

Stargazing

I looked up “stargazing” in the dictionary and found this definition: *The activity of looking up at the stars and objects in space as a hobby, as part of scientific study, or as part of astrology.*

I don't have much use for astrology, or much time for another hobby. But I do think there's an opportunity for you to engage in scientific study of stars to improve your business.

I'm not talking about those shining things up in the night sky by the way. I'm talking about people who do their jobs well. Hopefully, some of them work for you now, but your study shouldn't be limited there. In my experience, there are stars all around.

Sales Stars

I got some very good advice from my first sales manager at Moore Business Forms. He told me to pay attention when people were trying to sell to me. He promised I would learn both positive and negative lessons from that exercise, and he was right. On the positive side, I learned that most of the thoughtful and consultative sales strategies that worked *on me* would also work *for me*. On the other side, I learned how not to be a salesjerk from a whole lot of salesjerks.

My experience suggests that the average number of salespeople per printing company in our segment of the industry is some fraction between 1 and 2. The number of people *calling on* each printing company, trying to sell you things, is significantly larger. What I'm saying is, pay as much attention to *how* they sell as to *what* they sell, and try to extend what you learn to the rest of your sales team.

How do you do that? You could ask the best and the worst of the salespeople calling on you to spend time with your own salespeople. “I'd like you to spend 15 minutes with my salesperson, just explaining your philosophy of selling, some of the lessons you've learned, stuff like that. That would be a way to bring value to my business, if you'd be interested.”

Don't leave it at that, though, especially with the worst of them. The critical second stage is for you to review each conversation with your salesperson, focusing on the lessons, positive or negative, that you hoped they'd learn from each encounter.

Other Stars

Now let's consider the rest of your team, your non-sales employees. Please start by giving them each a “bright star” rating on a scale of 1-10, with 10 indicating a superstar. Your best employees will (hopefully) be in the 8-10 range.

What is it about them that led to these high scores? Obviously it's some combination of talent and attitude, but don't be satisfied with a surface-level perception. *What exactly* do you value about each employee?

The goal of all of this is to be able to sit with your less-stellar employees and say “I want you to be more like (X). Here are (Y) specific things I would like to see you emulate.”

Not Cloning

A printer once told me she wished she could clone her best employees. I told her she had the right idea, but the wrong terminology. “What you can do,” I said, “is *model* your desired behaviors and *motivate* towards them.”

Motivation starts with measurement and feedback. “I've rated you a 6 in this area. Let's focus on that for the next 30 days, with the goal of getting you from a 6 to an 8. We'll meet every week to talk about your progress. I'll let you know how you're doing, and we'll celebrate when you get there. (Then maybe we'll make a plan to get you from an 8 to a 9!)”

Navigation is the science of getting from one place to another. Early explorers navigated by those bright objects in the sky. I'm suggesting that you use human stars to set *destinations/expectations* for your employees. Model and Motivate!