person said, "Oh, if you want light; we circle medium. When we circle light, it means no starch." Hm...another chance to change cleaners, but no...I'm such a trusting soul.

One day I brought in five identical dress shirts. When I picked them up, all had a hole in the exact same place on the collar. Bringing it to the counter person's attention meant going through the "third degree", as though I had poked holes in all the shirts. After talking with three people, they agreed to give me "credit dollars" for future

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cleaning. Now, I had the inconvenience of having to buy five new shirts, plus not have them available for the trip I was taking the next day. Now...I began to think about changing cleaners in earnest.

The last straw (why does it take so many straws to break the camel's back?) was when I picked up a special shirt that should have been ready on the morning of a flight out, with only minutes to spare. Not only was the shirt not ready – it was lost, and nowhere to be found. In addition, they handed me a shirt that didn't belong to me. What to do? This time I drove to the men's clothing store and bought two shirts for this trip. I asked my sister (who also is my office administrator) to find me another cleaner and to get my shirts or money back from the old, now "fired" cleaner.

When I returned, my sister sent me to Conway Cleaners for my clothes. Although not on the same traffic route, it was about the same distance from my home and has proven to be as convenient. Conway Cleaner is owned by Jorge Saldana, his wife and kids. Now, when I get my cleaning, it is a pleasure. Why?

For starters, when I drive up to their free standing building, and walk in, I am greeted, "Good afternoon, Mr. Stuart!" Every time. For a while I thought "Wow! What a good memory!" Then, it dawned on me that the personalized license plate on my car boldly proclaiming "Stuart" might be a tip-off. But, I don't care – being greeted in a warm, friendly, enthusiastic way makes all the difference in the world, doesn't it?

Jorge's store is cool, too. Their big windows, open to let the breeze blow through on a hot Florida day, are a wonderful relief.

Most of the time, they start retrieving my clothes before I give them the ticket, showing again how much I, and my time, mean to them. When the shirts come back, they aren't flattened, but hang with plenty of room – like they had been done at home. All of the clothes go on one ticket and somehow the right things are done to each piece. How do they do that?

Of course, each visit I talk to Jorge or his family and have found out more about them. Jorge's oldest son works there, his youngest son even goes to the same high school as our daughter, Julie and rows on the crew team with her.

They always ask when it would be good for me to pick up my clothes - "Would Friday be OK?" And the few times I've needed them sooner, they have cheerfully met my needs. Oh, by the way, they always have the clothes ready and it is usually a three day turn around.

One last thing, when I came in the first time they explained that since I am larger than normal (6 foot 5 inches, 18 ½ inch neck, 37 inch sleeves) that my shirts would not fit on their standard pressing machine and would require special attention. And, my shirts would, therefore, have a slightly higher price for that attention. What do I pay for shirts now? \$1.70 per shirt. Do I care? The real question is "Do they care?" Yes!

The point is: a customer who gets all they hoped for...and more...will pay any price.

What is not having to worry about losing shirts; having them ready when I need them; and getting a warm, friendly experience worth to me? Price doesn't matter.

Now, who else have I told about Conway Cleaners? Everyone I can think of including my Toastmasters Club; the manager of the men's clothing store I buy from (and who happens to live close to where I live); audiences around the country; and now readers everywhere.

We don't sell shaved ice...you get time with your little girl!

Oh...there is a bonus to going to Conway Cleaners. My youngest daughter, Sarah, our 14-year old, loves treats. Right next door to Conway Cleaners is a shaved ice store, Snow-Ice, where they serve the best shaved ices in the world. The ice is so smooth (because it's shaved, not crushed) and the flavors are out of this world. In fact, we have a running argument, Sarah and I, whether watermelon, blueberry or creamsicle are the best. And, I get to

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spend a few minutes with my 14-year old (who becomes like a 7-year old with a shaved ice in her hands). What do I pay for the shaved ice? Does it really matter?

We don't sell men's clothes...we make sure you look like the speaking professional you are!

For far too long I walked into clothing stores trying to be the fashion expert. That is, until I met Ronald Simpson and Allen Kirk. Allen is manager and Ronald, assistant manager, of The Men's Wearhouse store where I now buy my speaking "uniform." It started one day when I needed some dress shirts in an emergency (see the dry cleaning story earlier...grrrrr). I walked in, dressed in jean shorts and a casual shirt, with an attitude and in a hurry. Ronald broke the spell with a wide smile, happy greeting, and firm handshake, "Hello, I am Ronald Simpson...you look like you're in a hurry...how can I help?"

I was hooked. Once again, personal interest, genuine care, and a professional marketing approach built on serving had won the day. I walked out with the shirts I needed – plus a sport coat, slacks, and socks (the ones he let me wear to try on the shoes to check the pant cuffs felt so good). A thank you note was waiting for me when I returned from the trip and the clothes were ready for pick up as promised.

On the "pick up" visit, I met Allen. Allen is my height (actually an inch taller than my 6 foot 5 inches) and knows how I feel trying to find shirts and jackets big and long enough. That's why he showed me the wonderful fitting shirts to compliment my "speaking uniform," knowing that style and comfort (try sweating through a four-hour seminar trying to look "cool") are equally important.

The next time I visited, Ronald answered my question about a casual look by showing me how one additional shirt would work in conjunction with the outfit, and feel as comfortable as it looked. By now, Ronald had earned my trust so when I asked him, "Does this look good together?" – he said, "Hey! Which one of us is the clothing professional here? You'll look great!" Enough said!

What did I pay for those clothes? Actually, they were far less costly than I expected (or was willing) to pay. Again, for what I felt, price didn't really matter, did it?

We don't sell car repair...we save your time and take away the headaches you feel as a 'car clutz'!

I drive a Cadillac. Why? For two reasons. One, it is big enough to fit my oversize frame. Two, I don't worry about the car repair or maintenance – because Joe Allegra does. He's the service representative at Massey Cadillac who greets me when I drive up with a genuine, "Hi, Charlie...how're you doing?" Joe's been doing that since my very first visit several years ago. How he knows my name from the dozens of customers he sees is beyond me – but, whatever his "trick" – whether he chooses to remember my face and name, or has a capability to remember all the names and faces he sees – doesn't matter. He knows me by name and I appreciate his effort.

And, Joe realizes that I don't know anything about cars, so he keeps the language simple. This is all the more impressive since he must really know a great deal about cars to able to accurately record the symptoms so his team can get the job done. Joe also suggests what needs to be done ("You're due for the 3,000 mile tune-up...we can wait on the full work-up until next time") knowing that I don't have a clue what the car needs.

But, the biggest plus with Joe is that he takes the time to know about my work. He knows that time and convenience are important to me – so he arranges a replacement car (sometimes I pay the rental, sometimes they do) so that my trips to see Joe take only minutes out of a busy day.

Finally, Joe keeps me fully informed, fulfilling every promise he makes...when Joe says he will call on Thursday afternoon, I know the sun won't set that day without hearing from him. Even if it is only to tell me the part isn't in and they need another day. Trusting Joe means that when he says the repair investment is \$300 I don't doubt it. Does it cost more to work with Joe? Probably...but, does it really matter? Nope.

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We don't coach crew...we teach your daughter desire and personal leadership!

"Dad...this is Coach Cliff. Coach Cliff, this is my Dad." With that I met the young man who would be my daughter Julie's high school freshman crew coach. I didn't know anything about crew...other than it involves rowing a boat (a shell I came to learn). And, my "football player" mentality at first thought "Crew? Well...I guess it is a good way to keep Julie busy. But, what will she learn but 'row, row, row your boat'?" How wrong I was!

It didn't take long to see the difference in Julie. Her already "inbred" focus had begun to sharpen. She felt pride in her work ethic and her progress. But, the real impact of what she was learning from Coach Cliff didn't hit me until I spent the weekend in Philadelphia with the team at the Stotesbury Regatta.

For three days I watched Coach Cliff push, pull, herd and help as Julie and her boatmates dealt with their first "big city" experience, as well as their first "big time" regatta. What I saw made me into a believer. Julie seemed to change right before my eyes as I watched Coach Cliff talk not just about their technique or conditioning – but of their heart...showing them with the fire in his eyes that they could "get out early and dare the other boats to pass them...dare them!" Coach Cliff set an expectation that I thought, at first, was pretty high even though they were the State of Florida champions. Come in first? How? This was my little girl.

When race time came, I saw Julie and her boatmates change from little girls to "we can do it" athletes. In fact, as they took the water my thought was, "I pity the other girls who might get in the way." Through years of competitive athletics, I had seen nothing more exciting than that boat launch. It brought me to tears.

When they returned as victors in their heat, Coach Cliff called them together and spoke quietly of their effort and success. Then he said, "Tomorrow, you row for the championship. There is nothing more we need to say. You know the plan...get out front and dare them to pass you. Good job, girls!" A tingle went up my spine – not just from his words but from seeing Julie as she nodded in agreement...knowing she was able, capable and confident.

I wish the story ended with a victory in the championship – but it doesn't. They came in second. There was, however, a victory. Julie rowed 1,450 of the 1,500 meters with her feet out of her shoes.

In a crew boat (shell) the rowers' feet are held in place by shoes bolted to the boat. This helps them recover during each stroke as they pull against the shoes. But, Julie's shoes broke at the start and, rather than "give up", Julie had to hold her feet in the heel of the shoes with her legs and pull even harder with each stroke. To see someone work hard...so hard she falls from exhaustion...and cries from the emotional release of total commitment...is something to behold.

Silly me. I thought Coach Cliff was teaching crew. Little did I know that he is teaching life. Does it matter the cost (in time, inconvenience, money) to give a child this opportunity to learn and grow so much? Nope. Not hardly.

Don't Sell What You Deliver!

More than 25 years of sales and marketing experience has taught me that any product can be customized to a customer's needs when you know what those needs are, and can bring added value to the solution for those needs.

Marketing success is built on knowing the essence you bring to your customer's life. How do you add value so incredible that they cannot live without you...so powerful that they "kick in your door" to buy from you and your company?

The solution is simple...and hard. Simple, because it can be understood by everyone. Hard, because most people will look for the easy way.

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What is the biggest obstacle to becoming an essence marketer? I can show you the problem, the solution is up to you. Go, buy an 8" x 10" mirror. Across the bottom of the mirror write...

**"This is my biggest obstacle...and my greatest asset!
Success is up to the person in this mirror!"**

The most important step is to look into that mirror and realize that the barrier to essence marketing success is looking back at you. And you control the attitude of the person in the mirror, don't you?

Look for mirror reminders throughout the book. Go ahead...buy your mirror. Keep it handy. Give one to anybody you depend upon for success. Remember it was Pogo (the great cartoon character of years ago) who said, "We have met the enemy, and it is us!"

Essence marketers master five areas that set them apart from the rest, and this book details these five areas so that you can become a master at **Essence Marketing**®!

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