

CHAPTER 7

YOUR COMPANY

We must, indeed, all hang together or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately.

—Benjamin Franklin

When I start a dialogue with a company that may enlist my peddler services, one of my first questions is, “So, who’s the founder and what was the genesis that got this joint jumpin’?” Then I train my hawk-like eyes on the interviewer’s face for that all-telling reaction to my wired question. Ya, I’m bad.

But the fact is, to be successful, us peddlers need to meld with our companies from the get-go. This requires understanding a company’s core origins, and you can’t get more core than a company’s founder—the dude or dudette with the creative spark that launched the company you see before you.

Founders are folks who see something atop that wondrous idea mountain, grab it, and come down with a strange glow. Then, they jack in, fasten their seatbelts, and go for one of life’s wildest rides.

Sometimes these folks are eccentric, maniacal, geniuses, holy fools, sharks, or dolphins. Sometimes they’re normal, like us. OK, perhaps not just like us. But the net-net is that they did it. They started a company. And years later they still have that funny look in their eye—one of magical inspiration. Bravo! Thank you for your symphonies.

You are probably wondering why I'm going on about the origins of the enterprise. It's simple. You have a distinct personality, and that personality works with some folks and it doesn't with others. Every company also has a personality (a.k.a. the corporate culture) usually stemming from its very beginnings and the founder. If your personality is not compatible with a company's, you'll be one unhappy camper. So save yourself the aggravation and get a clue *before* you sign on to sell its wares.

I'll let you in on a little secret that will help you: Companies are not really inscrutable entities, companies are people. OK, one more time. Companies are not really inscrutable entities, companies are people.

Here is my definition of a company:

A group of people threaded together by a spark of creativity channeled through its founder or leader, and which reflects its collective consciousness through its business dealings.

Nope, I am not smoking weed this Saturday morning. In other words, there are hundreds of telltale signs coming straight at you from the moment you make contact with a company. Take heed!

One big tip off for me is how a place sounds. If I walk into a company and I feel as if I'm walking into a monastery, I get a cold chill down my spine. I've worked for companies whose philosophy is, "No laughing, no fun. If you show your teeth or tongue you will pay a forfeit." It really sucks. If a company lacks excitement and noise, I watch out.

STORY TIME

Once during an interview with a CEO, I mentioned that the office was so quiet it was like a library. It was freaky. The CEO nodded and said that the corporate culture was one of the things he was looking to change. He asked me to help, which I gladly did. Thirty months later, the place was hopin', the folks were excited, and I was on to my next gig. Apparently, it was a little too dynamic for him. Such is life. The gig was worth it just to see him curl up in the fetal position every time I went into his office.

Once on board with a company, you need to learn how things *really* work inside and who controls what. Remember, selling to the customer is the easy part. Selling within your company is the hard part. It's one of those freaky truths about peddlery. Believe it! So, getting the “who's who in the zoo” down pat is critical. Read on pilgrim . . .

Who's Who in the Zoo

Inside any company there's the inner circle, brain trust, wired ones, chosen few, whatever you want to call them. They are the team that really runs the place. You need to find out who they are—and fast.



You can start with the company's organizational chart, but remember that org charts can be like Alice in Wonderland adventures: never what they seem. Too often org charts are just generic guides to a company and don't accurately reflect the power structure within.

Rather, look at your company from a peddler's perspective. You'll see it has all the same people you deal with inside your customer accounts: the gatekeepers, evaluators, recommenders, and decisions makers. Create your own org chart and then use it to navigate through your company to get things done.

At a Fortune 500 company many moons ago, I figured out that I could get anything done, and I mean *anything*, through the CEO's administrator. I know this revelation isn't news to anyone. My point is simply that all good peddlers need to find out who can get things done, who can't, who won't, and who always says nope.

PEDDLER'S PREROGATIVE #31

It is the peddler's prerogative to map his or her company, and figure out who can get things done, who can't, who won't, and who always says nope.

Then you need to map and assemble your very own team of trusted folks who want you to sell, and are willing to help you deal with the intricacies of your company so you'll be successful. These are the Go-To folks. You'll find them at every rung on the corporate ladder.

The Go Tos

These truly good souls are the patron saints of the peddler. They are always rooting for you. And they care and are always there to lend a hand.

They are not made up of the peddler cloth, but they have empathy for the peddler's task and fully understand that the company needs sales to succeed. The Go Tos perform miracles and accomplish the impossible. And do so happily! These are the folks that every good peddler needs and takes care of.

STORY TIME

I have been with a company only a short time when I try to get a friend hired. He is the number one technical support person at my previous company and was instrumental in making me a ton of cash.

I set up the required meetings, which turn out to be a four-day interview marathon. At the end of every day, my friend gets a thumbs down. And every day I pick him up and say, "Brother, you are great. You just have to sell yourself. Don't be a dry engineer. Show them some pizzazz!" The next day he tries but fails again.

Finally he says, "Look, I can't sell myself. I'm not made that way."

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I know what a great contributor this guy is, so I go to see the CEO and put it on the line.

"Have I driven a lot of business to your company and made a big difference since I've joined?"

"Yes," said the CEO.

"If I tell you we need something and that I am 100% serious would you listen?"

"Sure," he said.

"OK," I said. "I know a great tech support guy and we need to hire him. He can make us a ton of cash, because he really knows his stuff and customers love him."

"So bring him in and get him interviewed," the CEO replies.

"I already did and no one sees his terrific qualities because he isn't Mr. Sales guy."

I tell him the team doesn't know what I know and doesn't know me well enough to take my word. I should have stopped right there, but I am on a roll.

"If we hire this guy, I guarantee I'll make my numbers."

A big smile comes across the CEO's face. "Will this guy help you beat your numbers?"

He has me. "OK boss, what's the deal?"

"I get him hired and you give me 25% more on your number for the quarter."

"Deal."

We shake hands and a few days later my buddy gets a call from HR offering him the job. This was much to everyone's chagrin and amazement.

Fast-forward four weeks to the end of the quarter. I have a big deal on the ropes that will save my numbers, the region's, and the company's. Enter my buddy who is brand new to the company and hardly knows the product. I send him out to the customer.

After a few days on site he tells me that the customer doesn't have what it needs to make the product work. He also tells me he thinks he can write a workaround if he can get a product engineer

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to help him understand how the APIs (application programming interface) work.

I get him an engineer and my friend pulls it off, saving my butt along with everyone else's that didn't want to hire him. We close a huge deal, sign a great customer, and all make our numbers for the quarter. From that day forward, the CEO and everyone else in the company loves him. That's a Go-To guy.

If you're lucky enough to find one, keep him!

As important as it is for a peddler to have a solid team of Go Tos, it's just as important (perhaps even more so) for him or her to avoid the control freaks of every strain and in every unhelpful incarnation.

The Just Say Nos

These are the folks that feel compelled to lecture you about corporate policy, tell you why you *can't* do what you're proposing, and remind you that, hey, this is how *we* do it here. Make an off-handed comment and 30 seconds later all the hall monitors are posted outside your door.

Every company has these self-appointed few. They have nothing better to do than look for ways to say, "Nope, can't do that." You must be on the look out for these folks and spot them before they spot you. Once you are made, the vigils start. Your only hope after that is to devise ways to send them after your enemies or create elaborate scenarios so they lose your scent. Faking your death works well.

The Avoids

Once these characters get a hold of you, there's no escaping. They are masters at consuming your time. The Avoids often show up undercover. They might come over to upgrade your computer or fix the lights in your office, but before you know it, they're in the middle of a long story about their son, daughter, parents, job, or whatever. You don't want to be rude, but you can't help thinking, "Time's a wastin'! Why are they telling me this? How on Earth could they possibly think this interests me? If I cut them off, will they do as good a job?"



Then there are those who inspire less tolerance and deliberation as they rant and rave about some inane topic, or dig inside your knick-knacks for some information that's none of their business, or weasel a favor out of you—such as selling raffle tickets for their son or daughter. You quickly concoct an excuse for moving on, then wait and wait and wait for them to pause, which they never do.

The solution is simply to avoid these folks from the start. It's tough enough being a peddler. Don't let them waste your time, sap your energy, and lose your focus.

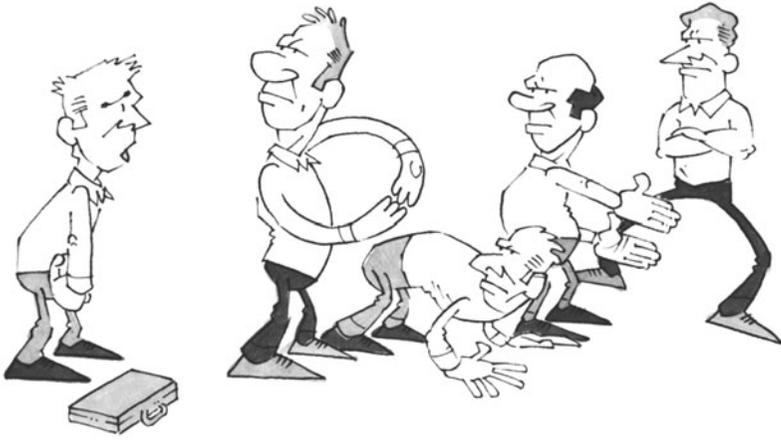
PEDDLER'S PREROGATIVE #32

It is the peddler's prerogative to enthusiastically embrace anyone or anything that moves him or her closer to a sale, and to wholeheartedly ignore anyone or anything that doesn't.

The I'm in Control Heres

These are the head cases of the corporation, as I like to call them. The I'm in Control Heres are a gnarly bunch. They're also just plain delusional. They need to feel they have power over peddlers, children, animals, and the elderly. They weasel their way into nice jobs and turn them into full-scale freak shows. They're different than their cousins, the Just Say Nos and the Avoids, because you have to deal with them and can't easily go around them.

You're sure to find the I'm in Control Heres somewhere in a process chain. They are a string of managers and their administrators who have



collective authority over an in-house process and, therefore, over something you want or need.

They like to be in an environs where there is a before them, a them, and an after them. So you find these folks pretty much anywhere there is a process or procedure looming: resource allocation, expense reports, evaluation forms, loaner agreements, licenses—the list goes on ad infinitum.

The I'm in Control Heres are typically in some sort of sign-off capacity or, even worse, working for someone who has sign-off authority. A nightmare is sprinkled upon you head when you have two or more feeding off of one and other, such as an executive and his administrator.

If all this isn't bad enough, the I'm in Control Heres actually think that they matter, and that the importance of their job supercedes you, your manager, your V.P., your CEO, and God.

I do not begin to understand the dynamics among the I'm in Control Heres, nor do I particularly want to. But I would bet it has something to do with low self-esteem and a general fear of the unknown (which includes you).

The only way to deal with these folks is to get on their good side. Make them laugh, bring them cookies, commiserate with their plight, do whatever it takes. It is very hard to penetrate their barriers, but once they let you in, you are in. It takes time and it is not easy, but hey, what is?

The Measurers and Analytics

Many corporations operate on the premise that they can control reality. Inevitably, of course, this leads to chaos and confusion, as well as questions such as “Why can’t we control reality?”

You might think at this point companies would stop and reflect, and realize what all good peddlers already know: It’s impossible to control reality. But no. Adding insult to cosmic injury, they try to solve the conundrum by hiring the Measurers and Analytics. They probably would be better off calling a witch doctor.

As a sales professional, you’ve undoubtedly been tortured by this crowd (read: marketers, product managers, business analysts, administrators, and bean counters, just to name a few). They are intimately connected to your daily sales reality (usually trying to measure and analyze it) even though they don’t carry a bag.

Some of these folks may have carried a bag at one time or another, but you’d never know it because they seem to have no recollection of how hard it was to be peddler. Whatever possessed them to give up peddlery and join the Measurers and Analytics is beyond me. But now their job in life is one of terrorizing your sales domain. I have a special place in my heart for the Measurers and Analytics. I can see my epitaph now:

Here lies Dennis Ford, a peddler who was measured to death.

The In the Ways

This may be getting hard to follow, so let’s review and make sure we know who’s who in the zoo. So far, we have:

- The Go Tos—The blessed ones
- The Just Say Nos—Who just say no, no matter what!
- The Avoids—Who drain your life blood and distract you from your mission
- The I’m In Control Heres—Who are power tripping and, I’m sorry to say, you just have to find a way to cope with them
- The Measurers and Analytics—Who’s job in life is to terrorize your sales domain

This brings me to the In the Ways. Here's a group that creates as much irony and desperation as comic relief, mainly because they are in the way of the peddler's deals and don't even know it.

The peddler's reality is simple: We sell stuff. This brings in money to produce more stuff. Because we keep the company afloat, *for the love of God*, could you help out just a little bit?

The In the Ways always take exception to such pleas, and want to debate you. A good debate makes them feisty, and when they get feisty they knock over applectarts.

"We work very hard. We're here 'til all hours!"

Can't argue with that. Unfortunately, all their work doesn't make it easy for peddlers to sell and customers to buy.

STORY TIME

I'm working at a startup. They have cool technology, it's ready to sell, but as with most new products it hasn't been proven outside of the lab and a few beta customers.

I'm thinking to myself, been here, done that. All I have to do to sell this puppy is give product evaluations to qualified prospects so they can see what the product really does. After I get a dozen or so evals out there, I can turn a few into sales for this quarter, and another half dozen or so into sales for future quarters. I always had a high percentage of deal closures doing evals before (more than 75%). The strategy works, because it makes sense for the customer, the company, and the product.

I gear up. I'm identifying and qualifying customers (well-qualified prospects are key to this strategy) when I start running into the In the Ways at every turn.

First there's the product manager: "My mandate is to show quick market acceptance. We don't have time to let people evaluate the product before buying!" Eh?

Then I meet with the head of system engineering: "If customers spend a lot of time evaluating the product, they could find problems or want changes. I need to move those engineers onto other projects. I can't spend time on products that are done!" Come again?

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Even my sales manager turns out to be one of them. “We need to get some skin in the game. Let’s charge customers for product evaluations.” Ya, right!

Welcome to The Corporate Mindset 101!

Too many people view the world from only their perspective. And here’s the scary part: It happens even at the top. I know CEOs who were engineers and it’s all about product speeds and feeds, or those who were accountants and it’s all about measuring and analyzing. To the CEOs who were consultants it’s all about strategy and positioning.

All these things are important, but without sales you’re dead in the water. How simple can I make it? If your company has incredible products and no sales, you’re sunk. If your company has made a science of measuring productivity and has no sales, you’re sunk. If your company has the best three-, five-, and ten-year strategies and no sales, you’re sunk.

If sales is the goal, then a company should make it easy for peddlers to sell and customers to buy. All processes that impede sales should be streamlined. All people that get in the way of sales should be removed. Sales must be number one on everyone’s hit parade.

PEDDLER’S PREROGATIVE #33

It is the peddler’s prerogative to demand that the company makes it easy for peddlers to sell and easy for customers to buy.

The Sales Prevention Team

Just when you think it couldn’t get any worse, I’m pleased to introduce the Sales Prevention Team (SPT). The Sales Prevention Team is like a mythical, otherworldly monster that conjures itself up seemingly out of nowhere. It’s an evil creature that has only one goal: to eat all good peddlers and their deals alive. GULP!

The fact that the Sales Prevention Team exists is one of the great mysteries of the corporate realm. It starts out as ad hoc groups (usually some perverse configuration of the previously mentioned groups), which band together “for the good of the company” and to “make sure things don’t get out of hand.”

They believe themselves to be the intelligent and privileged few who understand the whole company, who can see “The Big Picture.” So, they make it their business to ensure that your little deal fits in.

In reality, they’re just another band of control freaks who have the audacity to cloak their self-serving interests in a moral tone and purpose.

The members of the SPT typically know nothing about selling or closing deals. The major sin that they commit is thinking that they are so smart and such enlightened business minds that they know *all* there is to know about sales. Privately they think that sales isn’t a real profession; it’s not like their real corporate jobs. Sales to them is just where the pretty boys and girls hang out who get overcompensated for being able to bullshit well. They feel everybody knows it’s the SPT that asks the tough questions and does all the hard, meaningful work. The peddlers are just peddlers.

Any deal you try to work through the system can create a conduit for the SPT to manifest. But a surefire way to coalesce this group is to make a request, such as please send customer product ASAP; please provide customer with one product and two licenses; please send cus-



tomer only four of five modules; or customer to buy now and receive free upgrade when it ships in a week. Heaven forbid you want to tweak the product to accommodate the customer.

But nothing gets them together faster than when they realize your little deal isn't so little. In fact, it just might be the biggest deal they've ever laid eyes on. If you're a seasoned peddler, you know what's coming next and prepare for battle. But for the young peddler, it can blow their mind.

Picture this: You've been on the job for 6 months. You've been diligently following up with a prospect, patiently meeting with everyone at his organization and explaining the benefits, and ferreting out more information than they need to make a decision. Slowly but surely you've been reeling in the prospect. And now, just as you're about to bring him up over the side for the big catch, unbeknownst to you, you're about to meet with the Sales Prevention Team.

Your thinking they're just department managers and what not. You walk in confident. You're expecting warm handshakes, the proverbial slap on the back, perhaps some offers to help in the last stretch, when the head honcho clears his throat and asks, "Why are we doing this deal?" So stunned is the rookie peddler that he doesn't even know where to begin and winds up being steamrolled by the SPT.

Why? Why? *Why?* Why would anyone in their right mind allow themselves to be part of sales prevention? Your question is valid and the answer is obvious: They are not in their right minds. Otherwise they would surely realize how demoralizing and frustrating this is—not to mention a waste of time—for even the most experienced peddlers.

Members of the Sales Prevention Team are easy to spot. First they are in a group that is somehow connected to sales and, therefore, kept apprised of the deals in the pipeline and in the field. Usually there are folks from groups such as engineering, marketing, support, legal, finance, manufacturing, and the like.

Second, they typically don't have a grasp of the deals, but take dribs and drabs of information, and create mountains of fear and anxiety over small bumps in the road. Engineers who wouldn't tolerate a peddler questioning their code think nothing of asking a peddler about his customer strategy. Corporate accountants who would be dumbfounded if a peddler asked why it takes so long to process commissions has no trouble asking why a peddler can't close a sale in 4 weeks rather than 12. Customer support managers who would freak

out if a peddler suggested that resource scheduling was inefficient thinks nothing of asking a peddler if a prospect is a qualified lead. 'Tis simply amazing. 'Tis a crying shame.

The crime is that many a great peddler has to waste important time going over, under, around and through the SPT. After 25 years, I can't even pretend to be interested in any encounter I have with the misguided lot. The Sales Prevention team exists in every company, however, some companies control it better than others. These companies usually have a CEO who was a peddler.

Frustration Is the Enemy of the Peddler

As you can see, there are many groups that are sources of endless frustration for the peddler. To keep pitching your deals and ideas and know nothing's going to work because they can't or won't listen—well, it can drive even a sane peddler to thoughts of nuking them all. But, in reality, that just gets everyone upset and makes you look like a psycho even if they were the ones that drove you to pushing the button.

Trust me on this one: Frustration is the enemy of the peddler. So guard against it. Acquire extraordinary communication skills, and then try and break through and find some common ground. When that proves impossible, I just try to ignore them as politely as possible and go around them. I also spend as little time in their presence as possible. Any more interaction than is essential with this crowd can whack your reality.

PEDDLER'S PREROGATIVE #34

If folks frustrate you it is your prerogative to ignore them. If you can't ignore them, then it is your prerogative to hide your dismay and limit your exposure. If that doesn't work, it's your prerogative to get someone else to deal with them on your behalf. Forget about explaining or trying to make them see your point. That never works! It is your prerogative to stay away from the last resort, which is blowing up their universe. Stay away from this alternative at all cost. That is unless of course, you are really ready to take that long walk or are really in the mood.

Ladies and gentlemen please stand back . . .
