



Taking Sides

By Margit Weisgal, CME

Too often, we are told what to do with no one ever explaining why it has to be done.

It seems that everyone has an opinion of your trade show program, positive or negative. In the corporate world, large company or small, getting everyone on board is the answer. The question is how to do it.

Sales rarely exist in a vacuum. Neither do trade shows. The same departments that support any sales effort—and that's all of them indirectly if not directly—also support and contribute to the trade show effort. Gaining their involvement and support should be one of your goals.

When the trade show program has a mission and each show within that program has goals and objectives, the next step is deciding which tactics will take you to those goals. Given that these tactics will be implemented by the company *as a whole*, not by any one individual, it is imperative that all departments be involved. Communicating that to department heads is the challenge.

Your job in involving other departments is one of education more than anything else. Explain to them in simple terms why you exhibit at trade shows.

What's in it for your colleagues? How can they work with you in the exhibit booth to support their own sales goals? Corporations spend millions of dollars each year training their staffs on how to sell more effectively. But selling in a booth—using it to talk to clients instead of talking *at* them—is a skill rarely understood and taught even less.

When you educate your colleagues, they'll begin to understand how their contributions, no matter how small, have an impact on the impressions prospects and customers have of your company.

Many years ago I read a phrase in a book that I've taught every person I've ever employed. "I have a problem and I need your help." These nine words have gotten us all farther simply because they imply respect

for someone's judgment and value for what they have to say. If you use these words when talking to department heads about how the trade show is actually going work, they'll be more willing to come up with tactics because they know what they have to say is valued and that you're really listening.

What else can you do? Start with a survey of other managers in your company to find out what they like and dislike about doing shows. Just be careful—often we phrase questions so we get responses we want to hear, not the reality of what's going on. You want to find out where they are now, so you can move them to where they need to be. After collating results, distribute them along with information about the benefits of trade shows. Include how each department's contribution reinforces the overall effort.

Too often, we are told what to do with no one ever explaining why it has to be done. An exercise such as this one begins the team-building process. No longer will you have people taking sides. The goal is for your company to pull with you, not against.

Margit Weisgal, CME, is president and CEO of the Trade Show Exhibitors Association (TSEA).

About TSEA

Since 1967, TSEA (www.tsea.org) has been providing knowledge to marketing and management professionals who use exhibits, events, and face-to-face marketing to promote and sell their products, as well as to those who supply them with products and services. Members benefit from access to education, networking, resources, advocacy and member-only discounts on products and services that all exhibit and event professionals use. To register for any TSEA education program at the member price or to join TSEA and enjoy the benefits all year at the discounted show rate, please use promo code: **XYZ SHOW**