

Book Report Notes on *Nurturing Customer Relationships*

(A Step-by-Step Process for Growing Clients by Design)

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(Book Report by Gary Tomlinson)

Preface: In 1993 Jim Cecil was giving a presentation on marketing to a Vistage International group. Unbeknownst to Jim there was a senior VP with Microsoft who was attending as a guest. When the presentation was over the VP came up to Jim and said he wanted to have his people at Microsoft hear his presentation. That presentation at Microsoft was the beginning of a 13 year long research project that Jim conducted on behalf of Microsoft. Microsoft wanted Jim to interview CEOs of small to medium size businesses to better understand how they selected service providers. Jim interviewed over 500 Vistage CEOs and over 1,000 Microsoft employees. The top 3 answers from CEOs on why they chose a particular vendor over others were:

1. They *cultivated* me better than the others.
2. They *pampered* me better than the others.
3. They *nurtured* me better than the others.

The top 3 characteristic traits of the chosen vendors were:

1. Patience
2. Professionalism
3. Persistence

Jim's book, *Nurturing Customer Relationships* is not magic. It is a powerful, automatable process that can be defined, documented and repeated. The purpose of this book is to introduce you to that process. The goal of nurturing contacts, whether through letters or calls, is not to coerce a client to take action now. It is to cultivate a positive top-of-mind awareness for your services or products with that client.

The Relentless Pursuit of Low-Hanging Fruit: A cold call is a withdrawal. When you make a cold call you are asking for a withdrawal (their time) from the customer relationship before you have made any deposits. In his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey uses the metaphor of the "emotional bank account" as a measure of the trust that has been built up in a relationship. To create truly important relationships you must make deposits into that account before asking for anything in return.

If all you are doing is cold calling, you may be seriously overdrawing the emotional bank accounts you share with the people whose business you want. When an emotional bank account is overdrawn, that relationship is in jeopardy.

The Power of Staying in Touch: In today's cynical world, it can be a struggle to prove that what you offer is unique – so, how can you prove it? Through a program of relevant and respectful touches that demonstrate you have more to offer than anyone else. This is particularly important when you are seeking high-profile clients. Influential and affluent people are the prey of everyone seeking their business and all make the same claims: “We are the best. We are the greatest. We can do it all.” *The nurturing process does not shout those same tired messages.* You differentiate yourself and your business by allowing the client to decide, on the basis of their interactions with you, that you provide a level of service and integrity that is truly different.

By regularly sending high-value communications to current and prospective clients, you differentiate yourself as trustworthy. It is not difficult to do. Nurturing helps you sow the seeds of relationships simply by sending unique and valued messages to clients, customers and prospects on a regular basis. These can be anything from letters that offer tremendous value-added information to occasional humor.

People buy when they're ready to buy: Research and experience show that people buy when they're ready to buy and not a moment before. That means people don't buy just because we want to make a sale.

When we have a specific need in business, we rarely look for generalists in the business-to-business marketplace. We look for specialists who help us solve our unique problem – one who can relieve our pain. And remember, people will buy from you to relieve a pain faster than to receive pleasure.

The time to be on the top of your customer's minds is when they need a specialist and you are remembered as the one with that specialty.

Differentiate to the Top: Your goal in positioning is to emphasize what is truly unique about your company, play down any weaknesses and defuse a competitor's strength. It is usually best to focus on a single benefit; clients will not believe that yours is the fastest, friendliest and lowest priced offering in town all at the same time. Think – “*Domino's Delivers.*”

What a client can not name or frame, they can not claim. A Unique Selling Proposition (USP) answers the fundamental question that every prospect asks: Why should I give my business to you instead of your competitor? If you can not articulate a USP, each sales rep is going to answer that fundamental question differently. Unless everyone in an organization answers that question the same way and unless every communication with your clients includes the same consistent message, most marketing and contact efforts are a waste of money because clients end up confused rather than informed.

Elevate Your Elevator Speech: Your elevator speech may become the most profitable 60 second selling seconds you will have. It is your way of verbally communicating your USP to prospects you meet every day. A good elevator speech is not about “you” – it is about them. It should describe ways to solve your clients’ biggest problems or challenges and demonstrate what you would do to alleviate their pain.

Start with the word “for,” not “I” and then identify their pain. You might begin with something similar to the following:

- For university help desk managers whose staff can not properly document a call, we... or I...
- For software developers who suffer from an overabundance of support calls, we... or I...

Wrap it up by articulating how your company can alleviate that specific pain. For example:

- For university help desk managers whose staff can not properly document a call, we offer a special writing workshop that teaches how to document calls efficiently and make the captured information more usable to their organizations.
- For software developers who suffer from an overabundance of support calls, we develop crystal clear installation instructions, user manuals and quick reference guides that maximize the users’ out-of-box experience and cut the number of support calls in half.

Once your clients and prospects understand what differentiates your business from your competitors and know the benefits of doing business with you, you must keep your word. Otherwise, your efforts will have been wasted.

Repetition is what gets us remembered: Realize that 50 percent of all prospecting attempts are aborted with the first “no.” That means if a rep cold-calls you and you say, “I’m not interested,” there is a 50% chance that you will never hear from that rep again. 15% of the time that rep will contact you a second time and say, “I know you were busy when I was here before but I think we have something to talk about.” You reply, “No,” once again. Now, at this point, 65% of salespeople will give up. They are out of the game. 14% will come back a third time. By the fourth contact 90% of the salespeople will have given up. 90% will never come back to that prospect you are calling on and yet all the research says you will not even be remembered until you have made 9 contacts.

It is simply not in our DNA to “keep on keeping on.” The best way I know to keep on keeping on is to create and implement a strategic, nurturing plan.

Drip Irrigation Campaigns: This is a type of strategic, nurturing plan that’s intended to cultivate awareness, interest and loyalty over time using the power of repetition and permission-based communications. It allows you to pamper your best customers, introduce and educate new clients to your market positioning and to your specific value and differentiation. Nurturing

implies an intention to be of such genuine value to each client that their loyalty is not only easier to obtain, it is also in the client's best interest.

Action Plan: Your action plan, in simple terms, should state what you want to achieve and how you expect to achieve it. Give the plan a name. Identify the clients/prospects you are targeting, state the desired outcome and then specify each of the steps along the way. We recommend laying it all out as you see below. We also recommend a 12-step plan because it will take nine contacts before you begin to make an impression.

Action Plan

Generic Prospecting – B to B Executive

Purpose: Ensure Top-of-Mind Positioning

Step	Days	Activity	Description	Enclosure
Step 1	0	Letter	Introduction	Brochure
Step 2	15	Letter	Gift/Offer	Book Summary
Step 3	40	Letter	Positioning	Crystal Ball
Step 4	15	Letter	Gift	Shredded Money
Step 5	15	Invitation	Invitation	
Step 6	5	Phone Call	Follow-up	
Step 7	20	Letter	Briefing Highlights	CD Recording of the Briefing
Step 8	7	Phone Call	After Event Follow-up	
Step 9	30	e-mail	Article of Interest	Link to your Website
Step 10	30	Letter	List Letter	Transformation Article
Step 11	30	Letter	Paper-Solving Chief Pain	White Paper
Step 12	Seasonal	Greeting	Donation	Charity Card

Keeping in touch today is always a permission-based activity and few things seem to earn permission to cultivate a client's/prospect's loyalty better than knowledge-based interactions. Keeping your client touches personal, relevant and even anticipated is necessary. Customers need to know that we appreciate, understand and truly serve them.

A good drip marketing program lets you keep on keeping on in an automatic, systematic way. The key is to craft client touches that get remembered.

Banish the Bulk: One of the deadliest things you can do if you are trying to reach a CEO or CFO is to send them something in an envelope with bulk postage on it. Also know, if it has a label on it there is a better than 60% chance that it will be thrown out without ever being opened. If it has any teaser copy on the outside there is a better than 88% chance of it being thrown away unopened. These people get a lot of junk mail. If they can readily identify your message as bulk mail they will save themselves a second and simply not open it.

Basically the rule is, if you want them to look at your communications, it should not have the appearance of junk mail. Here are our 10 rules for avoiding the look of junk mail:

1. Never use a window envelope.
2. Always use a first-class commemorative stamp.
3. Use quality paper and envelopes.
4. Print the address directly on a standard envelope.
5. Use your logo.
6. Include a relevant trinket or small gift.
7. Always hand-sign your letters using blue ink.
8. Boxes, FedEx, lumpy mail (with trinkets inside) and 8x10 envelopes get opened. Use them.
9. Instruct your post office NOT to barcode your mail. Mail with barcodes looks like bulk mail.
10. Put your own name on the mailing list so you can see the finished result (as it appears when the client/prospect receives it).

The Write Stuff: The busier a person, the more likely he or she will quickly scan your letter instead of reading it thoroughly. Make sure your main point is stated succinctly.

An effective introductory paragraph compels a reader to continue reading. Try something other than a predictable beginning (It was a pleasure speaking with you yesterday...). Instead, ask a question you will answer later in the letter or relate a human interest story you have read or recently heard. You could address a business challenge you know they are facing or invite them to an event.

The body of the letter should contain information that is useful and relevant to the reader. It helps if you have a very clear goal in mind for the communication. Make your point simply and eloquently.

When using e-mail to nurture customers, make sure your messages are always relevant, positive and interactive. Always include an “opt-out” that allows the recipient to control communications with you, especially those suffering from information overload. Mixed media works the best. Supplement e-mail communications with postal mail and telephone calls.

The Secret Importance of Stuff: Most of us receive a myriad of items through the mail each day: junk mail, bills, checks and items that catch our attention because of their lumpy envelopes. If you are like I am, junk mail gets tossed automatically. Bills get our attention and we open them because we have little choice. Checks make us smile and we quickly open those. And the lumpy envelopes? I am betting you open those too! Items in lumpy envelopes pique a person's curiosity. They are irresistible – we want to see what is inside. Chances are, that is true of your customers/prospects, too.

Relevant, intelligent, appropriate enclosures (we call them “dimensional metaphors”) ensure your mailings get attention. But to extend the recipient's attention, enclosures must have a relevant association with the specific point you are trying to make. The connection is made with metaphors.

What is a metaphor? Simply put, a metaphor draws a comparison between two objects or ideas to make them easier to understand, like the comparison of your customers to plants in your garden. Metaphors have a way of triggering previous experiences and, therefore, creating memorable associations.

Metaphors are ubiquitous. We use them in our daily conversations. We find them in literature, music, art – in short; we use metaphors wherever vivid imagery is needed to illustrate a point. In this book, for example, we use the metaphor of farming to illustrate the nurture marketing and the process of “cultivating” customers.

Metaphors are essential in nurturing communications. Effective metaphors connect the enclosure and the message with relevance and impact. The enclosure, or “dimensional metaphor,” makes the envelope lumpy, giving it a third dimension that, in turn, piques the recipient's curiosity and ensures that the letter will be opened.

Dimensional metaphors can be both informational and fun. Examples of informational metaphors are:

- Pages from a magazine article relevant to your customer. (You could attach a personal note that says, “When I read this article I thought of you.”)
- 21 ways to solve a particular problem.
- An information white paper.
- Any book or summary that solves a problem that you know your clients have.

Everyone wants to have a little fun and interspersing your serious letters with some fun is almost always well-received. Examples of fun metaphors are:

- Crystal balls (Wish you could see the future?)
- Worry dolls (Let us handle your worries!)

- Small metal tools (Having the right tool for the right job is the only way to succeed and we are the right tool.)
- Squishy brains (Let us be your second brain.)

The Effective Executive: An ancient parable and guide for today:

Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty or even a hundred times.

We would like to finish on the same note on which we began – with the metaphor of the farmer. By now you surely agree that nurturing a garden and bringing it to harvest is the perfect metaphor for building solid customer relationships.

In any business organization, the person who assumes the role of gardener is the one who cultivates strong relationships. It is the gardener who creates and implements a marketing plan to communicate the right messages to the right people at the right time. The philosophy, methodology and processes involved in nurturing customer relationships are analogous to adding Miracle Gro[®] to your garden – it produces abundant, long-term harvests. Imagine how it will feel when customers consistently come back to you and also relate their positive experience to others!

Successful CEOs, and sales and marketing managers find time for planting and nurturing. As we said at the outset, nurturing requires patience and persistence. The payoff is worth the effort!

Message from Gary Tomlinson: These notes are not intended to replace the need to read *Nurturing Customer Relationships*. Their book contains a lot of examples of letters, e-mails, follow-up phone call scripts and step-by-step processes that have not been included in these notes.

I highly recommend reading *Nurturing Customer Relationships*. Then, I recommend practicing their methodology for drip irrigation marketing which is at the heart of their nurturing process.

You can learn more about nurturing marketing and/or obtain a copy of their book by going to www.nuturemarketing.com.