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A HEALING ARTS RESOURCE



Is Feedback Important?

By Sandy Penny

Why do some people like to use a question as a headline? It starts the reader thinking about the subject of the article. It speaks directly to them and immediately engages them. It's a popular marketing strategy because it works.

It actually sounds like you care about the opinion of your reader, and most authors do care. So what if it's a marketing ploy? If it engages you in an internal dialogue and you learn something about yourself in the process, isn't that a productive exercise? Who doesn't want to think our opinion is important to others?

Asking questions is a valuable social tool for creating dialogue. Many people lack the questioning skill. They just want to tell you

what they think and move on to the next subject. Caring about what other people say creates a bond between you. It can create more loyal customers who feel that you're listening and responding to their needs. After all, they're buying the product, shouldn't you care what they think?

Back in 1978, when I got the idea to start a newspaper in Houston, Texas, on the heels of another failed newspaper, it didn't seem like a great business idea. If my predecessor went out of business, perhaps the market for that type of newspaper was lacking. I really didn't know why they went out of business, so I hit on a strategy that worked for me, and I've since successfully used it to start other businesses.

I picked up a copy of the defunct newspaper, called all the advertisers, and invited them to a party. I was up front that the party was about discussing a newspaper idea. I didn't try to trick them into coming to a party and then spring the newspaper idea on them. I let them know I was interested in creating a newspaper that would meet their needs and the needs of their customers. I passed out a mock-up of my newspaper idea to everyone at the party. Then I did something unusual—I asked them how I could best serve them and their customer base. They had lots of great ideas.

Next, I asked them to support me in meeting their needs, and I sold enough advertising that day—on a newspaper that had never been produced—to pay for the first printing. After that, I had a party every month when the paper was printed so advertisers could take bundles of newspapers to their businesses. I thereby eliminated about half my distribution costs (mostly efforts on my part). Each month, I would chat up my advertisers for new ideas for future issues and get their feedback on how I was doing with meeting their needs.

The biggest benefit that came out of the experience was the sense of community that was created around the newspaper. It became the hub for dialogue among community members, and the monthly meeting became the venue for that dialogue. I sold more advertising and collected checks in a timely fashion at those parties. About a year

later, a larger newspaper came into my community and tried to start a competitive publication. It was better funded and slicker, but it could not get a foothold. My community was really loyal because I had created a personal bond with them by asking for their feedback—and, of course, using it. You can shoot yourself in the foot if you go to the trouble of getting input and then don't use any of it. People tend to feel disregarded and badly used.

So, why am I writing about this in a healing arts section? The same technique works in personal relationships. It's all well and good to say that we should not care what other people think. Independence and autonomy are great, and we should not let our lives be run by other people, but sometimes friends and customers have really excellent ideas that can benefit us personally and in business. Asking questions and really listening and using the answers makes our friends and customers feel valued. It develops interactive relationships. We all know those who pontificate from on high and never let others talk.

Dialogue creates community, cooperation, and strong friendships that sustain themselves during challenging times. We are living in challenging times right now. Maybe it's time to ask a few more questions of those you care about and really listen to what they have to say. What do you think? ✿

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