

Selling Power

A woman with long, straight brown hair and bangs, wearing a black blazer over a pink top, stands in a warehouse. She is positioned in the center-left of the frame, looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background consists of tall, industrial metal shelving units with red-painted beams, filled with various materials and boxes. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows, creating a professional and industrial atmosphere.

Self-Starter

An artist turns to sales to make her mark

RULES TO SELL BY

McMahan's Four Rules of Entrepreneurial Selling

BE PASSIONATE ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE SELLING. As an entrepreneur it goes without saying that you should be passionate about what you do, so don't be afraid to let that passion shine through, says McMahan. "I've commented to others that I need to hire a salesperson and my customers have said, 'Why? No one will be able to represent your company the way that you do!'"

"Enthusiasm does show through," she says. "Being passionate also allows you to be proactive rather than reactive. It helps you look out for your customers needs ahead of time."

DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness. It often opens new doors and offers you new opportunities. When McMahan started out she looked for people who could give her advice on the dos and don'ts of selling and running a small business. She asked questions, she observed, and she took notes. "Talk with other entrepreneurs, especially people in your type of business and people who have been in business for a while," says McMahan.

TAKE YOUR CUSTOMERS ON A "TOUR." Taking your customers on a tour could be literal or figurative. McMahan says that in her business it's critical to help customers understand the process primarily because it takes so long to produce her work. "Many people don't realize that there is a great amount of programming that needs to take place for the router to cut a seal," says McMahan. "For instance, I have to 'tell' the router what type of bit to use, how fast I want it to plunge, how fast to cut, how deep to cut at one time...all of which depends on the material being used ... which can be anything from acrylic to brass. Then when the router is done you still have a raw material that needs to be finished."

DO WHAT YOU SAY YOU'RE GOING TO DO. "If I tell my customer that I'm going to be there at a certain time, I'm there," says McMahan. "If I tell them that I will deliver a job at a certain time, I do it. For example, we only had a short time to fabricate the 9/11 memorial. I knew how important it was so I agreed to the deadline. I was working days in a row with no sleep; it was a logistical nightmare, but I did it. Because of that I was hired to finish the entire corridor for the families to pass through to see the memorial. The customer really appreciated the level of commitment that I had. Remember, it's not always the lowest bidder that wins; it's also someone who will meet timelines and has quality work."

McMahan now has six exhibits that are part of the Pentagon tour.

Smart Design, Inc, is located in Woodbridge, VA. Visit www.smartdesigninc.com for more information.

people appreciate that I take the time to explain things to them. Plus, by asking all the questions, it usually sparks an interest in additional signage or something that is needed that they hadn't even thought of yet."

After she gets the job and begins the design process, McMahan continues to keep in touch with customers by send-

ing them digital images of every step.

"When someone's paying you \$10,000 for a sign, they tend to be pretty interested in seeing how it's fabricated and how the work is progressing," she says.

These progress reports accomplish more than just fueling interest; they also help to keep clients' patience levels

in check.

"You can't just make the sale and walk away," she explains. "Some designs can take up to eight weeks because of the hand work involved. When you show customers the progress of the design, they tend to be a little more patient."

Although first an artist, McMahan admits that she is evolving into even more of a salesperson than she ever thought she would. Apart from selling her own creations, she now spends about 30 percent of her time selling three-dimensional software and CNC routers. The software company recently asked her to represent them at a major trade show.

"I'm even selling to my competitors and they're buying," she says. "After giving a demo of the software, I had five companies wanting to order it."

Sales aside, McMahan said that she would love to venture into commercial interior design in the future. And to do that McMahan has been creating samples to show prospects. She cold calls prospects and uses her samples and enthusiasm to drum up business in these areas. Although she is wearing many hats, her first priority is to please customers.

"I feel that, far more important than any sale that I make, is my ability to meet customers' needs and to establish long-term relationships that will keep customers coming back again and again," McMahan explains. "It's more than just giving a sales presentation and writing up the order; it's correctly identifying customers' needs and matching them to a product that we offer. I can then show them what THEY want and need and how they can have it."

Those are smart words from Smart Design.

— RENEE HOUSTON

ZEMANSKI

www.sellingpower.com/june06

Visit our Web address above and click under "Self-Starter" for these Bonus Articles:
1. Ed Plottle: Supersalesman, Superman at 82
2. Where There's a Will 3. General Alexander Haig: A Four-Star Success Story
(Available through 10-1-06)

“While working together, we discovered that we have the same sales philosophy; we focus on providing the best customer service.”

Although Shelly McMahan is an artist, she knows almost as much about selling as many seasoned sales reps. Her business, Smart Design, Inc., is taking off not only because of her talent as an artist, but also because of her sales and marketing savvy.

Before she started Smart Design five years ago, McMahan worked at the Pentagon as a graphic designer for Air Force Graphics. While there, McMahan became curious about some unused equipment under a tarp. People steered her away saying it was just a piece of antiquated machinery. Being persistent and inquisitive, McMahan decided to take matters into her own hands to learn more about the equipment. When she discovered that it was a Computer Numerically Controlled (CNC) router – a machine that is capable of cutting complex two- and three-dimensional shapes at high speeds – she contacted Craig Tyrrell of Tyrrell Tech to teach her how to use it.

Soon after learning how to use the CNC router, Tyrrell and McMahan's brother convinced her to open her own business, so she gave herself time to learn all the diverse skills she would need to create products, market and sell her products, and run the company. Her biggest fears: administrative work and selling. To learn the ropes, McMahan called upon friends, family, and acquaintances.

McMahan's diligence paid off – after years of juggling three jobs (including her full-time job at the Pentagon) while gaining experience with the router and other sculpting methods – she opened the doors to Smart Design,

Inc., a unique dimensional design fabrication firm near Washington, D.C., that creates dimensional signs, trade show exhibits, museum exhibits, and commercial interiors. Though McMahan worked many long hours to achieve her business goals, she credits Tyrrell, who sells the equipment that she uses in her work, as instrumental in helping her open her business.

“As a small business owner himself, Craig was able to guide me through the process of getting started and selling my work,” she says. “He is one of the best salesmen I've ever met. In the beginning, I couldn't afford to buy a CNC router for my business, so he allowed me to use his in exchange for helping him with jobs. While working together, we discovered that we have the same sales philosophy; we focus on providing the best customer service.”

Things are working out well for McMahan. After only a year on her own, she was asked to bid on and won the Pentagon's 9/11 memorial project. The catch: the entire project had to be completed in five weeks. McMahan took on the project with vigor and ended up finishing the project in 18 days. Meanwhile, the Pentagon decided that it also wanted a hallway exhibit to recognize 50 years of service for the Department of Defense. The already sleep-deprived McMahan took on that project, too, completing 18 printed and acrylic enclosed panels in another five weeks. The result: a breathtaking memorial and tons of new business for Smart Design.

“The customer knew how ridiculous the deadlines were for the 9/11 pro-

ject, but they asked me to do it, I told them I would do it, and I did it,” she says. “I understood the importance and the timeliness of these projects. I believe that it is very important to treat people the way that I would want to be treated.”

That belief, along with quality work, won her many new projects beyond the Pentagon including projects for Washington area Channel 7, News Channel 8, the Fairfax (VA) Water Authority, and the International Spy Museum in Washington, D.C.

HUNTING FOR TREASURE

McMahan comes prepared when she visits prospects, always bringing a list of questions in the form of a checklist. From jotting down the initial meeting date to checking off suggested follow-up actions (estimate needed, design needed, extra interview needed, etc.), it helps her cover all her bases. These questions not only assist McMahan in getting an accurate description of what the customer is looking for, but also often result in further business from prospects.

“When I started working in this field, I didn't know much about it so I always try to put myself in that position again when I visit with a new customer,” McMahan explains. “I find that bringing a lot of samples with me helps the customer visualize what I'm talking about even though I kind of look like a pack mule when I visit my customers – but it pays off. Samples really help people visualize the technique and what it entails. I'm educating them on the whole process and



833 Highams Ct. | Woodbridge, VA 22019
Phone: 703.492.2764 | Fax: 703.492.4862

EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITIES:
<http://www.smartdesign3d.com>

TAKE YOUR PROJECTS TO THE NEXT LEVEL-3D

Whether it's a distinctive dimensional sign, exhibit, award, or office interior, we can achieve magnificent results on your budget with **innovative approaches** & **cost-effective** selections of materials.

3D Logos

Architectural

Awards

Cut Letters

Exhibits

Indoor/Outdoor

LED Lighting

Memorials

Metal Coated

Tabletop Displays

Signage

Speciality

Vinyl Lettering

and more...