



Working with true GRIT

Earning trust is hard, but far easier than repairing it

by Phil Sasso

Quickly write down the names of a dozen people you know. Now circle the ones you respect. I don't mean people you treat with respect. We should treat everyone respectfully. That's common courtesy, not really respect. By "respect," I mean people you esteem or admire.

Chances are you didn't circle every name on your list; most people will only circle a few names. That's because there's a big difference between knowing someone and respecting them. As a mobile tool dealer, you come into contact with a lot of people every day. But respect is something reserved for only a few very special people—usually those who have proven their integrity by their actions.

What do I mean by integrity?

In ethics, integrity means your actions are consistent with your core values and principles. It's about character and honesty. I find it interesting that in engineering the word "integrity" refers to how an object performs under stress. Oddly, in both cases, I think integrity is about how something or someone performs under pressure.

When I think of integrity, I think of movie icon John Wayne. I don't know much about Wayne's personal life and I've seen very few of his movies, but in my mind, his image as a rugged hero is underscored by a strong sense of integrity. In his last movie, "The Shootist," one line defines that image of integrity: "I won't be wronged, I won't be insulted, and I won't be laid a hand on. I don't do these things to other people, and I require the same from them."

What's all that got to do with selling? Everything.

As a tool dealer, you have a

truckload of inventory and a catalog full of tools. But your most important asset is you. You need to take stock in yourself. Do your customers respect you? Do they see you as a person of integrity? Do they see your primary purpose as to help them or to help yourself?

Your ability to earn your customer's trust will have a direct impact on your bottom line.

So using The Duke as a role model, here's a quick checklist to see if you have true GRIT. Are you Genuine, Realistic, Invested and Truthful?

Genuine. No one is perfect. We all fail sometimes. Integrity isn't about being without fault, it's about being real, sincere and authentic. Customers will respect you more for striving to do your best and sometimes failing than never admitting to your mistakes. Be real—admit your mistakes and others will find you respectable.

Realistic. Always deliver what you promise. Don't tell a customer you'll have his tool next week unless you're absolutely sure you can do it. It's much better to underpromise and overdeliver than vice-versa. It's much more rewarding to dazzle a customer unexpectedly with more than he expected than to make promises you don't deliver.

Invested. Invest in your customer and they will invest in you. By invest, I mean you need to really care and be interested in them. Ask them questions. Use the 2:1 ratio of listening to talking. Listen twice as much as you speak. You'll learn more about your customers and they will notice. More often than not you don't need to spend more time with your customer, you just need to spend more time listening to your customer.

Truthful. Be scrupulously hon-


est. The most founding principle of integrity is your honesty. It's hard enough to gain a customer's trust; it's nearly impossible to win back a customer's trust. People will forgive incompetence before they will forgive dishonesty. Willfully breaking your customers' trust by misleading, deceiving or cheating will come back to haunt you.

Aspire to follow these tenets and, with time, your sales will grow.

Don't get me wrong. Not everyone will recognize or respect your integrity. And not everyone will treat you fairly or honestly in return. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't do what you know is right. Integrity isn't measured by how you treat people who treat you well. Integrity is how you act every day to everyone. "Character is who you are when no one is looking," as the saying goes.

My personal faith leads me to believe that integrity is a moral imperative. Striving to run my business with integrity helps me sleep better at night and look at myself in the mirror every morning.

But good business ethics is good business. Your reputation, good or bad, will get around. Most people would rather do business with a tool dealer they know and trust than to risk their hard-earned money elsewhere just to save a few dollars. Integrity can earn you more than just brownie points.

Building a reputation for integrity and earning your customer's respect is a long, hard road. But in the end, it can help you build unshakable customer loyalty. 

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