

editor's note



MY YOUNGEST SON'S TEAM RECENTLY COMPETED IN A HOCKEY TOURNAMENT HELD AT THE HOME OF THE CHICAGO STEEL (WHO, COINCIDENTALLY, A FEW WEEKS LATER WON THE USHL CLARK CUP FOR THE LEAGUE CHAMPIONSHIP).

I was fascinated by the fan base and how the team interacted with them. For those of you unfamiliar with the United States Hockey League (and I assume that's everyone reading this), it's the top junior hockey league in the U.S. Its players are not yet professionals—though on average, about 30 USHL players are drafted by NHL teams and hundreds receive NCAA Division I scholarships.

While it always helps to have a winning team, I think some of the Chicago Steel's popularity is based on how they treat their fans.

Tickets were cheap, the stands were packed, concessions were reasonably priced, the atmosphere was fun, parking was free and the team mascot mingled with the crowd and revved them up. And after the game, hundreds of fans hung out and waited for the players, who happily posed for pictures and signed autographs.

Years ago, one of my old roommates was the general manager for the Milwaukee Admirals, the AHL (American Hockey League) affiliate of the Nashville Predators. My buddy stressed that he wasn't just filling the stands on any given night; he also needed to think about developing a fan base who would support the team year after year.

These are the same issues that designers and builders face. Yes, you need to get that contract you're working on today—but you also need to be thinking about building a relationship to help you get tomorrow's contract too.

What's your relationship with your clients? Is it combative or collaborative? Is your company easy to work with or a nightmare?

Jim Pancero, one the gurus of the sales industry, often says that you shouldn't be selling based on price, that price only matters when everything else is equal. Instead, you need to differentiate yourself and your company through the services you offer and the quality you provide.

Take a look at your company. Why should a client hire you? What do you offer that your competitors don't? Those are the important questions, and your success—and the success of the steel design and construction industry—rests on your answers. If you can't answer them on your own, I urge you to hire a consultant or attend a sales seminar to help you develop them.

Good luck!


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