

# From **ROO** to You



May, 2011

## What are you selling?

Last week I had the pleasure of welcoming Rick Garber, owner of Kelsifahr, Inc. to speak to my Entrepreneurship class. Rick is a great engineer, an astute business person and a colorful storyteller. Of the many thoughts that resonated with my students was, “What are you selling?” Is the future bar and grill owner selling Budweiser and Miller, or a “Norm”-type of gathering place where everybody knows your name? Is the future nightclub owner selling a dance floor, a hipster hangout or an entertainment experience?

Think of the ice harvesters of days gone by, that cut ice from the lakes and delivered it to customers in the city. They did not realize they were selling cold storage and refrigeration. There are no more ice harvesters. Think of the iPod. It is not an MP3 player. There are cheaper MP3 players on the market. What Apple is selling is a jukebox experience – the thrill of flipping through the song, movie and game choices and finding just the right thing at just the right time. They are constantly focusing on the user experience – the technology is a way to deliver that experience. It is surprising how much thought we give to our intended products and markets compared to the thought we give to identifying the true product or service we are providing to our boss, clients, families, etc.

My consulting practice has products – training programs, HR audits, Department on Demand toolkits. I have services – coaching, facilitation, and project management. But I am not selling HR services. I am offering my clients piece of mind, confidence and giving clients back the gift of time.

We hope this month’s newsletter provides an opportunity to reflect on the unique gifts you are offering as an individual and the true products and services your organization offers your clients. As always, we welcome your comments.

**For You:**

**Expert Needed: <Your Name Here>**

Think about your current workplace. Who do you rely on for advice? For information? For verification? What do other people rely on you for? Beyond the traditional organizational chart, how do things really get done in your workplace?

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Most organizations have a “Pat.” Everybody wants Pat on their team. What is so special about Pat? Perhaps she is the person with 15 years of tribal knowledge. Perhaps she is able to exert influence without authority (hopefully using her powers for good!) to move projects along. Perhaps she is the only person who truly understands how to slice and dice information from the customer database. Do you think Pat is happy and engaged in her work? She may be thrilled with the attention, respect and opportunity, or she may be overwhelmed and feeling “dumped on” by everyone else.

If you were Pat, what would you want to be known and appreciated for? How would you assert yourself when others say, “Just give it to Pat – she’ll do anything.” Just because you are a wealth of knowledge and a great team member, doesn’t mean you want to be the go to guy for every project. Whether you are looking for a new job or seeking to expand your contributions in your current organization, clearly understanding your strengths will help you to better articulate your “value proposition” and identify interesting ways to leverage your gifts and benefit your organization. Take the time to figure out what you are “selling” and what “markets” you prefer not to play in. Talk to your boss and figure out how and when you can use these talents.

## **For Your Organization: Selling Inside and Out**

Your product catalog most likely contains a breadth of products, describes the industries you serve and may contain pricing information. Copy writers did a good job describing your corporate capabilities and critical competencies. You probably did a decent job articulating your strategic differentiators. But have you spent the time to truly understand the value of the product or service you are offering? Are you following a cost plus pricing model, or do you truly understand the value your product or service is providing to your clients. Does your pricing reflect that value?

Whether we are selling to our organizations internally or to customers, externally, taking the time to understand your true products and services will enable your staff to better understand your market positioning, your value and close deals.

## **Selling Inside**

Each day we are selling our organization to people, not just purchasing managers. We need

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to get employees aligned with our strategic priorities, we need to get one department to play nice with another department, and we need to recruit the kind of people that want to drink our Kool-Aid. Clarity, consistency, and accountability are essential for success.

- Clarity of purpose: Why are we here and how do we contribute to the broader organizations – as individuals, departments and the company as a whole. Who are we serving and how are we meeting their needs? Does our budgeting, staffing and actions confirm and reinforce our stated priorities?
- Consistency: If your culture values innovation, do you also accept failures and risk-taking, or do you shame and blame unsuccessful projects? If you are emphasizing cost reduction but your executive team enjoys the 5-day retreat in the Bahamas, are you being consistent? As leaders, we are always under the microscope, and the messages we deliver to different groups need to be consistent or we lose credibility.
- Accountability: When your star performer violates a core value (respect, teamwork, integrity....insert your value here), how does leadership respond? Is the issue ignored, swept under the rug, or addressed head on? Do your HR systems (recruitment, performance management, recognition) reinforce “how” work is done as much as the results?

## Selling Outside

As an organization, do you understand the true product or service you are selling? Do you know why your customers buy from you instead of someone else? If you are selling a sprinkler system, you could be selling a commodity product, a watering system, or assurance of a lawn and garden that can look as good, or better, than the neighbors. After diligently attacking thistles in my yard with Round Up instead of weed killer a few years ago, I have gladly paid good money for someone else to eliminate weeds and save me an entire season of embarrassment. I hate the cold, but I couldn't wait for it to snow that year and cover up my mistake.

Take the time to understand why customers in different industries or market segments buy from you, and what they are buying. In critical applications, you are probably selling reliability, safety and security. In other applications you may be selling ease of use or time savings. In retail clothing you are selling a reflection of personal style, the appearance of being “in” for the logo-clad set, and guidance for the fashion-challenged among us. I sometimes miss the Garanimals clothing with tags to help me match my tops and my bottoms. Thankfully I have teenagers to help me. In most instances you are selling expertise. Whether you are selling products, services, or time, you are selling expertise. Price it accordingly.