

Hey 98.6!

In the best tradition of the AM Top 40 Radio I grew up on, here's a Blast From The Past!

"Hey, 98.6, it's good to have you back again!"

The song was titled 98.6. The artist was a one-hit-wonder named Keith. 98.6 made it to #7 on the Billboard Chart in 1967, when I was a sophomore in high school. I heard it on Sirius XM Classic Vinyl the other day and it brought a smile to my face.

A "Useful" Temperature

98.6 degrees Fahrenheit, of course, is considered the "normal" temperature for a human body. It might also be considered the "healthy" temperature for a printer-customer relationship. That's a useful concept, because it provides a way to quantify the health of your relationships. That in turn gives you a much better chance of diagnosing and treating a sick relationship before it causes any lasting damage.

Here's an important point. Hyperthermia – running a fever – is probably most associated with being "sick" in human physiology. In business, it might seem like a higher temperature is better, but that's only true up to a point. Hypothermia –the cold side of normal – represents a different kind of "sick," but it's equally dangerous to our physical health, and even more dangerous to a printer-customer relationship. So let's start the process of taking the temperature of your customer relationships.

Spreadsheet Layout

I recommend doing this with a spreadsheet. Use Column A for the name of the company, Column B for the name of your contact, Column C for that person's title, and Column D for the temperature.

Let's stop at B and C for just a moment. Do you sell to companies where you have more than one contact? If so, I say you have more than one customer. The company is not the customer, the individual who buys from you is. I use the term "account" to identify the company. On your spreadsheet, every individual customer should have a separate line, and the title is helpful in identifying other potential customers within an account. If you're selling to Marketing, don't you also want to be selling to Human Resources, or vice versa?

OK, now that we've gotten that out of the way, enter the temperature you think you're at in Column D. And then ask yourself, does this represent something I think, or something I know? If it's not something you know for sure, another step is necessary, but let me come back to that.

Definitions

Working through this exercise with one of my clients recently, we assigned these definitions:

- 98.6 degrees means a solid relationship, no current issues or problems on either side
- 90 degrees means there's been a little stress in the relationship, still healthy but not perfect
- 80 degrees means there's some real stress in the relationship – a large issue, perhaps, or several smaller ones
- 50 degrees means a relationship damaged beyond repair
- 125 degrees means "they love us to death" (my client's words)

Obviously, anything below 90 degrees requires treatment. I hope it's just as obvious that even 90 degrees requires some work. That describes a relationship moving in the wrong direction. Fix it before it gets any worse!

Thinking vs. Knowing

As noted, this is not something you want to guess at. The good news is that it doesn't have to be. The person who knows for sure is already listed on your spreadsheet! I listened as my client reached out to a number of her customers. First, she explained that she was implementing a new process to measure customer satisfaction. Then she explained what the various temperatures would mean. Then she said: "I don't want to presume on our relationship. I think it's pretty good, but I want to know what you think. Where would you put the temperature of our relationship?"

She was happy with all the answers, even the one that identified a problem she didn't know she had!