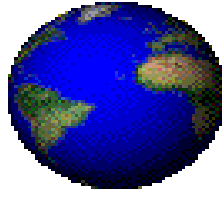


AUTHORITY



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All Organizations Need Faith

Sharon Imperiale

On January 23rd, the CCI Team cooked and served dinner for residents of the Ronald McDonald House in Philadelphia, a temporary residence for families with seriously ill children who are being treated in area hospitals. Amazingly, the organization is run mainly by volunteers. Words will never express the personal satisfaction that each of us felt as we provided a home cooked meal for families that otherwise may be eating chips from a machine. We engaged in conversations with the families, learned that they were from all parts of the world, enlisted them as Eagles fans (for next year!) and shared in the wonderful stories of the benefits of the medical care our city has to offer.

Our contact and coordinator was named Faith. "Faith" means confidence, trust, reassurance, etc., and she is all of these. She gave us a tour of the "House," an amazing mansion beyond description. Her passion for the people, memories, games, and rooms was alive in every word she uttered.

As Faith spoke, she used examples from her own life. She made a career transition many years ago and is now a teacher in the Head Start Program in the inner city. She loves her children and teaches lessons in life every day. She told us that her teaching philosophy was different and sometimes risky. She said, "Most of the time it works. I tell my children they can try anything as long as they are willing to clean up their mess." She further explained, "I'm not just talking about the red paint on the floor. I am teaching them that they have to be accountable for what they do. It is OK to make a mistake but they need to take responsibility and clean up after themselves."

Faith is teaching children the concept of empowerment. She made it so clear for me...empowerment is trying something and if it doesn't work you need to clean up the red paint on the floor! And of course, since cleaning up red paint is a tough job, you'll learn from this and do it differently the next time. Thank you, Faith.

Joe Conklin, Philadelphia's Comic Genius: A Great Career Management Story

Joe Dougherty

At Career Concepts, we are very fortunate because we get to work with, coach and sometimes play a part in, some of the greatest career management success stories. In our 15 year history, we have seen the vision, hard work, risk and persistence that it takes for someone to realize his/her dream. The stories behind individuals following their dreams are always fascinating ones. All of us learn from them and we believe in sharing these stories so others can use them as a model in pursuing their own dreams. Many of us on the Career Concepts staff have been fascinated with the success of Joe Conklin.

As most people living in the Delaware Valley know, Joe Conklin is one of the funniest comics in the area. He is a legend at most Philadelphia banquets, night clubs, awards presentations, and corporate dinners, but is probably best known for his time spent on the radio in the morning on WIP 610. Joe is a great impersonator and he is famous for doing voice take-offs of local sports celebrities as well as national entertainers. He has achieved great success and yet most people don't know the struggles, sacrifices and stamina that were needed for Joe to realize the success that he enjoys today.

We recently spent some time with Joe and gained a better understanding of his career path: what worked, what didn't, etc. Trying to get a few minutes with Joe Conklin is next to impossible because of the schedule he keeps. He is on the radio every morning from 6:00 to 10:00 and generally works most evenings to well past midnight. Fortunately, Joe's brother, John, is the Vice President of Career Concepts' South Jersey office and he twisted Joe's arm to spend a few minutes with us. Most people don't realize what they want to do for a living until they go to college; some later in their lives. Joe Conklin is an exception: he knew in grade school what he wanted to be when he grew up (although some would say he has never grown up). In the seventh grade, he realized he wanted to be an entertainer when he was asked to perform at a Catholic Charities function and got an "incredible rush" being on stage making people laugh, and he became addicted.

Joe was the second youngest in a family of seven children. He attended St Helena's grade school in the Olney section of Philadelphia. He graduated from Cardinal Dougherty in 1980 and from Temple University in 1984 with a degree in Communications. Joe was always the "class clown" and Joe's grandfather was a vaudeville entertainer and his parents were singers, but no one ever thought a decent living could be made in entertainment. He was advised to work at the Naval Development Center since that's what most people did because it was safe and had benefits, but Joe Conklin wanted no parts of it. He had a dream and he wanted to pursue it!

He had developed a knack of impersonating voices as early as age five, and he developed a list of famous voices that he could personalize including Jack Nicholson, Sylvester Stallone, Howard Cosell, Merrill Reese, Bill Campbell, Harry Kalas, Charles Barkley, Homer Simpson and others. He enjoyed success early but also, as most people will admit, had his share of failures. Joe described a time when, after a number of successful gigs at the Chestnut Cabaret in 1987, he decided to try some new material on an audience. He bombed! Within three minutes he was booed and yet, because he needed the \$40, he stayed on stage for another twenty minutes getting booed the entire time.

He had some successes on radio and even TV, but the industry is not a very stable one, with turnover rampant and stations switching formats constantly. While most around him were encouraging him to get on with his life and find a more traditional career, Joe stayed the course. He starved at times and worked a number of jobs to support himself. Yet he continued in his belief that he could make a niche for himself and entertain others because that was his passion. He sent a tape of his work into WIP in the early 1990s and was rejected. He was persistent, however, and believed his humor could make a difference, so he kept trying. The personalities and producers on the midday show liked what he did and decided to give him a shot. Joe worked for free, until he became so popular that he was offered a contract. His popularity continued and he was offered a spot on the popular "Morning Show;" ironic because this was the group that had rejected him earlier.

Today, Joe Conklin has been called one of the funniest people in Philadelphia and has been recognized as "A Comic Genius." He has carved out his own career path and is enjoying incredible success. He has since left WIP and will be with another Philadelphia radio station soon to be announced. The common themes that we at Career Concepts see in other success stories can be found in Joe Conklin's story.

Following a dream, testing the market, persistence, ability to acknowledge failures, learn from those failures, test, test, test, have stamina, sacrifice, ask for help, ask for help again, celebrate successes. All of us have dreams. We can learn from others, and Joe Conklin's story can be a model for so many.

Stress: An Occupational Hazard

Patreece Thompson, MD

Anxiety is front-page news on the February 24th issue of *Newsweek*. Our Homeland Security Office recently put out an "Orange Alert" advising US citizens to protect themselves from terrorist attack with duct tape, among other safety measures. (I learned that duct tape is permeable to airborne toxins, so it is no help.) Even the snowstorm that hit the East Coast brought the threat of flooding and fears of being swept away. All of this is superimposed on the backdrop of the stresses faced by employees in their jobs. America is becoming a nation of fear and anxiety. It is a problem that cannot be ignored.

According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health:

- Over 70% of reported illnesses and diseases are stress related.
- One-fourth of employees view their jobs as the #1 stressor in their lives.
- Three-fourths of employees believe they have more on-the-job stress than workers a generation ago.
- Stress costs businesses over \$300 billion per year, or \$7500 per employee.
- Healthcare expenditures are nearly 50% greater for workers who report high levels of stress.

Needless to say, stress plays a major role in decreased productivity and employee turnover. Many organizations offer stress courses for their employees; but to truly be effective, there are two areas that must be addressed. Stress Management programs need to focus on providing employees with tools to manage their anxiety on an individual level. Studies document repeatedly the efficacy of breathing, yoga, exercise, proper nutrition and time management. These need to be reinforced. What gets less attention is that stress is a systemic problem. There are factors such as workload, effects of re-organization and chronic change that are beyond the employee's ability to manage individually. Organizations need to assess the impact of their culture and environment on employees and make the appropriate interventions so that the employees' personal strategies can work.

According to a study conducted by St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company, stress prevention programs in a hospital setting showed a reduction of medication errors by 50% in one report, and a 70% reduction in malpractice claims in 22 hospitals.

Recently, we assisted bank employees who went through the experience of being robbed. We responded to the bank's request to speak to these employees within 24-48 hours after the event. The result was that employees felt their employer was concerned about them and the bank was able to continue operating without employees leaving.

In summary, chronic stress resulting from one's occupation is a potential health hazard that employers can ameliorate through providing employees with coping tools and making changes within the organization.

New Book Captures Customer Service Excellence

Marybeth Fedyna

Please agree or disagree with the following:

- Every person with whom you communicate is your customer.
- Every time you communicate you make an impression.
- It costs 5 times more to gain a new customer than to retain an existing customer.
- Your communications create the customer's perception of quality.

If you agreed with each of these statements, then you are keenly attuned to the needs of the customer and customer service excellence.

Over the past few years, Career Concepts has become very involved with delivering customer service excellence training programs. With our ongoing objective of providing superior training delivery, we read and review the most up-to-date publications on customer service. A recent discovery by one of our company owners is the new book by Lior Arussy, called *The Experience – How to Wow Your Customers and Create a Passionate Workplace*. This book reads very easily in a fable format and highlights 8 success strategies that all of us in customer service must keep in mind.

#1 - **Technology Does Not Care for Customers: People Do.**

The book starts by telling how a company installed new customer responsiveness software. However, no matter how superior the software may be, it is the following 7 guidelines that really determine the effectiveness of each interaction.

#2 - **Treat the Customer the Way You Want to be Treated.**

Being able to relate to personal experience as a customer is key to your ability to deliver the best experiences to your customers. Feel the annoyance, pain, or frustration of the caller. Respond with the empathy and respect that each of us would like to receive in that circumstance.

#3 - **Own the Problem.**

The book confirms: if you do not own the problem, no one else will. Personal responsibility is key to delivering positive customer experiences.

#4 - **The Customer is Everyone's Job.**

Customer service is not a department; it is the job of the whole organization. Everyone who works at a company is responsible for delivering the best customer service through his/her respective roles.

#5 - **Earning Customer Loyalty Starts with Loyalty to Employees.**

Customer experience is about human interaction. If you want your people to deliver the best experience, give them a good reason to do it. Reward your reps. Customer service excellence is demanding and requires continued patience, professionalism and respect. Provide an environment that lets the reps know that they are appreciated by the organization.

#6 - **Empower People to Solve Problems.**

Do not put your people in the position of having responsibility without authority. Give them the tools to solve the problems they encounter. If you trust them to take the call and handle your customers, trust them to resolve the problems.

#7 - **Listen to Learn.**

Recognize that your customers know your products as well as you do. Stop listening in order to answer and start listening like a student who is ready and willing to receive valuable information. Act on customer suggestions to show your customers that you care enough to build a relationship based on mutuality.

#8 - **Keep Them Excited.**

As in personal relationships, consistency can only go so far. Customers are people and they take for granted what you delivered yesterday. Reinvent the relationship and rejuvenate the experience. Make them excited and keep them coming back for more.

Thank you, Lior Arussy, for these 8 clear and crisp reminders for Customer Service Excellence!!

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The Top Ten Labor Issues for 2003

According to a study by the **Employment Law Alliance**, the top ten labor issues for 2003 will be:

1. Lay-offs and Reduction in Force
2. Family Medical Leave Act
3. Whistle Blower
4. Age Discrimination
5. National Origin
6. Wrongful Termination
7. Wage and Hour
8. Disability Discrimination
9. Employee Misconduct Internal Investigations
10. Disability Discrimination Accommodation