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You & I

No need to send me the proper phraseology but I always get confused when talking about myself and another person. Is it 'Tom & me', 'Tom and I', 'me and Tom'? I know for certain that it isn't 'I and Tom' because it sounds so obviously ridiculous. I'll be impressed if my Word software gets smart enough to pop up and correct me when this conundrum presents itself next. Are you listening Microsoft? Of course you are. Word is, pardon the pun, that everything you type in Word is secretly being logged and sent to Seattle.

Anyway, I have a problem with the word 'I'. It gets used too much, by me and probably most everyone else as well. It is a pretty selfish word if you think about it. When you use the term 'I', you are likely stating something you believe, something you did, are doing or about to do. When the sentence begins with "I ...", it doesn't leave a whole lot of room to include anyone else, does it?

In our money-making we need to get out of the 'I' business. This is especially true when we are looking to sell something. Think about how you sell. How much time do you devote to talking about yourself when speaking to customers, prospects and the like? Do you spend most of your time talking about your capabilities? In this respect, using 'we' is just as bad as 'I'. "We have the best customer service in the business." Says who? You, and frankly that has limited value to your audience.

Consequently, the word we don't use nearly enough is 'you'. If you go to www.world-english.org, they have a ranking of the most commonly used words in the English language. You'll find that "I" comes in at #18. Any guess on where 'you' falls on that list? It's #9. So if we use it more in general language, why do we suddenly

abandon it when it comes to speaking with our customers? There are lots of theories about that. The obvious one is Maslow and his hierarchy of needs. At the base of this needs hierarchy are what is referred to as physiological needs. In effect, our need to survive is the most basic, fundamental need we have. The need to survive is very 'I' driven. It doesn't consider others. It's all about one's self and the need to do whatever it takes to perpetuate ourselves. When we are working in our businesses, we often view it as a survival activity. We have to make profits to live, to get by. I think that sense of the need to survive in business causes us to wrongly focus on what we need, not what the customer does.

What this all means is that we have to work at thinking about our customers above ourselves. Here's an excellent idea on how to do that. When encountering a customer, visualize yourself as a doctor and your products or services only as a potential cure for the customers' problems or needs. A great doctor is a great doctor because they are great at diagnosing the problem. The only way to do diagnose a problem (& ultimately produce a cure) initially is to ask questions of the patient, in your case the customer. Think about it. If you have a great doctor, I bet one of the best things you can say about them is that they actually ask questions to find out exactly what is wrong, and they actually listen to your answers. They don't just look at you and start prescribing drugs or surgery. They focus on you.

Think about this 'I vs. you' issue when it comes to your marketing. Is your website about what you can do or is it based on what your customers' needs are? Do your brochures talk about you and all of your accomplishments and skills, or does it focus on the problems you solve for the customer?

Audit all of your potential communication interfaces with customers. Place a premium on the customer's perspective and be sure you are addressing that perspective. Make sure the 'you' count outnumbers the 'I' or 'we' count by a factor of 5 to 1... at least.

Oh, on that list of most commonly used English words, 'love' comes in at #387 and 'mean' comes in at #142. We're definitely a work in progress when it comes to what we should be saying.

See you next time.



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