



Michael A. Brown's

Business To Business By Phone[®]

Fourth Quarter 2001 Edition

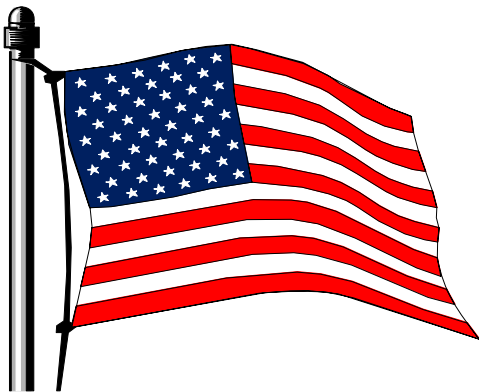
"THE SKIES ARE NOT CLOUDY ALL DAY"

This is not the column I intended to run in this space. The headline remains the same but the content is entirely different.

Despite the bright sunshine, the skies were cloudy all day on Tuesday, September 11. Now, as we consider what happened, even our view of cloudless skies remains blurred by our sorrow and anger. Yet the light of freedom shines!

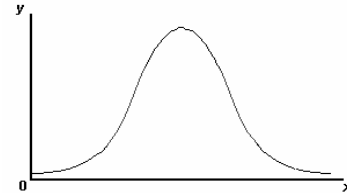
As we sing in *America the Beautiful*, "thine alabaster cities gleam, undimmed by human tears." Indeed, damaged but not defeated New York City still gleams with the resiliency of the people and the soaring, beloved Manhattan skyline. My hometown, Washington, D.C., still gleams with the resolute determination of our elected and military officials, and with the beauty of our national buildings. So the skies are clearing and we can begin revitalizing our spirits even as we fight.

As I write this, I think of the older generation, who have had to endure *two* "days of infamy." For them, for our children, for ourselves, for our nation and the world, we must make the commitment that this time, as ever, we will prevail. May God bless us all.



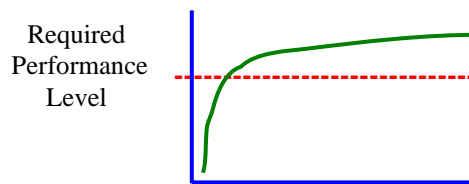
EDUCATION GETS 'EM READY TRAINING GETS 'EM GOING

This is education:



Got mostly "C" reps? "C" results? Call me!

This is training:



Do it! Budget *NOW!* Profit! Get promoted!

WHEN AND HOW TO "RAISE THE PERFORMANCE BAR"

Former NBA referee Mindy Rudolph used to say that game officials have to be *perfect* on their first night and then get better as time goes along. I think the same is true for callers doing *Business to Business by Phone*.[®]

On their very first shift, callers have to be able to sell the value of having a conversation, conduct meaningful dialogue, achieve the "reason for the call" (qualification, sale, account development, etc.), make the case for their product or service, and close on a reasonable and appropriate next step. And then almost immediately they have to get better!

It is management's duty to see that they *do* get better all the time. Specifically, managers must:

- Monitor, coach, and counsel live calls at least 25% of every business day.



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- Apply the right metrics, right. For example:

Quantitative

For direct sales: revenues and margins, i.e., quota
For opportunity generation and qualification: enough leads to enable your sales channel(s) to make quota
Ratio of conversations to connects
Ratio of definitive next steps to conversations
Caller's conversation length \pm 15% of group median

Qualitative

Ratio of listening to talking is 70\30
Verbal finesse, e.g., nice turns of phrase
Follow-on questions based on the contact's response to the previous question, not on the next data field

Best Advice: Review your performance bar and its metrics every quarter. Identify exactly what has to rise, and how high. Then, to enable the improvements:

- Tell the callers about the new bar height.
- Make sure everything (systems, data, etc.) is in place so callers can, in fact, clear the higher bar.
- Confirm that callers actually *want* to clear the higher bar. If they don't, hire replacements who do.
- Provide training and practice.

PHONE MANAGEMENT'S HARDEST JOB

... is to tell a caller, an adult human being, that the caller needs to change the way he or she talks. But often, doing so is absolutely right and proper for the career of the individual rep and the performance level of the phone team.

Many organizations have phone people who mean well and try hard, but whose verbal communication skills need significant upgrading. I'm not referring to accents or how fast or slow they talk. I mean basic English usage, grammar and diction ... the skills our grade school teachers tried to

convince us are important. Regrettably, not everyone "got it."

But can you look a rep in the eye and tell 'em that? Cringe! Other reps *never* will be right for phone marketing or sales and they need to be told so. But if we *do* tell them, and reassign or fire them, do we risk getting sued? *Really big* cringe!

Because of the cringe factors, managers often avoid telling it like it is. Instead, they try to put a positive spin on the fact that a rep speaks poorly, which does everyone a disservice. So, what to do?

Best Advice: Establish speech, diction, and vocal standards that are specific, observable, and measurable. For example, one must "ask" questions not "ax" them. One does not call a customer "dude." One says "you're welcome!" not "no problem." One inflects higher at the ends of questions only, not statements.

Next, conduct a heart-to-heart with each and every rep to learn if they really, truly want to be doing what they are doing. Sometimes, the reps with poor communication skills will opt out. (How did they wind up on your phones in the first place?) Re-qualify by the standards every rep who wants to stay. Delineate what needs to change in each rep's speech patterns and delivery. Provide training and practice, with audio taping and critique. Monitor, coach, and counsel live calls.

But wait a minute! How about we, ourselves? What about our own communication skills as phone people and managers? Who says *we're* so great? Are we practicing what we demand of our reps? How do we sound? And who evaluates *us*? Next time, we'll turn the examination inward. Be ready!

PLEASE HELP THE CAUSE

All projects through year's end, 10% goes to the American Red Cross disaster relief fund.