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BOARD CONVERTING NEWS™

An N.V. Publication

AICC Meeting Speaker Interviewed:

Gitomer: 'Entrepreneurs Are The Answer'

by Jim Curley

On October 7, when Jeffrey Gitomer, the best-selling author on sales and customer service, addresses his audience at AICC's Annual Meeting in Las Vegas, he will talk about "their real world," the world of intense competition and great challenges, but also one of personal growth, enhanced customer relationships, and sales successes. Gitomer's attitude is shaped from an appreciation of the independent spirit of these boxmakers and their suppliers. "Entrepreneurs are the answer to a healthy economy," he says. "I write myself a bailout check every day, because I know no one else is going to write it for me."

Recently, I talked with Gitomer, and here's what he had to say:

BCN: You went from salesman to sales guru. Talk about that journey in your life.

Gitomer: I grew up in New Jersey, near Philly. I've always had the "gift of gab," but I never really understood the science of selling. My father was an entrepreneur, so I became one, and I realized as a business owner, I had to become the Chief Executive Salesman.

I manufactured leisure furniture and later imprinted sportswear. In the beginning, I would take one of the beanbag chairs we made, bring it to Bloomingdales in Manhattan, throw it on the floor in front of the buyer and tell him, "Sit in this and then tell me how many you want to buy."

Later, I studied sales methods and attitudes for four hours each morning, and then went out to sell at

12:01 in the afternoon. As a result, when I got into the garment business in New York, I was a lethal weapon.

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- Jeffrey Gitomer



I could go to Manhattan, meet buyers who did not know me and walk out with a million dollar sale - based on my ability to transfer my passion, my enthusiasm, my belief system and my attitude towards others. As a result, the customers bought the product, I didn't sell it.

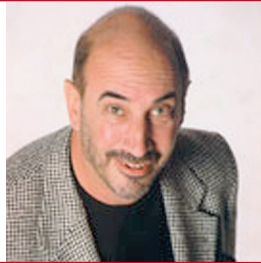
That was in the '70s. In the '80s, I began to do consulting, and when I moved to Charlotte in 1992, I began to write. I went from an expert in selling to an authority on sales. Every penny that I've made from 1992 to today, I can trace back to something I've written. Writing leads to wealth. I became a sales expert because I became dedicated to my writing craft and had to create new things every week. I write from my own practical experience and from my thoughts.

I've given more than 2,000 talks over the years, and I customize and personalize every talk.

BCN: Your audience in Las Vegas will be mainly entrepreneurs with a sales background running small- to mid-sized businesses. Will your message be different for them than it would be for a Fortune 500 corporation?

Gitomer: No, my core message is my core message. Whether my audience is a corporate CEO or a salesperson facing a sales quota he doesn't think he can

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meet, I'm challenging them to do their personal best every time they go out there and make a sales call.

I'm going to bring my AICC audience obvious ideas they've been overlooking for 100 years. My responsibility is to be a dynamic, compelling speaker, and, rest assured, what I say will be so interesting that no one will be texting during my talk.

BCN: Will your talk in Las Vegas be geared simply towards company owners or to sales managers as well?

Gitomer: Every owner of every company lives or dies by their sales numbers. Why would the folks from AICC not bring their sales managers to this meeting so that these employees could get first-hand information, rather than the owners having regrets that their managers weren't there? I have never done a seminar when someone didn't come up to me afterwards and say, "I wish so-and-so were with me."

I addressed a large manufacturing company just yesterday and all the salespeople were there. Even then, the CEO came up to me and said, "Boy, I wish my parts and service people were here today. I'm bringing you back for two more seminars."

BCN: What are some specific ways in which your philosophies and overall approach to sales can help sales managers get more from their existing salesmen?

Gitomer: I don't teach people how to sell; I teach why people buy. People don't like to be sold, but they love to buy. I teach how to build relationships, rather than make sales. I teach value versus price. I teach staying in touch and service. I teach customer loyalty, not customer satisfaction.

Regarding sales managers, I teach them to encour-

age each member of their team to be their best. Leadership is by example, not by a dictated policy, circumstance or goal. I teach them to establish goals with their sales staff and to go with them on sales calls once a week.

BCN: What qualities would a manager want in a new salesperson?

Gitomer: I would want a person who is smart and self-starting and has a great attitude and a past history of success. I can teach a person with those qualities how to sell.

BCN: "Have some fun. Make some sales" is one action you advise. What do you mean by that?

Gitomer: I'm looking for a friendly person, not a professional person. The more professional you are, the more you have to deal with policy and price. The friendlier you are, the more you can deal with relationship and value.

Recently, I talked to a group of bankers. Typically, a banker goes in to a possible client and is very professional. "Here are our CDs, check accounts, bank loans, etc." The client then says, "I'm interested in a bank loan." In response, the banker asks for a whole pile of papers - a business plan, tax returns, etc.

Why can't a banker just say, "Jeffrey, here are five things you've got to do to get a loan from my bank or any other bank." If I get a personal interaction, I'm "all ears."

I'm going to give my audience in Las Vegas better ideas on how to introduce themselves to potential clients and differentiate themselves from competitors.

BCN: How do you handle the salesperson's lament: "Our product is a commodity."

Gitomer: Boxes aren't traded on an exchange like pork bellies or oil. There has to be something that puts value to a product and differentiates you from your competitors.

I'm going to explain to the group in AICC what happens when you cut a price or match a price. I'm going to teach them how never to do this.

BCN: I saw an article you recently wrote on joining Twitter. How can sales folks use Twitter, Facebook, You Tube or other "social media" tools to sell successfully?

Gitomer: In Las Vegas, I'll talk about social media, what messages customers are looking to receive, and why you should be sending those messages. For example, I would "tweet" value messages on a daily basis.

Some people in business can't even open up their

own laptops. I'm going to challenge them that this is a new world, and they're either going to be in it or lose out to someone who is.

People aren't putting enough value in their marketplace so that customers will call them.'

BCN: Let me present a few comments you've made in various media and ask you to explain them a bit more.

- **"Don't educate the customer. Educate yourself."**

Gitomer: Customers don't want an education; they want answers. As a customer, I don't need to know how the box is made; I want to know how the box will help my brand, my image, my customer's ease of use, the fun of opening up the box, whatever it might be.

- **"The only good news about price objections is that they are often buying signals in disguise."**

Gitomer: When someone says your price is too high, what they're really telling you is "I want to buy from you, but you haven't sold me yet." What I'm saying is that "price is too high" is not a problem; it's a symptom. You haven't conveyed enough value so that the customer doesn't care about the price."

- **"I bring value to everyone before I ask for anything."**

Gitomer: Jim, did I call you or did you call me for this interview? I don't call anyone. I've been successful because people don't like to be sold, but they like to buy.

My experience is that if I put enough value in the marketplace - my seminars, my books, my e-mail magazine, my weekly columns, my "tweets."etc. - people

will call me. And I'm telling you that the people aren't putting enough value in their marketplace so that customers will call them. And I'm talking about value first - not value added. "Value first" is what creates the law of attraction for me and differentiates me from all the other speakers out there.

- **"Leaders of the company determine its environment."**

Gitomer: It's pretty interesting. I head a staff of more than 30 people and I'm the friendliest, happiest guy on the planet. By contrast, in many companies, people ask, referring to their boss, "Is he in a good mood today?"

If leaders look for loyalty from their employees, they must give loyalty. In order to get a positive attitude, the leader must project one. Our company goes into customers globally and changes corporate culture with "Yes" attitudes at a time when morale and attitude is at a all-time low.

We will not take on a training contract from anyone unless we've trained the whole company in attitude. In Las Vegas, I'll challenge AICC members that everyone in their company has to be the happiest, friendliest person in the world, and that starts with the leaders.

BCN: Thanks, Jeffrey, for your time.

Gitomer: Listen, I can't wait to give this talk. I have a long history with corrugated. When I was a teenager, my dad was in the kitchen cabinet business, and I used to wrap our cabinets in singleface. Did it thousands of times. It'll be a very nostalgic talk for me; I'll be thinking about my father's business and those times when I speak in Vegas.

Also, at my company, Buy Gitomer, Inc., we buy thousands of boxes a year. I'm coming to Las Vegas not only as a sales or a customer loyalty expert; I'm also coming as a customer.