



CHAPTER THREE — *PRELIMINARY TRAINING*

WHAT DO I TELL 'EM FIRST?

Congratulations! You've got a brand new employee brimming over with confidence and future promise. Now what?

If you work for a large, multiple-location art gallery business, you may be in the training mode a lot—if not all the time—and you are no doubt doing sales clinics on a regular basis. If not, you still want to be doing sales clinics on a regular basis, even if you only have two employees.

Since the approach to training an uninitiated employee is different than one who has some sales or gallery experience, let's start with the first.

THE CHRISTIANS AND THE LIONS APPROACH

Many gallery owners, with difficult and compromising schedules often resort to that well-worn employer's training program, OJT. (On The Job Training).

Nothing is less effective than OJT.



If you are tempted to assign a new salesperson to an already seasoned employee and tell them, “Just follow Charley around for a few days until you get the hang of it,” you’re shooting yourself in the foot.

Your new salesperson is like a new born babe. He’s going to fall down more often than not. If he hasn’t been in the art gallery business before, he’s going to be totally befuddled at the prospect of talking in a compelling manner about art.

GIVE THEM THE ROAD MAP FIRST

The first thing to do is get your new employee conversant with your Policy and Procedures Manual. If you don’t have one, write one. Aside from your policies regarding sales techniques, it should reflect your official position on everything else. That’s what he needs to know first so that he, along with every other employee, is on the same page concerning: hours of shift, breaks, tardiness, returns, dress code, pay scale and pay periods, commission schedules; etc., etc. I know all this goes without saying, but I believe it’s important in terms of the order in which it’s presented to the employee.

If you use an employee contract, much of this information will be contained in it. And a contract, reflecting the policies of the company and the manner in which these policies are carried out, can be valuable. If you use one, I believe that a contract between you and the salesperson that clearly states what your business stands for philosophically, is best.

However, I also believe that the posture of your manual is important, too. For example, if your policies and procedures manual focuses on the prohibition of all those things you consider unacceptable—thou shalt not be tardy, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not engage in side dealing, etc.—I believe that is exactly what you help to create in your business. State your policies in positive terms—you will put your customer’s interests first, you will represent the company in honorable ways at all times, etc.—this will

start the employee off on a positive footing, rather than a negative one.

THE MISSION STATEMENT

The most important aspect of this official line, I think, is The Mission Statement. Every company of people, gathered together for one common purpose, whether three people or three hundred, should be very clear on exactly what that purpose is. And they should be able to describe it in a very few words. It should be distilled into a paragraph or two and written down, ideally in large letters on a sign posted in the back room. Or better, frame it nicely and hang it right in the gallery itself. Really. For all to see on a regular basis, so it's kept in the forefront of their minds every moment they're in your place of business.

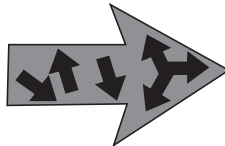
If you think this is silly, just wander into the locker rooms of any NBA team (well, I suppose you couldn't just wander in, but go with me on this for a moment) and you will see a mission statement, or something like one, posted there. These are guys who earn millions of dollars a year. Whether they stay on one team or go to another, they're still going to earn big bucks—certainly more than the coaches do. And yet, those coaches understand the necessity of instilling in these athletes a credo toward which they all work, as a team.

A friend of mine, I'll call him Dean, is a very wealthy man (on many levels) and owns a company in Las Vegas which specializes in New Home Development and Marketing. He has a small company by most standards—perhaps forty employees or so—in what started as a very narrow market niche. His company is hired by new home builders to come into their developments just before completion, set up a sales force and marketing plan and sell the product. Dean was working very successfully at this—in the booming real estate market of Las Vegas—for some years. His company was successful largely due to the fact that Dean had literally invented the idea. And for some years, he was nearly the only game in town.



Dean managed his people by being a Commander. He commanded them to do this, he commanded them to do that. He commanded them to do well. And when they didn't, he ranted and raved. Then fired them and hired others. As the word got out about Las Vegas, other developers crowded into the (then) small city, scores of new home developments sprouted up, and other real estate marketing people—upon whom no moss was growing—looked at Dean's successful idea and began offering a similar service. The competition got very tough. Dean got tougher. And so did his salespeople. They began to defect to the competition. Dean got even tougher. Things were not going well.

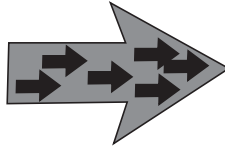
Then Dean received a gift from a good friend: he was provided with the opportunity of taking a good look at how he was operating his business. A very honest look (another whole story I won't recount here, but if you're interested, call me). Dean began to see that he had been operating from scarcity and paranoia, and treating his salespeople the same way. And that even though the company seemed to be going forward in a straight ahead direction—his sales were up over prior years—what in fact was occurring in his business was this:



The company appeared to be moving in a forward direction, but all the employees inside the building were moving in different directions, and often at odds with each other. Dean was invited to observe that the problem was directly attributable to the fact that he was at odds with himself. He didn't know where he was going, or what he stood for or what he wanted from his own life—let alone the company.

Dean got it. He began making changes. He started with himself, and then he changed the way with which he operated his business. He hired and trained his people differently and he changed the way in which he managed them. He became a leader, rather than a commander—a leader often leads from the rear. Dean gave his people the trust and confidence

to believe they could sit in his seat, if they had to. He empowered them to do well at their chosen careers. And he invited them to participate in the creation of a Mission Statement for the company. He created this:



Dean's little business went from five million dollars in annual gross revenue to twenty five million dollars in under five years. And when you walk into the offices of his company, whether he's there or not (and these days, he often isn't), you can feel it. And see it. The Mission Statement is posted in the reception area for all to see when they walk in, customers and employees alike. (They even have a recited version of it that you listen to when you're on hold with the office telephone line—which usually isn't very long.)

A Mission Statement empowers people to believe they have a proprietary interest in the success of the business, that they are personally responsible to see that it happens. And as a result, they don't wait to be told to do something. When it needs to get done, they do it.

A new employee to your company wants to believe they are part of something positive. A company that is going somewhere, being driven forward. The Mission Statement is their driver's license.

What do you want to do with your business? Who do you think you are to your community? What service do you perform? What positive changes are you creating? What contribution are you making? These are just a few issues to be addressed in a mission statement. Get together with your staff and write one. And put it up. I once had a very wise man tell me he thought the mission statement was like a golden chain—one



end tied to his ankle, with the other end staked firmly in the ground. And whenever he got too far away from his “path”, the Mission Statement acted as a tether, to keep him rooted in what he knew was best for him.

In the day to day challenges of our business life, it’s too easy to forget that there is an underlying, but nonetheless important layer to our lives that isn’t clearly evident—our reason for being here. And I know you’ve experienced this: you turn around and realize it’s been five years since you thought about it. And where did that time go? What did I accomplish in that time? What do I have to show for those five years?

A mission statement tends to remind you (and your staff) to keep notes.

PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE

The Art Gallery business is specialty retailing. We just happen to be in the business of selling Fine Works of Art, but it’s specialty retailing, nonetheless. To state the obvious, you can’t sell a product without extensive product knowledge. This is the next place to take your brand new employee.

If you don’t have a reading list for your salespeople, create one. Included in it, should be:

- A glossary of terms unique to the art community. A book or list of terms that describes everything about the world of art. For example: lithography, serigraphy, artist proofs, framing terms, pre-publication prices, hors commerce, atelier, fillets, rag papers, canvas, gesso, etc. etc. Any library can supply you with books wealthy with this kind of information.
- A basic overview of world art since the Turn of the Century. A salesperson should be able to converse intelligently about the trends and genres of art that have occurred over the last one hundred years.
- All the major trade periodicals—Art World News, Art Business News, Decor Magazine, Art in America, Niche, etc. Have them

read them front to back, each month. They should know what the publishers are offering and what it looks like. What other dealers are selling and what isn't selling. Who the major artists are and what kind of art they make. If a customer enters your gallery inquiring about an artist you don't carry, and your salesperson is familiar with the artist, he might be able to steer that customer to an artist you do carry who does similar work.

- **Gallery Guides.** Who is the competition? And what are they doing? Who do they show? How are they doing with the artists they represent? Sound like something only you should know? No. Your staff should know everything you know. The more knowledgeable your salespeople are, the more confidence they inspire in the minds of their customers. This holds true of information outside your own business' frame of reference.
- **Artist Biographies.** This, of course, is extremely important. Your salespeople need to know everything they possibly can about the artists you represent. Most publishers go to great lengths to supply their dealers with information about their artists, with which to create a sales presentation. Many times, they put their own names and addresses on the literature. As a result, the dealer, understandably fearful that the customer may find out where the work of art comes from and go around the gallery, will not allow the material on the floor (of course we both know that a publisher would never sell a work of art directly to a retail customer at wholesale, don't we?). If this is the case with the artists you represent, call the publisher and ask for more generic literature. Or make your own bios. A good gallery will have a system in place where someone creates biographies and small presentations about each artist on their own letterhead, for the purpose of handing them out to viable prospects. Ideally, when the customer leaves the gallery they should leave with the art, but in the event they don't, you want them to have something to take with them—with your phone number on it. Most people won't read them anyway,



but you want the bios to fall out of their briefcases and purses when they get home.

- The Sales Manual. As I have mentioned already (perhaps ad nauseum), in *A Manual For Art Sales*, I presented a format for the basic sales process. Everyone on your staff should read that book. Or one like it. And not just the salespeople. Everyone in your company must be made to understand the process of the sale and how important it is. The receptionist, the shippers, that new accountant, everyone should read the sales manual, so they know what you're up against. (Okay, I've said that before, too. But just like in selling, you have to repeat things for people to hear them.)

WHEN WILL THEY DO ALL THIS?

This process of preliminary training may take weeks. Surrender to it. It's an investment in your new employee you must make. If you've taken the time to identify and evaluate the salesperson's potential can't them to have completed the operations and procedures manual, the reading list and the sales manual—on their own time.

This may not be received well, but you'll have to sell it to them. It's part of that education you referred to during the interview. And an education comes with a price. This is the price—their time. The last thing you want your new salespeople doing during those first weeks is to be seen sitting in the viewing room, reading the sales manual. Or sitting at a desk on the floor reading anything. Assign them to a shift, with the responsibility of observing the other salespeople as they go about their day.

When I go out to dinner, nothing is more annoying than that new employee who is training with the waiter, hovering about in the background while you're trying to place your order. Your new salesperson can have that effect on the customers. So walk them through it. Have them know that they will be assigned to a veteran salesperson for a period of time, if only that one shift, but that they are to stay at a distance and

remain quiet. The veteran may well avail him or herself of the help, having the new person bring bios out or visual slicks on other works of art, or other framing samples, whatever.

You want your new salesperson to just be present on the floor for a few days—a week, two weeks, whatever it is—and observe. Surreptitiously. From the wings. Getting a handle on what goes on. Not diving in and doing it wrong.

And when they seem to have a pretty good idea about what does go on, that's the time to start them in formal training clinics.

WHEN WILL YOU DO ALL THIS?

As we will see in the next section, I believe regular training classes and sales meetings are absolutely critical. But in addition to that, your new person has to be exposed to the process one-on-one.

It's usually best to take a few small meetings with the new employee during the first weeks, in which you "test" them on their knowledge of the first assignment—the reading list. What does *bon a tiré* mean? How is a serigraph made? Who was Pablo Picasso? You know, elementary things like that.

When you are content that they have satisfactorily involved themselves with the process, it's time to take them aside and begin some preliminary training.

If you are a sole proprietor, set aside an hour each day for working with your new employee. Take him or her into your office, or an empty viewing room and begin with the beginning. If you are using the Manual, start by walking through it with the new employee and discussing the various aspects of the process—greeting, qualifying, etc. Your gallery will have its own idiosyncrasies where all this theory is concerned and you'll want to familiarize your new employee with your personal spin on it all.



For example, qualifying a customer in a smaller, more regional gallery or frameshop is quite a bit different than what might be done in a large tourist oriented gallery in Maui. This will hold true throughout the entire manual. Walk them through it, have them take notes and give them the official policy line as it relates to your business.

At the same time, ask questions about a specific artist you carry. Pop them out of the blue, as you are discussing aesthetics, for example.

“By the way, Mary, where did Robert Schnay go to school?”

Something like that. Just a little testing inquiry to make sure they are ingesting the material you gave them.

TRAINING IS EASIER THAN RETRAINING

It may take weeks to get through the entire manual this way. But you should persevere. I've often seen it happen where a new salesperson seems to be getting the material quickly, and appears to be making great progress—even to the extent of making a few sales on the floor—and the trainer will take his foot off of the pedal. I've done it myself. Suddenly, you'll be walking through the gallery and overhear that new salesperson making some outlandish statement to a customer that will curl your hair (if you have any left). Just remember, you want to be satisfied that your new employee is on the same page as the rest of your staff.

BE CAREFUL OF WHAT YOU TELL 'EM

Here's a frightening story: years ago I was the district sales manager for a company that had set about to launch a string of galleries that dealt only in sculpture. (A novel idea that worked better on the drawing board than it did in reality.) We offered an entire array of sculpture, both modest and sublime, which included Remington bronzes. Of course, these were not actual Remington bronzes—those are valued in the tens of thousands,

and up—but rather, recast bronzes taken from the originals. These sculptures started at about \$395 and went up to about \$1300 for the large version of “Coming Through The Rye”—thought to be one of Remington’s best compositions and weighing over seventy five pounds. We provided the salespeople with a presentation on the sculptures—there were about eight or nine titles in all—that presented them as recasts. A touchy, fine distinction, because by definition, a recast must start with a mold taken from an original sculpture. Somewhere along the line, someone who owned an original lifetime Remington, had sold the rights to recast it to some foundry—Remington’s work being in the public domain.

One day, I came back from lunch to find a couple of suits standing around the front desk, looking very serious.

One of them, sizing me up for a striped, orange jumpsuit, barked, “Are you the manager?”

“Uh, not if it’s trouble,” I joked.

It turned out it was! These guys (even one, pretty serious-looking woman) were FBI agents—complete with dark glasses, nondescript grey suits (even the woman) and no sense of humor. They not-so-politely informed me they were closing down the gallery and confiscating all the art, which they did in a matter of minutes, having come prepared with hand-trucks! They also confiscated any and all paperwork reflecting Remington sales receipts.

It turned out that the gallery had been identified by someone as selling fake Remingtons to the unsuspecting public. What a nightmare! We had to hire attorneys and create written affidavits about our position on the bronzes, involving the foundries we bought them from, the customers we sold them to, the salespeople who sold them. It went on and on for over six months!

The entire investigation was a result of a recorded conversation one of the agents had had with one of our salespeople while wearing a wire—like



something out of a James Bond movie! The FBI had evidence that we were fleecing the unsuspecting public out of their money by misrepresenting the sculptures as Remington bronzes, and had a recorded conversation with one of our employees to prove it. And yes, the salesperson's presentation indicated that the sculpture—priced, by the way, at an astronomical \$395 (just what one would expect to pay for an original sculpture by one of the most revered artists in American art history)—was in fact taken from the original work of art by Remington, and hence could truthfully be called a Remington bronze. It was sculpted by Remington, himself, and this one was recast from the original. Okay, sure, for those of us in the art business, the implication seems obvious. But to the FBI, whose agents are not exactly steeped in the vagaries of art history, it seemed a minor distinction. (Never mind the fact that an original Remington bronze could bring a price tag in the six figure range.) We spent many months in anxious hysteria, before the whole matter was dropped by the FBI. But only after a lot of sleepless nights, lost revenue and many (expensive) meetings with attorneys—criminal attorneys, I might point out, since the matter was considered a felony and for which we all might (oh, my God!) serve time if convicted.

True story.

All that because we didn't more closely monitor what was being said by our employee.

If you feel it's too much trouble to thoroughly train your salespeople on the official company policy, remember this incident. Salespeople tend to get carried away with the heat of the moment. They are apt to say anything they think will make the sale. You want to avoid potential catastrophe by anticipating this. It would be difficult to run your business from inside the slammer.

I know this needn't really be pointed out: your policy on honesty and fair business practises should apply to every thing you sell. Because it creates a very valuable commodity—The Loyal Customer.