



Exceeding Expectations: The Key to Value

By Tony Jeary

OK, the economy is 'bad'. In spite of that, most of us still have to put food on the table, manage our business and produce a profit! One thing I've learned during my life is that even though the economy may go up and down, some things never change. One of the things that never changes is that even in tough times when most of us cut back on spending, nobody can completely stop spending. That means somebody is always buying and somebody is always selling. In tough economic times, you just need to make sure you are one of those doing some selling! My father taught me a great truth when I was growing up: "Give value, do more than expected." I have lived by that principle and it has been the key to my own success – in good times and bad. Exceeding expectations is the means by which value is created and things get sold! You can exceed expectations in price, quality or service and possibly all three – but you must understand what it really means to exceed expectations before you can actually do it.

The first thing to understand about exceeding expectations is this: *The expectations you exceed today become the seed for new opportunities in the future.* This may seem to be an obvious fact, but many people fail to connect today's actions with future opportunities. By that I mean they approach exceeding expectations as a one-off special event rather than a way of life. Exceeding expectations is a foundational attitude and something that you have to pursue daily. Exceeding expectations is a proactive effort that is always looking for a way to express itself. Exceeding expectations is a completely voluntary activity and when it becomes foundational to the way you think it has the power to elevate value and become the seed for new opportunity.

It is rare for anyone to exceed expectations unless they do it on purpose. To *exceed expectations on purpose* means that you have an understanding of expected performance, and you realize that expected performance is in no way extraordinary. It becomes tougher when you realize that exceeding expectations requires more effort to surpass what might be described as "acceptable performance." Acceptable performance is in fact mediocrity and mediocrity is usually the norm. The problem is that it's hard to sell mediocrity!

Understanding how expectations are created is the first step in being able to exceed them in a positive way. Expectations come from our experience. As our experience changes, our expectations change, too. To illustrate how this happens, let me share an example. It involves a tool that has changed the way we all work and communicate: voice mail. Prior to voice mail, when you dialed a phone number, your expectation was to hear a live person answer the phone. When voice mail first appeared, however, that expectation was suddenly shaken by an invitation to leave a personal recorded message. The first time I encountered voice

mail, I hung up! It was such a departure from my expectations, I didn't know how to respond to it.

The original intent and strategy of voice mail was to create a positive tool that would exceed expectations by significantly improving the speed and results of telephone communication. Prior to voice mail's the expectation of callers was to get caught up in a process that can best be described as message-slip phone tag. The message slips were created by switchboard operators and receptionists who handed the message slips off to the people being called. Typically, the message slips merely reflected the name and number of the caller and the reason for their call was fairly short and cryptic. Message-slip phone tag was the standard of telephone use until the advent of voice mail.

As with most good ideas, voice mail as it was originally intended accomplished a great positive result. It enabled people to leave personal recorded messages for specific people, who could return their calls more efficiently. Voice mail helped synchronize telephone communication to the real-world work environment. The ability to leave content-rich messages allowed people to engage the purpose of their call much faster and reduce the time it took to resolve problems. Prior to voice mail, only one in four calls made through a switchboard connected in real time to the person being called. Getting a message of content through via message slips was a hit-or-miss possibility. Voice mail allowed callers to leave a message directly with the person they needed 100% of the time. Clearly, voice mail exceeded expectations of business callers in a positive way and led the way to superior results, faster.

The voice mail story reveals two things about exceeding expectations. First, voice mail in its real-time use exceeded the expectations of the businesses that purchased voice mail and the customers of those businesses who were able to use voice mail to communicate with the business. The fact that voice mail exceeded expectations of the business and the callers to those businesses created enhanced value for both parties. It was the enhanced value that changed the status quo of using the telephone. Those facts give us a formula for exceeding expectations. If you can do something for your customer that not only exceeds their expectations, but also empowers them to exceed the expectations of their customers you have enhanced your value tremendously.

So, if you are concerned about the economy take heart! There are still plenty of prospects out there who will buy your product or service if you deliver enhanced value and the way to do that is to exceed their expectations! Do something positive in their behalf they do not expect.