

Work Ethic
By Chris Burand

“Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.”

-John F. Kennedy

What an elegant, profound statement that still resonates almost fifty years later. It inspires. It leads. It causes a person to want to do great things. Today we have politicians stating, “Don’t ask, don’t tell.” What a sad difference a few generations make. And I’m not referring to the sexual preference aspect of this quote. “Don’t ask, don’t tell” has much more significance. Think about what this really suggests: “Stick your head in the sand!” Is this supposed to be good advice? Again, this has ramifications far beyond military policy. Such an attitude has ramifications for the entire country and I often see this attitude filtering down into insurance agencies.

Which of these quotes best exemplifies the attitude in your agency? Are your employees energized to make a difference or are they looking for ways to slide under the radar to avoid accountability? Are they working hard or hardly working?

Parking Lots

Consider, for example, your agency’s parking lot. When does your agency’s parking lot empty? When does it fill up? Are the producers’ cars in the lot too often when they should be out prospecting? Where are those cars really when they are not in the parking lot? When do the owners’ cars arrive and depart? Are the owners setting the best example?

When I drive by insurance agencies in my travels around the country, I rarely see any car in the parking lot after 5:01 p.m. I know work is being done from home. I understand attending community events in the evening is work. I also understand that long hours are not indicative of results. But the odds suggest I should see cars in the lot after 5 p.m. at least occasionally.

Lead Lists

While I don’t see a lot of employees working after 5 p.m., I do hear a lot of complaints that not enough leads exist. But why does anyone owe a producer a lead list? Shouldn’t producers take the prerogative to find their own lead list? The complaint that more leads are necessary is simply a crutch.

A better strategy might be to make producers find their own leads, right from the get go. Quality leads are readily available using free search engines and by pro-actively asking for good references from clients and other contacts, both personal and business. Other sources for lead lists are government databases. Some states and counties have excellent databases that can be used for developing personal and commercial leads.

Perhaps the best lead list can be made by tracking all the pertinent data about prospects with whom the producer has tried and failed. In fact, if a producer keeps track of the right data, such as premiums by line, carriers by line, agencies/brokers by line, hot buttons, coverages, and gaps

in coverage just to name a few, the opportunities with such information are limitless. The key point is that sometimes, a person has to get out and do something for themselves rather than waiting on a handout such as a lead list. Those lists are really just a crutch. Success is not found by waiting for the leads to develop. A person has to pro-actively ask. If a producer cannot do this in this economy and soft market, they very likely should seek employment elsewhere because the odds of them succeeding are tiny.

Procedures

Along with complaints about the lack of lead lists, I hear complaints about procedures. Producers claim they can't follow procedures because the procedures make it too difficult to make sales. But what exactly are they doing that prevents them from following procedures?

Based on hundreds of interviews with staff and producers, a huge portion of most agencies' books are renewed as is, so much of these books are never touched by producers. Also based on hundreds of interviews, I don't find many producers quoting a lot of new accounts. In fact, I've had staff and even producers tell me, "I'm not sure if I should bring this up, but no one (or no one except...) is making much effort to bring in new business." So where are producers, including agency owners, spending all their time? Many agency owners never know because the "Don't ask, don't tell" philosophy rules the agency. Don't ask whether we are really working and definitely don't tell anyone that we aren't.

My experience is that producers who follow quality procedures are often the most successful producers in an agency. Good procedures improve productivity, which means people have more time to sell more accounts and to write accounts better, resulting in higher commissions per account.

So much about insurance agency management success has nothing to do with strategy. Success is more about execution than strategy. Success is about hard work. Success is about accountability at all levels. Success is about standing up and counting for something rather than wishing one was an ostrich that could bury its head in the sand. Are you and your people asking what else can be done to attain success or are you and your people finding excuses and crutches? What are you doing to lead like past generations?

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January 2010