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### Two Books + One Blog = A Better Salesperson

One of the perks of being a trainer is that I get to meet people who work in our industry from all over the country. Whenever I talk to these industry leaders, the conversation frequently turns to the subject of what they are reading. In the words of Eleanor Roosevelt, *“Small minds discuss people, average minds discuss events, great minds discuss ideas.”* Successful people are always trying to expand their knowledge and looking for ways to grow as professionals and as people. The best way to accomplish this is to crack a book and absorb the wisdom they contain. This ongoing quest for knowledge has several positive effects.

Regular reading makes us more creative. Our brains are like buckets of Lego bricks. The bigger our buckets, the more bricks we have and the wider variety of shapes of bricks we have; the more different kinds of things we can build. By filling our minds with a wide range of ideas we will be able to develop better and more creative solutions for our customer’s problems. Regular reading makes us more confident. The more we know, the more sure we will be of ourselves. This confidence is contagious. When we trust ourselves, the more likely it is that our customers will trust us. The more they trust us, the more likely they are to buy. Continuous learning keeps us fresh. New ideas are energizing, they prevent us from slipping into ruts. Embracing new information and working out ways to apply them on a call, keeps us engaged in our careers.

Just as you feed your body everyday to maintain your physical strength, you should feed your mind daily to keep it healthy. Here are a few things that I’ve read that I highly recommend.

#### **“GO: A Kidd’s Guide to Graphic Design”** by Chip Kidd

Chip Kidd is one of the leading graphic designers working today. He is particularly well known for his award winning book cover designs. As advertising sales people we wear a lot of hats, sales person, copy writer and of course ad designer. Most sales people are good verbal communicators. We are comfortable with words. Generally we are less skilled at visual communication. Access to computer graphics and digital media has made our society more and more visually oriented. “GO” is an excellent overview of visual communication and design techniques. Kidd writes in a simple, conversational style that is easy for non-designers to grasp. He discusses all of the factors, line, color, scale, typography etc. that go into an effective design. He provides examples from his own work

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and from other leading designers to illustrate his ideas. Though I have been designing ads for decades, I took away some valuable ideas from this small book. It helped me to understand the language of design and I am sure that it will help me to create better ads for my customers.

***“The Art of Explanation, Making Your Ideas, Products and Services Easier to Understand”*** by Lee LeFever

This is a book that goes right to the heart of what we do as advertising sales people. Advertising is an odd product to sell. Advertising is neither a tangible nor an intangible product. While customers can see and touch our papers, they have a harder time visualizing the value of our readership. We need to be able to tell our story in ways that help potential advertisers understand the value we bring to their businesses. Lee LeFever is the founder of CommonCraft.com. Common Craft produces online videos to help their clients explain their products and services. LeFever has given a lot of thought to what is required for information to be transferred from one individual to another. He has looked at what techniques work and which techniques are ineffectual. He makes the point that simply conveying facts is not an explanation. Explanation requires preparation; facts given out of context are more likely to confuse the prospect than they are to enlighten them. I found his 360 degree approach to communication particularly interesting. LeFever uses real world examples to illustrate all of his points. The Art of Explanation breaks the process of explanation down into these six simple steps:

- Agreement—Getting the customer to agree with you on a “big picture” concept such as, “It is a tough time to be in business today.”
- Context—This moves the “big picture” to a more specific place. “Many small businesses have trouble attracting enough customers.”
- Story—This puts your ideas into a narrative format. Tell the story of a successful advertiser.
- Connections—This shows the customer how the story relates to their business or something they already believe in. “Investing in advertising is similar to the investment you’ve made in this beautiful facility; you want it to be inviting to new customers.”
- Description—This uses facts to make the story and the connection more tangible.
- Conclusion—Summarizes the information conveyed in the explanation.

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I found LeFever's description of how to use stories and analogies/metaphors particularly valuable. He makes the point that "Facts give stories substance, stories give facts meaning."

Throughout The Art of Explanation, LeFever summarizes his key ideas in bullet pointed lists. The book concludes with a chapter on using simple visuals to make your point. One of the ways I measure how much I take away from a book is how mutilated it is when I have finished with it. My copy of Lee LeFever's "The Art of Explanation" is festooned with page marking post-it notes, lots of yellow highlighting and quite a few notes penciled in the margins.

### **"Seth's Blog" by Seth Godin**

Every morning when I open my e-mail I am inundated with information. I get blog posts, newsletters and lots of ads thinly veiled as "content." A lot of these get quickly deleted, but I always read Seth Godin's daily blog post. I have been a big fan of Seth Godin for years. I have read all of his books (Purple Cow, the Big Moo, Tribes etc.) and always found them to be fun to read and packed with valuable information. I am quite frankly impressed with the creative outpour he puts into his blog. Seven days a week, 365 days a year he drops a bit of wisdom in my inbox. Some days it is just a sentence or two, other days it is a full blown essay, but it is always interesting and thought provoking. Often I read Seth's blog and have an "Aha" moment. Seth Godin is a very perceptive person, he has a way to see through the clutter and get to the point of a subject. I frequently find myself forwarding his blog to my coworkers or to my friends and family. One of the reasons I like Seth's Blog is that I never know what to expect from his very active mind. He may choose to present a big concept; a recent post was titled "Your relationship to the future," to much more practical advice such as how to use lists to enhance your sales. No matter what his subject may be, his blog is always creatively written and enjoyable to read. Reading Seth's Blog makes me feel like I have one of the world's most brilliant marketing experts as my personal mentor. To sign up for Seth's Blog go to <http://sethgodin.typepad.com/>

### **Getting Better and Better**

My children are both professionals; my son is an attorney and my daughter is a psychologist. To maintain their professional licenses they are required to take CEU, continuing education units. This is necessary because their chosen fields are complex and ever evolving. Our profession is also complex and changing at an unprecedented rate. To continue to be successful and to deliver the value that our customers expect and

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deserve we must also continually improve our skills and expand our knowledge. Fortunately the bookstores, the libraries and the web provide an endless supply of books and other sources of information for us to use in this quest. As the old saying goes, “*The only difference between the person we are today and the person we will be in five years are the people we meet and the books we read.*” The next time we bump into one another at a conference, I’ll be interested to hear “What have you been reading?”

*This article was written by Jim Busch of the Pittsburgh Pennysaver.*

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