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August 19, 2012

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What the world needs is more association executives

By MARK J. GOLDEN, FASAE, CAE | 08/16/2012

The thesis of Dan Pink's upcoming book, *To Sell is Human: The Surprising Truth About Moving Others*, is that we're all in sales. He previewed the contents at the closing general session at ASAE's annual meeting this week in Dallas.

The presentation was a little bit of a first draft, which I am sure he will polish and perfect. But the content was spot on: whatever our trade or profession, we are all in the business of persuading someone else to give up something of their own (their time, attention, money, actions) for something we have to offer (a product, a service, a cause) in an exchange of value to both parties.



And while he spoke in the vernacular of sales, the case he made for the new, universal salesperson sounded to my association-centric ears like recognition that the very skills, traits and abilities we have always relied upon as association leaders are precisely those needed in the new world he described. (At left, Dan Pink at the closing session of the ASAE annual meeting, this week in Dallas. Photo by www.ChuckFazio.com.)

To wit, the characteristics of:

- **Attunement:** The ability to see through the other's eyes and understand from the other's perspective;
 - **Buoyancy:** the ability to bounce back from constant rejection, selling with undiminished energy and commitment; and
 - **Clarity:** We talk about selling as "problem solving." But with the access to information that is available to any motivated consumer today, if they **know** what their problem is, they can find a solution themselves. The real issue is to assist in problem definition.
- Then the skills that are needed to do this successfully:
- **Mastering the pitch:** making a clear, concise, compelling and attuned statement of what you want the prospect to do in a short attention span world;
 - **The ability to improvise:** adjusting on the fly to the unexpected when it occurs (which it constantly will); and
 - **The ability to serve:** enacting an exchange that is truly meaningful, creating new value that is recognized by all sides in the transaction, and even by the broader public as well.

Beyond our specific skills in the business of association management, beyond our informed expertise in the profession, industry or cause we represent, isn't that precisely the unique competence that we, as association leaders, have always brought to the table?

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