

Recipes For Success (And Disaster)

I'm a big Tony Bourdain fan. If you don't recognize the name, he's the host of the TV show "No Reservations" which runs on The Travel Channel. In every episode, Tony and his crew travel to a city or region in the US or elsewhere and give viewers an insider's look at the culture—specifically the food culture, because Tony made his bones as a chef in New York City. Brasserie Les Halles, where he last ran a kitchen before becoming a full-time entertainer, is a regular stop for me when I'm up there, and for my money, the best food value in New York can be found at Les Halles, where you can get *Steak, Frites, Salade*—grilled hanger steak, a large serving of incredible fried potatoes and a small salad—for only \$19.50.

Recipes For Success

OK, that's all very interesting, but what does it have to do with printing and sales? Simply this, when Tony was a working chef, he was in the *consistency* business. In other words, it's not enough to serve a great meal, you have to serve *lots* of great meals. *Consistency*—of quality *and* service—is as important in the restaurant business as it is in the printing business, and maybe even more so, because printing customers don't *always* see quality or service failures as life or death situations. In a restaurant, a quality failure can literally kill someone. (OK, it's true that only a very small percentage of food poisoning victims actually die from it, but if you've ever had a serious case, you probably remember thinking you were going to!)

The key to consistent quality in the restaurant business has two parts. The first is to use quality ingredients. The second is to prepare them the same way every time—in other words, to follow the recipe! Yes, there is a trial-and-error stage in the development of a dish, but once the recipe is finalized, *quality* comes from *consistency* in preparation.

So is printing any different? I tried this idea out on one of my coaching clients, and he felt that "quality ingredients" would be less of an issue in printing than in food preparation. "Paper is paper," he said, "and ink is ink and toner is toner."

But think back on some of the quality failures you've experienced. Haven't there been times when the paper or the ink or the toner *was* the problem? In the kitchen, there's plenty of opportunity to inspect the raw materials, right up to the moment they go into the preparation of the dish. Just yesterday morning I cracked an egg in my own kitchen that looked fine on the outside, but quickly identified itself as *spoiled*. Fortunately, I was well schooled back in my own restaurant days: Crack the shell. Hold it upright. Inspect the egg. And then, if you are satisfied with its quality, add it to the dish.

You don't necessarily get the same opportunity with paper, ink and toner—especially if we're talking about a sealed ink or toner cartridge—but if you don't see a defect on the front end, you do have the opportunity to see its effect on the back end. Moral: If a meal's not right, don't serve it! (If a job's not right, don't deliver it!)

Start To Finish

Quality comes from *consistency* in preparation—from start to finish! That raises a question. Where does a print job start? I think the answer is that it starts at the point where the *specifications* of the job are being transmitted from the buyer to the seller. That could be limited to the *technical* specifications (stock, color, quantity, finished size, etc.) or it could also include the *applications* specifications (the purpose or objective of the printed piece). Either way, it's critically important that those specifications are accurately communicated. I have found that the vast majority of quality or services failures originate at this point, which means that unless someone picks up on a problem and corrects a miscommunication before the ink or the toner goes on the paper, the job is doomed right from the start.

Now, where does a print job finish? It is *not* at the end of production or the point of delivery. It can only be at what we should call *The Point Of Known Satisfaction*. In other words, every print job has to end with a happy customer.

Do you have a means of determining the happiness of your customers? If not, I submit that you are not following a recipe for success. In fact, you are flirting with disaster. I'll write more on the topic of measuring customer satisfaction in next month's column.

Recipe For Disaster

For today, I want to share something else with you—another recipe for disaster! Just yesterday, one of my new sales coaching clients told me that he feels "claustrophobic" when I talk about consistency. He doesn't like the idea of following a recipe/process. He especially doesn't like the idea of being held accountable for some number of

prospecting calls every week, and for some number of appointments and other measurables. “The thing I like most about selling,” he said, “is that every day is different. And I think pretty well on my feet, so if you put those things together, I think I’m at my best when I’m free to roam and free to wing it.”

Let me draw a distinction here between experimentation and *winging it*. As noted, there’s a trial-and-error component to the development of a recipe, and most salespeople engage in some trial-and-error as they’re learning how to sell. Beyond that, even the best and most experienced salespeople will run into a head-scratcher occasionally. But I see a significant difference between *thoughtful experimentation* and what this guy seems to want to be doing.

I think it’s also pretty likely that when you read his comment, you were in complete agreement about this being a recipe for disaster.

So here’s the question. Do you have anyone working for you who is following a recipe for disaster? Are you following any of those recipes yourself? If the answer to either of those questions is *yes*, doing something about it today might save you a lot of aggravation later on. This is another application of the *Tomorrow Man* philosophy I wrote about a few months ago.

Here’s something else to think about when you’re tempted to *wing it*. The origin of that expression is contained in the phrase *a wing and a prayer*, and that refers back to the earliest days of aviation. Do you really want your business or personal well-being to be hanging on a wing and a prayer? If not, it’s probably a really good idea to study *best practices* and then follow a recipe for success.