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Gallo's Message To Independents:

Don't Curb Your Enthusiasm

by Jim Curley

Though inspiration is downgraded to only one percent in Edison's formula for genius, it plays a much larger role in carrying a company to success. That's the message that communications coach Carmine Gallo will present to AICC members at their annual Spring Meeting in San Diego this April. Recently, we talked with Gallo, author of such business best-sellers as *Fire Them Up!* and the just-released *The Presentation Secrets of Steve Jobs*, about the role of inspiration and leadership in successful companies. Here's what he had to say:

BCN: One of the chapters in *Fire Them Up!* is titled "Paint a Picture." How would you "paint a picture" of your business career?

Gallo: I was a journalist for 15 years, as well as a television anchor. During that time, I interviewed many business executives and found that often they weren't effective communicators of their brand.

In 2000, I started moonlighting as a communications coach to help high-level executives speak better, present better, and communicate more effectively. I started my own media training company, but soon expanded my interest into studying what made leaders inspiring, the sorts of people who generated the spark that made people in the company love to go to work each Monday.

As a columnist on small business communications for **BusinessWeek.com**, I interviewed a number of inspiring leaders and began to delineate what made them inspiring and how they transferred their enthusiasm to others in their companies. This formed the basis for *Fire Them Up!*

BCN: What will be the basis of your talk in San Diego?

Gallo: What I'm going to share with the meeting attendees in April are best practices - case studies from companies whose leaders I've admired and lesson from executives whom I've interviewed - from companies like Google, Starbucks, the Ritz-Carlton, and Ford. They all have inspiring leaders and do things a little differently. And it all comes down to communicating a vision to their employees and their customers.

'I want the AICC members to see themselves, if just for the time I'm with them, as Chief Inspiration Officers for their brands.'

- Carmine Gallo



BCN: So you see a correlation between the ability to communicate and the overall success of a company?

Gallo: Some of the leaders I talked with said, "Communication is everything." Take the Ritz-Carlton: How do you get 9,000 employees around the world to share the vision of the founder and provide extraordinary service even if they're getting minimum wage? It comes down to communicating a vision, and that comes from the top.

I visited Zappos in Henderson, Nevada. All visitors to their company, be they customers, vendors or other people, are picked up in a company car at the hotel where they are staying and driven to Zappos' headquarters. The folks at Zappos want you to experience their culture, and everyone at Zappos represented that brand very effectively and very enthusiastically. That all starts from the leader.

BCN: Your audience in San Diego will include many entrepreneurial people, often founders of either boxmaking or supplier companies, who are highly self-motivated. What's their role in firing up themselves and their companies?

Gallo: Most of the people I spend time with are entrepreneurs. Marc Benioff started **SalesForce.com** in his apartment, and it's now a billion dollar company. He wrote a book about his experience and a lot of the book has to do with communicating his vision.

Passion is a big part of what I talk about. Of course, you can't inspire anyone unless you are passionate yourself. At San Diego, I'll talk about Richard Tait, who started the board game Cranium. Tait left Microsoft to start a board game in which every player has the chance to excel in one way or another. His enthusiasm for that product was so infectious that he convinced investors, partners and other Microsoft employees at Microsoft to join him for that ride.

Before I first met Tait, a colleague of mine said, "Within five minutes, you're going to want to work for him." I got the point. Tait is so passionate about the product and what it can do for the lives of this customers that it pervades his whole organization.

What I learned from talking to some of the folks at AICC is that customer service is a great differentiator in their industries. In order to give good customer service, the leaders of your companies had better be excellent communicators in order to motivate their employees.

Entrepreneurs often have an advantage over those working in larger corporations in that they can provide meaning to their employees. And that starts with a passionate commitment to the brand. The entrepreneurial leader must communicate passion for the brand throughout the whole organization.

BCN: Don't companies have to evolve from that initial entrepreneurial vision?

Gallo: In a way, yes. In *Fire Them Up!*, I devote a chapter to inviting participation. The most interesting companies I've worked with are those that realize that they must be committed to open, honest and transparent communication, which is a little scary initially. The companies that are mainstays on the Best Places to Work lists are those that invite their employees to participate in the growth of the company.

Griffin Hospital in Derby, Connecticut went from one of the worst hospitals in the region to one of the 100 Best Companies to Work For by becoming very transparent. They asked their workers, "What would you want the hospital experience to be like?" The workers wanted a patient-centered experience. Since they adopted some of the changes suggested by employees, Griffin has become a template to a positive hospital experience, and its customer satisfaction rating has soared.

BCN: The AICC Spring Meeting theme is "Authenticity: Delivering What You Promise, Profitably." How would you define "authenticity" and how important is it for an effective motivational leader?

Gallo: My definition of authenticity is leading with a passionate commitment to your vision. Vision provides a roadmap to where the company is going. A vision statement should be no longer than a Twitter post (140 characters) and is the description of a better world made possible by your company or service.

Years back, the entrepreneurs at Google walked into a meeting with Sequoia Capital. When asked what Google did, they replied with a vision statement: "Google provides access to the world's information in one click." The investors got it immediately, though the Google executives used only ten words.

Creating a vision statement is a great exercise and very motivating as well. It keeps people focused on the goals of your company, the big picture.

BCN: Your latest book, hot off the press, is called *The Presentation Secrets of Steve Jobs*. What can AICC members and other converters learn from Jobs?

Gallo: The one thing about Jobs that is important for our attendees in April to focus on is that Jobs always remembers who his customers are. In 1997, when he returned to Apple after an 11-year absence, Jobs met with employees, customers and analysts. He told his audience, "Let's remember who our customers are. They're the creative ones, the people who think with their right brains. They're the ones out to change the world. They're the one we have to make tools for. We always have and we always will."

It's important to note that Jobs talked about his product as a tool, something customers use, rather than as a computer, something his company makes.

Corrugated converters need to think about their customers too. Who are they? What are their problems and how can you solve them? Your customers are not interested in your products. They're interested in their hopes, their dreams, and their visions. How can you help them achieve their dreams?

In San Diego, I'll also moderate a panel discussion before my presentation on challenges AICC members face and how they can use communication to address these challenges.

I want the AICC members to see themselves as Chief Inspiration Officers for their brands. They have the ability to motivate, to inspire, and positively influence everyone. To do that, they have to learn the language of motivation.