

It Has Always Been About Relationships #2

The Art of the Invitation

Love was in the air – or was it? Valentine's Day, the one holiday that it seemed girls had taken over the world, with red hearts, pink ribbons and “pretties” everywhere, made going to school for an elementary aged boy who thought that all girls had “cooties” a bit challenging. All that “be mine”, “say yes”, “happy 2gthr” romantic stuff felt like I was being forced to star in a “chick-flick” and pretend to enjoy it.

Stress levels were high. Last minute, night before runs to the store to buy a package of 20+ perforated cards and envelopes replete with your favorite cartoon character carefully ensconced on the front did not help. Returning home, two more stressors activated; one's handwriting, and the carefulness required to avoid unleashing the unwelcomed attention of a would-be secret admirer by giving them an unintended Valentine message of invitation.

People need to know that they are welcome to do business with you. Just hanging an “We're Open” sign out front is a good reminder, but it is not nearly enough.

For many years, scores of cheap, meaningless valentines and hundreds of **conversation heart** “candies” bursting with the texture and taste of Tums® were exchanged between classmates and friends on that dreadful day in the name of love. It was not until celebrating that first Valentine's Day with the girl of my dreams that I finally discovered that these chalk-like candies possessed a redeemable quality, which brings me to the point of this article; the art of the invitation.

Childhood valentines were not normally prepared for the purpose for eliciting a response. Our gifts and greetings, loaded with compliments, feign affection, sweet-nothings and nothings-sweet, were simply the expected behaviors of everyone in the classroom, but if you expect people to do business with you, you will have to do better than what's expected.

Inviting others to do business with you will require that you do a better job with the following –

#1 Simplify Your Processes – If you want to close more business, attract more clients and find more successes, making it easy for people to “fall in love” with you and your business is your next best move. The easier you can make it for new and current clients to “say yes” and buy, the faster your business will grow. Take some time this week to scrutinize your client connections, interactions and

communications. Ask yourself critical questions like, “Why do we require this?” “Could this be better stated?” “Is that a needed step in the process?”

I remember a time when I was forced to evaluate how I received payment. One of my top paying clients and someone with whom I enjoyed working asked me why he had to pay by check. He also informed me that I was the only service provider with whom he worked that did not take credit cards.

That afternoon, upon returning to my office, I began to research this payment option and, soon, signed my business up with a credible credit card processing company. I would encourage you to question your invoicing habits, your check processing, the cost of bank runs and every area of your businesses payment systems. You might be amazed at the amount of time and money it costs you to get paid.

While you are in that investigative mode, check out your sales process. Do you have a working script and process from the initial contact to the “cashing of the check”? Are you getting to the point? Are you leaving money on the table? Are there more services and products needed? What about the follow up? The best time to get your client or customer to do more business with you is right after you have hit a homerun. In all of this, make sure that you are selling only what is needed, and keep it simple.

You can also take another look at your emails, your signage, your brochures, phone messages and product/service descriptions. Do all you can to tell people exactly what you are offering and how to buy. Keep in mind, those confectionary, communicators of love (heart candies) possessed the ability to make lifetime companions out of two strangers with less than 3 words printed on them.

#2 Do the Unexpected – Stay away from phrases like cheapest, discounted, high quality service, customer satisfaction and guaranteed. As a paying customer, I would expect no less than quality work for a fair price. I would expect that you would have my best interest in mind and that my satisfaction would be your priority. It would make no sense for me as a consumer to run around town, spending my money on services and product that achieved less than the best quality guaranteed.

Do all you can to stand out with what you have, even if all you have is a nasty, chalk-like conversation candy heart. One of the most memorable valentines that I have ever received, was one from my wife of almost 27 years. It was our

first Valentine's Day together; she did the unexpected while achieving something that I never thought possible; she found a valuable use for those nasty heart-shaped candies.

That day, I received a homemade valentine made of purple construction paper, glue and cleverly placed conversation heart candies that created an unforgettable message. Many marketing lessons are to be gained from this.

We tend to look past many valuable elements within our business. The "construction paper" and "glue" in your company holds greater value in setting yourself apart than you may realize. You alone have many unique qualities and experiences that can be and should be marketed. Make those your message – your tagline. What's your story? How did you arrive where you are? What makes your approach to business worth buying?

Doing the unexpected may mean being vulnerable, promoting yourself, giving back and showing up. I'm not sure what you can do, but I can tell you this, in the world of business, doing the unexpected does not have to be difficult, but it does need to be done.

#3 Carefully Select Your Valentine - Make the invitation. People need to know that they are welcome to do business with you. Just hanging an "We're Open" sign out front is a good reminder, but it is not nearly enough. More on this next week.

As always, if I can help, please contact me by text at 707.953.6681 or by email at andy@andyspringerconsulting.com

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