

Dream as a Team

New Years Day — on this day many of us dream about the upcoming year with high expectations and the best of intentions. Some of us make New Year's resolutions. Others may be NFL or NCAA basketball fans and thus look ahead with hope and excitement to The Super Bowl or March Madness. The start of a new year is an important milestone that drives many of us to hope and plan.

This year, the New England Patriots are again one of the top teams in NFL football and surprisingly, playing with the most rookies in the league. At training camp this past summer, the Patriots Coach, Bill Belichick, addressed his new players, knowing that the young men before him had undoubtedly dreamed of playing in the NFL since they were children. At that milestone, the first day of rookie camp, Belichick told his new players that beginning that day they needed a new dream -a dream of winning the Super Bowl - a dream already shared by the veteran players and coaches on the team.

Belichick may be on to something important here: the importance of a shared dream or vision in motivating a group to higher performance. Could this kind of dreaming play a role in our businesses? Is it possible that dreaming with our employees and even with our customers could help us achieve this same success?

Concerning customers, Yuhmin Hwang, President of AAEON Electronics, and a member of The Presidents Forum, thinks so. Yuhmin spoke to the members at our December meeting on sales strategy. At AAEON the sales process is a continuous task in which prospective customers are discovered, qualified, their needs assessed and then fulfilled. Yuhmin doesn't believe in a hard sell but prefers an approach in which his staff collaborates closely with the customer. He used the term "dreaming with the customer". Yuhmin suggested that the customer doesn't usually have a concrete sense of what he wants, rather a vague sense of what he needs.

To illustrate this concept, Yuhmin told a story about a friend who was very nervous about asking his girlfriend to marry him. Instead of asking directly, the man took the girl to a park and during their walk, he said, "I hope when we get married, we have three children like that couple over there". His girlfriend responded, "I hope we have four

children". This response gave the young man the courage to ask the girl to marry him. By planting a concrete picture in his girlfriend's mind of a desired outcome, by sharing a dream, it became easier to move ahead as a couple.

Yuhmin also shared the importance of "helping customers make the decision". Many times we know we should do something but we hold us back, we don't act. It might be because we are naturally risk averse and are waiting for clearer signs before making the decision. Uncertainty breeds indecision. Some of the key strategies used by the AAEON sales team to help customers make a decision and move the process forward are:

- Use the customer's own deadline as a tool to make a timely decision
- Don't push, instead guide with confidence
- Impress with real commitments
- Don't hard sell, convince through trust

When asked at a post-game news conference if it had been a "hard sell" when informing players they had room for improvement, Belichick praised the players for their consistent approach in coming to work every day and working hard to improve. In other words he addressed a "hard sell" situation with trust and praise. It is also clear that Belichick dreams with his players. He presents them with a clear image of standing on the field of victory, surrounded by popping champagne corks and adoring fans. The players know they want to be there. And in spite of carrying an unusually high percentage of rookies on his roster, he has engineered enviable success.

So, what can we do to help others achieve success and achieve some success for ourselves in the process? I suggest we start by thinking of the customers and their dreams first. What is their dream? How can I help them turn their dream into a reality?

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