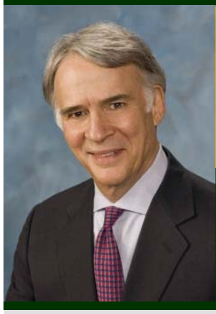
The Baron Group, Inc. Fall 2010



LET'S TALK SELLING

It's a Great Time to be Visible

Hello Everybody:

As the year starts to wind down, we are sure that many of you, like us, enjoyed 2010 a great deal more than the last two years, but would still prefer less volatility. Thankfully, most of our clients had good years and in spite of the horrendous unemployment figures and lack of certainty, it was a nice bounce back year for most of us.

Against this grateful backdrop, this quarter's newsletter will drive home the importance of visibility. Too many salespeople simply do not make enough sales calls. There are lots of reasons for this—many understandable—but we hear over and over again that salespeople are coming up short in the visibility department. They just aren't "out there" the way they could be.

Inevitably, the last few weeks of the year and the first few weeks in January create several unique opportunities when we visit clients. We can solicit feedback, conduct bigger conversations, and focus on enhancing the relationship. But to do this, we need to be there. That is our message as the year comes to an end. It's early, but since this is our last newsletter, let us wish you a strong finish and memorable Holiday Season.

There is a magical moment in the sales cycle and it's happening right now. From late November through late January, it's a wonderful time to be visiting clients.

And when we say visiting, we don't mean virtually. Forget the phone, forget email, and forget even the most beautifully crafted letters. It's a time to be visible—to see clients on their turf and to have meaningful conversations.

Sure, everybody is busy. We are all in the planning process. People are scrambling to get things done before the Holiday Season and we are predictably resisting a more frenetic pace. There is a lot going on. And this continues when the new year begins.

Despite all this, the moment is ripe for a visit to your client… in spite of how busy you both will inevitably become.

Throughout the fourth quarter, we contemplate next year and beyond. So are your clients. This is the moment for meaningful conversations and big ideas—or, what we refer to as strategic dialogues. There is no better time to do it.

When people are in the planning process, they see everyday issues and challenges from a more strategic standpoint. Though it may seem counterintuitive, asking big picture questions and stretching your client's thinking a bit may be more comfortable now than at other times of the year.

It is a great time to ask for feedback—ask your client to assess your performance. Most businesses (unlike advertising) do not get report cards at the end of the year. Asking a client—or even a prospective client, what you did well, what you could do differently, and what you could do better is perfectly in sync with the times.

Enhancing relationships as the Holiday Season approaches by expressing appreciation for the business (or for being given an opportunity to win the business) leaves a positive memorable impression. To take it a step further, identifying specific interactions that occurred throughout the year and thanking support people for the help they offered will set you in good stead for the upcoming year and beyond. Simply put, remind people that it's not just the business—it's the people—that make relationships so important.

Beyond everything else, make sure you're out there. You may recall a well-known United Airlines commercial in which the leader of a team lamented with the group how they had lost a long-time client. He attributed it to "not knowing us any more" as he handed out airplane tickets to each member of the team—including himself since he was "going to see that old friend who fired us this morning." Of course, the commercial intended to sell tickets, and it probably worked. The message was, and remains, powerful—we need to see our clients.

Now is the time to do it. It's a short but opportune window. The return on the time invested will knock your socks off.

It follows that if we're going to become strategic advisors, we're going to have to ask strategic questions and engage in strategic dialogues. We define strategic questions as big picture questions that are asked with the intent to elevate the conversation.

Strategic questions focus on the long-term. They can be uncomfortable to ask, but they lead to valuable conversations. They are terrific differentiators and they uncover less obvious needs.

- How are the demands of your clients changing; short and long term?
- What changes do you see taking place in the marketplace over the next 3-5 years?
- What changes do you anticipate in your current product offering over the next two years?
- Can you share how your expectations of suppliers like us are changing in both the short and long term?
- If you could change anything about the way you do business what might it be?
- How do you see your competitors evolving and how will that impact your business?
- How do you plan to leverage your success in the past as you move into the next decade?

These are just some examples. Of course, you won't ask them one after another and another… or your client will hide under the desk. But asking these types of questions at this time of the year will yield extraordinary insights, help differentiate you, and land you in a much stronger position to do great things in 2011… and beyond.

On the flip side of asking questions, this is also a marvelous time to ask for feedback. Though not always comfortable, providing a client with the opportunity to assess your performance can be extremely helpful.

Rarely will clients provide feedback if you don't ask. Unless of course you messed up. So ask for it. It's an important thing to do.

Here are some ideas.

- What did we do well in 2010 and what could we do better?
- How did we do in meeting your expectations?
- If you could change anything about the way we performed, what would that be?
- Is there anything that we are not doing that you would like us to do in 2011 from an account management perspective?
- Are our competitors doing anything that you wish we were doing?
- Have I done anything to disappoint you that we haven't discussed?
- Is there anything other members of our team could do better moving forward?
- What might you say about us if I wasn't here that you would like me to know?

Again, these are examples. Some are quite risky. You will decide what is appropriate; doing anything to make the client uncomfortable is probably not a great thing. But feedback is important. And if you don't ask for it, you probably won't get it. You get the gist. Moreover, our experience strongly indicates that you customers will appreciate being asked.

Keep/Stop/Start Exercise

This is a classic teambuilding exercise originally developed by Synectics® Inc. in the 1980s. Groups would come together to generate these lists. The intent was to provide them with an opportunity to assess their own performance.

The Keeps—the things that the group believed it was doing well and wanted to continue doing to be successful (e.g., solid planning). Too often, we don't pay attention to what is working.

The Stops—the things the group believe it need to stop doing because it prevented them from reaching their potential (e.g., gossiping or talking about others). We need to identify the things we want to eliminate from our day to day activities.

The Starts—the things the group felt it should begin doing to become even more successful (e.g. joint calls with technical people). This list provides teams with the opportunity to be creative and to generate ideas in order to better leverage their strengths and minimize their weaknesses. It also opens the door for new approaches.

You can do this with your customers and clients. Explain that you want to improve the relationship and that one way to do it is to get the answers to these three questions on the table. You will be surprised at how responsive clients can be to this kind of request. You will figure out how to do it.

To do this you need to be very clear about your intent. Explain precisely why you are doing it. Make sure your customer wants to play. Then give it a try.

But all you will learn from this are the things you need to do to enhance the relationship. All good things.

The Expectation Exercise

Another classic team building exercise that is applicable for selling situations is the **Expectations Exercise.** It works for groups that regularly interact. Here's how it works.

Group One puts together two lists—what we expect of Group Two and what we think Group Two expects from us. Group Two does the same thing—what they expect of Group One and what they think Group One expects of them.

Next, they compare the lists and identify any differences. They then take these differences and issues, transform the issues into statements and generate ideas to resolve them. It can be extremely effective.

We are not suggesting that you get this complicated with your clients. But we do encourage you to get your clients talking about their expectations and compare what they say with what you can and cannot do. As appropriate, you can express your expectations of the client and ask for feedback. You will no doubt uncover some insightful information that you can put to use immediately. You will be delighted with what you learn… as will your clients.

In his highly acclaimed book, Flawless Consulting, Peter Block introduces the valuable concept of "contracting." Simply put, it speaks to the client and consultant agreeing on expectations. One of the key tenets of consultative selling is to be perceived as a consultant—not a salesperson. These exercises will help you reach that pinnacle of success. Again, you will figure out how to make this conversational and comfortable with your client; maintaining your own style is critical. But clarifying expectations will result in a win/win every time.

This can be uncomfortable. We understand that. But we have heard too many stories about relationships that ended because expectations were not clear. Do what you can to avoid that.

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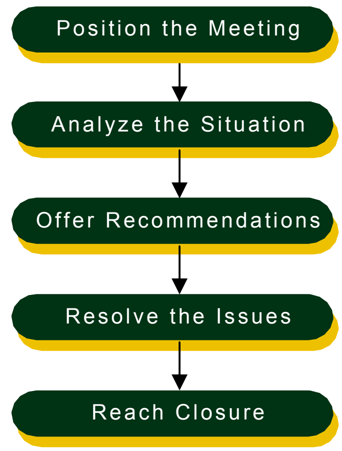
Consultative Selling Skills (CSS)

By the conclusion of this two-day course, participants will be able to:

- Understand the connections and similarities between problem-solving and selling in order to transform the sales call into a problem solving opportunity.
- Determine both the obvious and not so obvious needs of their customers.
- Use state-of-the-art skills to determine needs, including: questioning, listening, reframing, interpreting understanding non-verbals, and paraphrasing.
- Provide recommendations with benefits linked to specific client needs.
- Present ideas in addition to products and services as answers to customer needs and add value.
- Resolve objections using a problem solving approach and mentality.
- Apply facilitation techniques in selling situations.
- Plan and follow-up their sales calls in a professional manner.



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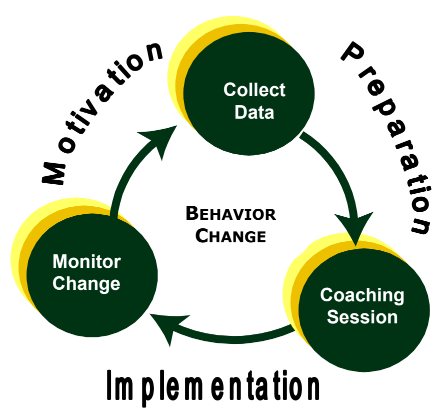
CSS Workshop Dates for 2011

February 3-4 ▪ May 12-13
September 22-23 ▪ December 8-9

Coaching for Improved Sales Performance

By the conclusion of this two-day course, participants will be able to:

- Observe their salespeople in selling situations with an understanding of what to look for and how to capture key points.
- Give feedback in a balanced, helpful, and non-threatening way.
- Offer ideas as to how to be more effective in the selling role.
- Manage the resistance salespeople demonstrate when a manager suggests changing or modifying their sales approach.
- Gain commitment by getting the salesperson to develop an action plan at the conclusion of the session.
- Apply the process in other situations to help people grow in their jobs.
- Deal effectively with coaching problems and issues.



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Coaching Workshop Dates for 2011

March 3-4 ■ July 28-29
December 1-2