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President's Corner



Lisa Miller

Our actions speak louder than words

Do you find this to be a true statement?

Last Friday I was leaving a high school football game and the losing team (48-0) was walking to their bus. I hear a kindergartener say to his mom, “Mom, that football player just gave me a high five!” You could hear the excitement in his voice.

I visited a county park this past weekend. It was a beautiful fall afternoon where the breeze was brisk and the fish were biting. I was walking on the trail and saw an older woman fishing. She didn’t engage me and I figured she was concentrating on fishing, so I simply strolled by enjoying the view of the lake. After returning down the trail, I stopped where she had been fishing to find four small 2- to 4-inch bluegill lying on the grass. Believe me, I am no fisherwoman! (Did you know even singing to them doesn’t make them bite?) But I do know well enough that if they aren’t big enough to keep, you throw them back into the water.

On my walk to the post office, I see the president of the bank walking out the side door in front of me. He proceeds to take the white trash bag and place it into the dumpster behind the bank. This simply speaks for itself.

Actions speak louder than words. The player was showing great sportsmanship by simply acknowledging a younger child, even though his team had just had the wind taken out of them. The woman showed her poor sportsmanship by not following a simple rule to put a small fish back instead of letting them die. The president of the bank showed he isn’t any better than any one of his employees and can take out his own trash.

Every day we have the choice to make the decision for our actions to speak louder than words. Each of us are publishers and, of course, we have all heard the pen is mightier than the sword. BUT after my experiences this past weekend, I took a different look. Should we be more focused on what we are doing within our publications? Should we do more sections that focus on the good for our community? Would our actions then cause our words to be better? Maybe we should take more time to get to know employees instead of focusing on email? How could we utilize more organizations such as MFCP?

We all hear the negative when mistakes are made; however, very rarely do we hear the positives as publishers. This week we did a section that celebrated a 125th anniversary for a local business. We received a compliment back stating what a nice job we did and how nice it looked. Not a large money-maker, but yet our actions focusing on them probably created a buzz within our readership. I definitely see that as a win-win.

As publishers we have overcome several obstacles over the past 18 months. I believe the surviving publications are in the positions we are today because of our actions during the hard times. Don’t let the negative actions impact your outlook. Be the publisher that wants their community to shine within your publication. Take the necessary actions to be the good so, in turn, your words within your publication are the good in a community. Take action to reach out to other MFCP publishers and touch base.

Start the fourth quarter with the right actions.

From the office



Lee Borkowski

Let's talk circulation!



As we make plans for the Spring 2022 conference we need to survey you, our members. We're looking to put together a circulation summit to be held on Thursday, March 3rd from 1 until 4PM.

During this time we will discuss all things circulation for all delivery types.

Carrier

Postal

Rack

Is this something you or a team member would want to attend? Please let us know by completing the short survey at: <https://forms.gle/NZSQvwJ7auG5PGsS7>

Thanks! And, we hope to see you in Ames this spring!

Lee

Member News



MFPC lost a good friend last month: Donald "Tiny" Weigel. Tiny, husband of member Deb Weigel, was a familiar face at the MFPC conferences over the years. He's fondly remembered for his keen sense of humor, devotion to his family and love of the Iowa Hawkeyes.

Tiny Weigel

Donald "Tiny" Joseph Weigel, 69, of Strawberry Point, Iowa, passed away on Thursday, September 2, 2021, at his home from pancreatic cancer. He was born on November 25, 1951, at Manchester, the son of Robert and Germaine (Drees) Weigel. Tiny was raised in the Earlville area and graduated in 1970 from Maquoketa Valley High School. After graduation, Tiny worked in construction.

Tiny met Deb Kruse at a stock car race on a blind date on July 14, 1974. On October 1, 1977, Tiny was united in marriage to Deb at SS. Peter and Paul Catholic Church in Petersburg. Three daughters were born to this union. Tiny and Deb lived in Manchester for eight years before moving to Strawberry Point. Tiny worked with Duane Sherman for several years before starting his own construction company, Tiny's Home Improvement. He also worked as maintenance manager for Yankee Settlement, Strawberry Point Leisure Homes and Strawberry Homes. Tiny was also a valued employee of Leonard-Muller Funeral Home for almost 6 years.

Tiny was a long-time member of St. Mark Catholic Church. He was a devoted Iowa Hawkeye fan and a long-time football season ticket holder. Tiny also enjoyed boating, going to his cabin on Esmann Island, and traveling. He liked classic car cruises and especially enjoyed driving his 1970 Chevelle convertible.

Survivors include his wife of 43 years, Deb Weigel of Strawberry Point; his three daughters, Mica (Josh) Geistkemper, Ciara (Spencer) Rave, and Tessa (Kyle Kelchen) Weigel all of Manchester; six grandchildren, Harper, Harlow, and Briggs Geistkemper, Blayr and Crew Rave, and Ava Besch; his three sisters, Wilma (Steve) Billhorn and LuAnn McQuillen of Manchester, and LaVonne "Lovey" Guetzko of Olathe, Kansas; his brother, Joe (Anna) Weigel of Manchester; his brothers-in-law, Lance Billhorn of Manchester, Lee (Patti) Kruse of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and Chris (Pam) Kruse of Earlville; and many nieces and nephews.

Tiny was preceded in death by his parents; his three sisters, Kathy Gorkow, Marjean Billhorn, and Marilyn Corcoran; his sister-in-law and brother-in-law, Sandy and Fred Ries; and his in-laws, Walter and Catherine Kruse.

John Draper is the 2021 ACP Volunteer Award



Gladys Van Drie presents the
2021 ACP Volunteer Award to
John Draper at the ACP/MFCP Conference

Gladys Van Drie was the perfect choice to present the 2021 ACP Volunteer Award to John Draper. Her simple, but powerful message says it all!

It gives me great pleasure to present this year's volunteer award to John Draper. John has spent countless hours volunteering to make sure the merger of the two organizations was successful. His leadership was a valuable gift to both organizations.

John has also spent 11 years leading the Rising Stars Program. To the Rising Stars I say, "what a wonderful leader you have had!"

Denzel Washington, an accomplished actor, had this to say about volunteering. "At the end of the day it's not about what you have or even what you've accomplished. It's about who you lifted up, who you've made better. It's about what you give back."

So, to all of you here and especially to the Rising Stars go out to your families, your work pace, your communities and lift someone up, give back, follow John's example. Make the world a better place.

Congratulations John!

MVP'S AT CONFERENCE



MFCP welcomed the first class of MVP's (Most Valuable Professionals) to the annual conference in Des Moines on Sept 17. Shown (L-R) are: Amanda Hoefler, Kari Jurrens, Carrie Fowler.

By Kari Jurrens

The joint conference has come and gone with ACP & MFCP and boy did we all have a great time. Some of the major takeaways that the MVP's took away from the conference were time spent with Holly Hoffman and her individual time with the MVP's and Rising Stars group. We felt motivated and refreshed to tackle the tasks that come our way each day! Other takeaways included time with Kevin Slimp and what is in style for fonts to keep designers with the current trends as well as sales trainings that reminded us "Be a Fountain, Not a Drain" and "Belief in Yourself if the Greatest Superpower". To say we are excited for the next conference and what it may bring is an understatement.

During the call our topic of discussion was how working in a positive work environment can help everyone. Amanda brought 7 topics of how to bring a positive and great working attitude to work. We discussed if we have a "downy dumper" in our office and how they can ruin the environment and how working remotely and relating to our co-workers can be done so differently. Some of us like to do small gifts for co-workers while others like to have calls every so often just to check in or get together and work on the relationships. Tiffany reminded us to share our failures with new employees to remind them that we are human and it's okay to not be perfect all the time.

At the end of the day we are all in the business to grow our business. Sometimes those small reminders and uplifting quotes like we heard at conference can change our whole attitude which can help the whole office. Be sure to give your best every day and remember you never work a day in your life if you love what you do!

Kevin Slimp



Growing Readership

“Just because you build it doesn’t mean they’ll come.”

Lost
or Buying a Home

Kevin Slimp
kevin@kevinslimp.co

I’m in a positive mood concerning the newspaper industry. After the past couple of weeks, I continue to see incredibly upbeat signs about things happening in our business.

For the first time in 18 months, I spoke at a live convention last week in Des Moines, Iowa. Meeting with community newspaper publishers and journalists from throughout the United States lifted my spirits. There wasn’t a lot of time for personal visits. I was scheduled to speak for 75 minutes seven times during the two-day event. However, I managed to squeeze in meetings with publishers from South Carolina, Minnesota, Iowa, New York, Idaho, and other places to discuss what’s happening at their papers.

There was no “doom and gloom” in these conversations. There were several “I’m starting a new paper and want your advice” and “I want to get more training for my staff” conversations. There were a few “I’m updating my newsroom and would like your thoughts” conversations. While I wasn’t crazy about stepping onto a plane and meeting in person with COVID-19 still hanging around, I left inspired by how these newspapers are moving forward.

Speaking of moving forward, redesign seems to be on a lot of papers’ minds these days. While working on a redesign for a friend’s paper in Tennessee in September, I received a phone call from another publisher friend whose paper I redesigned three years ago.

“I wanted to tell you,” he said, “we’ve grown in subscribers since doing the redesign three years ago. I waited for him to continue, “but counter sales have been dismal” or something along those lines. Instead, there was an “and” statement. “And we’ve had a healthy increase in counter sales, as well.” “I know there’s a lot more to it than just the redesign,” he continued, “but the redesign has had a lot to do with our growth.”

Boom! Wow! Now that’s a phone call.

Tony Cox, the publisher who called, is constantly working to increase readership at his papers in Clinton and Farragut, Tennessee. He still does things papers used to do back in the heyday to increase readership. I’ve known Tony from his work with paid and free newspapers, and he’s always working on ways to gain new readers.

In a conversation a few days ago, he told me about using sampling to grow his readership base. “Old school sampling still works. We’ve added 31 new subscriptions in 35 days.” He went on to say, “The first weeks were done using good ole USPS delivery. The next week was done using saturation of a newspaper carrier route” (by a nearby metro paper). Each week has netted new subscribers the following day, meaning a person actually wrote a check and stuck it in the mail.”

Tony added they also received subscribers through their website after folks received a free paper. “I was really impressed,” he told me. “That’s an immediate return.”

I asked Tony if he had advice for other papers trying to grow circulation, and he had plenty. “Circulation efforts require effort 52 weeks per year,” he told me. Something else he said brought back memories of the movie “Field of Dreams.” “If you build it,” he began, “it doesn’t necessarily mean they will come. You have to invite them.” Amen to that, Tony.

Growing interest in Affinity

Another topic that doesn’t seem to be going away is interest in Affinity Publisher, the software giving Adobe InDesign a run for its money. While in Des Moines, several publishers asked if I thought moving from InDesign or QuarkXpress to Publisher was a good idea. Since returning home, I’ve heard from other publishers asking the same question at both free and paid newspapers. I’ll tell you what I’ve told them. If you have a relatively straightforward editorial/design process that doesn’t use XML tags (often used by third-party classified systems), it might be worth ordering a copy of Publisher for \$55 and having one of your designers give it a spin. If your composition is heavily dependent on XML tags and InDesign libraries, however, I’d suggest sticking with InDesign for the time being.

Kevin Slimp has been a popular consultant and speaker in the newspaper industry since developing the PDF remote printing method in 1994. His upcoming webinars on design, circulation, and software can be found at newspaperacademy.com.

Ad-Libs



Lessons from a failed advertiser

John Foust, Raleigh, NC

I remember talking to Clark about his early days in advertising. When he started his then-small marketing business, one of his first clients was a fast-food establishment that needed help with an introductory campaign. Although the store manager knew almost nothing about advertising, he understood that it was important.

According to Clark, three factors drove the advertising strategy: (1) the budget was severely limited, (2) although it was a national brand, the business was new to the market, and (3) a large university was about two miles away.

“In those pre-Internet days, the college market was the store manager’s best option,” Clark said, “and I figured the surest way to reach those students was through the college newspaper. The challenge was to give them a reason to travel two miles for fast-food. I decided to run a series of quarter-page ads, with discount coupons. The price fit the manager’s budget, and the coupons would give him a way to measure results. Each ad had a code number on the coupon, so he would know which days of the week drew more responses.”

When Clark dropped by the store after a few ads ran, the store manager held up a big paper grocery bag which was overflowing with coupons. There was no organization at all, and it was obvious that coupons had been mixed together in the bag. The ads had pulled in some customers, but – even though they had discussed the significance of measuring results – the manager clearly had no interest in following through.

“Unfortunately, that fast-food place didn’t stay open very long,” Clark explained. “For several years after it closed, I wondered if I could have provided more help. But eventually I came to realize that advertising alone can’t keep a business going. People were willing to try the restaurant once, but the food simply wasn’t good enough to bring them back. The store manager had a gruff personality that may have turned off customers. I also heard that there were staffing problems and issues with state restaurant inspections.”

Although that was a painful experience, it taught Clark some lessons which benefited him in later campaigns. “The first lesson was the importance of a system for clients to track ad responses,” he said. “That can be as simple as a box with folders to organize coupons. Or it can be as sophisticated as a spreadsheet or tracking software.

“The second lesson was to develop a way to capture customer information – at least a name and email address. That can be done with some kind of loyalty program, a requirement to provide information before downloading an online coupon, or an in-person sign-up for future deals.

“The biggest lesson of all,” Clark said, “was the first-hand observation of the power of the consumer’s in-store experience. The ultimate goal is for the customer to see the store as worth a second, third and tenth visit. Experience, not advertising, is the determining factor in customer loyalty.”

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John Foust has conducted training programs for thousands of newspaper advertising professionals. Many ad departments are using his training videos to save time and get quick results from in-house training. E-mail for information: john@johnfoust.com

Bob Berting



When a publication is headed for trouble

Bob Berting,
Berting Communications

It's rare for a newspaper to head off a marketing strategy problem before a crisis is upon them. More often, at times, it takes the sudden entry of a new competitor in the market, a serious plunge in sales, or a similar emergency to get a strategy change. The answer is to evaluate the publication's marketing program on an objective on-going weekly basis.

Here are 6 ways that the publication is heading for trouble:

1. **Cutting rates become the driving force to get sales**

Deep discounting, constantly offering "special deals" is an indicator that the publication is using lower prices to beat competition. Customers see the publication as just a low cost medium, and don't see any other value in doing business.

2. **The publication can't be differentiated from competition**

It is vital that the publication maintain a unique identity that distinguishes it from the competition. This branding process is on-going and under constant review. The question is—how often is it reviewed?

3. **Steady stream of sales gimmicks**

When one special promotion runs into the next, customers soon think that nothing is really special. Instead of getting customers on an ongoing campaign, the publication floods the market with signature pages, national widget month, and other one-time fluff promotions that threaten the budgets of advertisers who want to put their money in campaigns that get response.

4. **Sales management tactics change arbitrarily**

Instead of a roller coaster of contests, trips, and bonus programs, the publication needs a unified plan of rewards that will motivate the salespeople on an on-going basis. This can be an incentive plan based on increasing sales, any activity that helps dramatically the image of the publication in the marketplace, etc.

5. **More and more leads come from the sales force**

Of course salespeople should develop leads, but if salespeople are the primary source of new business, the publication has a marketing problem. Even the best salespeople can't be at the right place, at the right time, all the time. The publication needs a well developed marketing program to keep their name in front of prospects, so when they're ready to buy, the sales staff can enter the picture from a position of strength.

6. Customers start saying “ I didn’t know you did that”

Even when long-time customers don’t have a clear picture of the publication’s overall capabilities, it’s a sign that marketing is failing. So many times, a booklet or brochure showing ALL the publication’s services can be very effective because it clarifies and reinforces what the publication offers. Of course an effective website is another powerful tool. But that’s another story.

Bob Berting’s new e-book #4 for advertising salespeople

Bob is the author of 4 best-selling e-books for the newspaper industry Bob’s newest e-book “**Smart Customer Connections For Advertising Salespeople**” is a publication that is very relative and helpful for print media salespeople dealing with their customers in today’s CoronaVirus atmosphere. You can order any of Bob’s books on his website: www.bobberting.com.

Read Bob’s e-books and discover how his vast experience and know-how can help you achieve much more business for you and your publication. You’ll greatly benefit from the wisdom of one of America’s top advertising sales experts.

Bob is a professional speaker, advertising sales trainer, publisher marketing consultant, and leading columnist in many national and regional newspaper trade association publications. He is the President of Berting Communications and can be reached at bob@bobberting.com or 317-849-5408.

Getting Lucky at ACP Meetings

If someone goes to an out-of-town conference and says they “get lucky” – you probably do not want to ask a lot of questions. But after 23 years of attending the annual conferences of AFCP and now ACP I have lots of good luck stories to share.

First, it is always about the people. If business, politics, and personal struggles are getting you down, a few hours with free paper publishers can renew your faith in people and positivity. I am lucky to know many of the people that come to these conferences, volunteer countless hours to make them a success, and celebrate their years together.

Between my busy law practice, and postal association work, there are never enough hours in the day to get the work done. But I have learned to mix business and pleasure and I have “gotten lucky” many times at the annual free paper meeting.

Your conference planners always seem to have great timing. When we attend a conference, we make an effort to see what is going on in town, and to “get lucky” with whatever local sites or events might be available for good times. Thanks to the association leaders and member that have invited me, and my partner Jeff Albrecht, to go postal with them since 1997, here are some of our memories we have made together at your annual meetings.

Most speakers make you laugh – cry – and think. Sometimes all at once.

One of my first conferences was in Chicago – right in the middle of the Chicago Blues Festival. Post Katrina, the New Orleans conference was in the middle of the New Orleans jazz festival. Tab Benoit showed us all how to Boogie at a private performance. Publishers know how to party! (Some of them even know how to dance). Your conference planners like getting funky and provided some great music. The music under the stars in Palm Springs on an April night go head-to-head for great moments with the Buffet cover band and sunset at St. Pete’s beach.

Dancing and outdoor music has always been my jam and a source of much joy. But there has been other fun as well. Like any ‘winner’ “we got to go to Disney World.” Jeff rode in a pace car at Daytona. We saw where a war started in Savannah and got to party on an aircraft carrier in San Diego. We saw sharks and caught an outdoor dog frisbee catching show in Atlanta. Jeff’s birthday falls on many of the April conference dates. In Louisville I made him “see fireworks” and he “got lucky” with me in Vegas.

The Des Moines conference was full of delightful surprises. Mid-West blue skies, and tropical temperatures were appropriate for the World Food Fest and International Music Festival a few blocks from the hotel. We ended Saturday night of the conference listening to the Original Wailers sing Bob Marley’s reggae classic “Don’t worry - everything is gonna be all right.”

Thanks to ACP and the people that make it possible. Borrowing a theme from the Des Moines meetings’ opening ceremonies, Iowa can be a little bit like heaven. When it comes to planning a great conference “if you build it, we will come”. Thanks!

Gratefully Submitted,
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Postal Rates

GOOD NEWS – BAD NEWS FOR PUBLISHERS THAT MAIL

On September 15, 2021, the Postal Service made an announcement and submitted a filing with the Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC) announcing its future schedule of “regular and predictable rate adjustments.”

The good news is that mailers will not see another postal increase until July, 2022. The Postal Service will wait until spring of next year to combine the rate authority it has to increase rates based on over the CPI, and will calculate the other authority it has under the Postal Regulatory Commission’s new ten-year order that gave the Service additional authority to increase rates over CPI, for one rate adjustment to take place during 2022.

The not so good news, is the Postal Service announced its intentions after 2022 to increase rates twice a year in January and July of each year, with the filings outlining the rates and the rate tables to occur in the preceding October and April, respectively.

In its filing the Postal Service wrote it “intends to be judicious in the use of available pricing authority depending on our financial condition, but anticipates the possibility that the price adjustment for each market dominant class may be required to apply most or all pricing authority available at the time of filing.”

So what does this mean for mailers trying to figure out this “regular and predictable” schedule of Postal rates for 2023 and thereafter?

In April of next year, the Postal Service will be able to calculate the amount of an increase it is entitled to receive under the CPI for increases inflation. It will also have numbers that the PRC determines based on whether or not the service has made any contributions to its pre-funding obligations under current law to pay for retiree benefits. The PRC order gives the USPS an additional amount of approximately 1% of rate of authority (over the cpi) to correspond to actual prefunding payments made. If Postal Reform is accomplished as proposed in a pending House bill, that additional 1% authority could “go away”. As currently drafted, the proposed postal reform bill in the House would eliminate or vastly change the retiree pre-funding requirements.

A separate increase, known as the “density adder” allows the USPS to charge higher rates to make up for volume it loses. To businesses like publishers, it may sound perverse to be rewarded with additional pricing authority when the service loses business. But the PRC reasoned that some loss of mail to electronic diversion was outside of the Postal Service’s power to control, and that the Service needed to cover its fixed costs and obligations that are no longer covered as it loses mail volume and should be able to charge mailers for that “lost business/density”. During this last year (2021) with Covid mail volume losses being significant, the additional “density adder” allowed the service to increase its rates and prices by an additional 4.2%. That is why many mailers saw some of the highest increases in years in August, 2021.

It is always hard to make predictions, but at the present time it would seem next year’s loss of volume, when compared year over date, will not be as severe as it was 2021 and, based on a current projection from a Postal Service Pricing and Costing Official, it could be under 1%.

The Service gets its numbers for what it is permitted or allowed to do at different times during the year. Historically, the Service has filed its rate increases based on the CPI rate cap in October, for a January implementation. When the Postal Service files its Annual Compliance Report (ACR) of performance and volumes for the year, the PRC is able to do the calculations needed for its additional pricing/rate authority. That appears to be the reason driving the Service's announcement that it will do a filing in April, for a July increase every year. That timing allows the Service to get as much money as it can, as soon as it can, with the PRC's release of its calculation of the lost density and prefunding payments additional rate of authority. Theoretically, there is nothing to stop the Service from switching to a once-a-year rate cycle, by postponing the filing of its CPI rate increase to coincide with the additional determination of additional rate authority after receipt of the PRC's calculations. The potential confusion, and complexity, of different rate schedules and twice a year price increases for the mailing industry and advertising customers may lead some mailers, printers, publishers and customers to push back on the complexity and 'bad pr' of this proposed schedule. The additional costs it will add to the mail industry in changing forms, pricing schedules, software, etc. – to say nothing of having to talk to advertisers about an endless cycle of higher prices – will erode customer confidence and may further discourage businesses and advertisers with marketing choices from using the mail.

For free papers that use saturation mail or high-density mail to reach their advertisers, this type of mail is in the Marketing Mail class. This is one of the largest classes of mail within the market dominant postal products. There can be significant variations with individual product prices within this large class - where some categories of mail pay will pay higher prices, and others may see lower increases. Based on the competitive market conditions for saturation mail, and the unique operations and service characteristics of this mail (usually drop shipped to the DDU to go right to the carrier), SMC and our members will continue to urge for "better-than-average" pricing to retain this profitable mail volume for the Service. This type of product is more price sensitive than other postal products and is very susceptible to electronic diversion and diversion to other media.

For periodicals and papers that have been using periodical rates, (sending their papers as subscription – requester papers), the annual rate increases must include an additional 2% to reflect that this class has not been carrying its costs according to PRC findings for several years. Any class or product of mail that is "underwater", is required by PRC regulation to be assessed an additional 2%, over any other rate increase allowed with different formulas, at least once a year if there is a rate adjustment for that class.

What if anything could save mailers from this twice a year endless cycle of price increases? The mailing industry has been challenging the PRC order as contrary to the 2006 PAEA law and that case is under consideration in the DC Circuit Court of Appeals. If the mailers prevail, that could change the additional pricing and authority described in this article.

But for the short term, it appears that publishers that are using the mail, and have been fighting to build back business during this challenging year, will have a few months of breathing room before the next Postal rate increase is filed and announcement.

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Ryan Dohrn



Getting Out of a Sales Rut

Exploring the intersection of mental health and sales fatigue

Ryan Dohrn

Mental health is a very important subject for us to discuss as it relates to our work life and, I believe, our sales life, as well. Please understand that I am not a clinically trained therapist in any way, shape or form. I do hold an Associate Certified Coach (ACC) certification from the International Coaching Federation. My intention with this column is to try to provide inspiration to those of you who might have found yourselves in a sales rut or mentally fatigued at work, or in life, as we're getting back to some level of normal sales business across America. If you are experiencing significant mental fatigue or issues related to your mental well-being, please seek professional advice. I have listed several resources at the end of this column. I dedicate this column to my fellow media sales warrior, Chris Atkins, who took his life amidst a vibrant media sales career. Chris, you are missed.

The National Institute of Mental Health reports that 31% of survey respondents report symptoms of anxiety or depression, 13% report having started or increased substance use, 26% report stress-related symptoms, and 11% report having serious thoughts of suicide within the past 30 days. These numbers are nearly double the rates expected before the pandemic. Friends, this is a real problem. This is more than a revenue issue. This is a human issue.

We've all had those days and weeks and months. Days when you just don't feel like doing much of anything, much less selling. It doesn't matter if you are selling copy machines or advertising. Some days you just don't feel like doing it. Have you had one of those days? If you haven't, you've probably not been selling for very long, because it's quite normal to feel this way. But know this: you are not alone out there.

So, what do you do? Is there a way to get yourself out of a sales rut? Is there a way to push through the mental fatigue? The answer is a resounding ... YES! Rather than blaming this dilemma on the pandemic, it's probably better for all of us in sales land to recognize that we're just normal people that have chosen a career many would never take for any amount of money. Each month I end my *Ad Sales Nation* podcast by saying, "If ad sales was easy, everybody would be doing it. And they're not. We are the chosen few. But, we've found a career that will feed our families for a lifetime." It is a statement that I feel deeply about. I tell my ad sales coaching clients all the time that I go where I want, eat where I want, travel where I want, all because of media sales. It has literally been a part of my life for 30 years. But over that period of time there have been many days, many weeks, many months when I've just not felt like I wanted to sell anything. Here are the seven things that I often do when I find myself in a sales rut or mentally exhausted from the business of sales.

1. **Connect with others in the sales business.** The first thing for every sales rep to recognize is that sales ruts are normal and they happen to everybody. You are a unique person, but this circumstance and situation is not unique at all. You're human. These things happen to all of us. It's important also to surround yourself with other people that understand where you're coming from. Oftentimes, those around you can't sympathize very much because they don't really know what it's like to be in the sales business. Think about it. If every day you're guaranteed a paycheck, you're not used to what we in sales land are going through each day. Being in sales is tough. We live and die by our sales activity. Nothing is a guarantee in sales. Having a few mutual connections that are also in the sales business is important to your long-term sanity. While it's always good to get other people's outside perspective, it's also equally important to surround yourself with other people who completely and utterly understand what you're going through on a daily basis. There's a reason that people crinkle their noses when you tell them you are in sales. You probably do not smell bad. They just know they could not handle being in sales. In every major city there are groups of sales professionals that gather together on a regular basis. With COVID restrictions subsiding across the country, It's probably easier now than it has been in the last year to find a group of like-minded sales professionals that you can gel with and who will provide you a shoulder to lean on. Here is a link to several groups that you can join: <https://jobstars.com/sales-professional-associations-organizations/>. I truly feel this is an important piece of the puzzle. If you're not able to find a networking group, seek out professional sales coaching. Finding a coach that's also in the sales business can be extremely helpful to you since they will be able to better sympathize with your current situation and provide guidance.

2. **Change your frequency.** If you've ever had the opportunity to read the book *The Secret*, you'll understand a little bit of what I'm talking about. Even if you feel that book to be complete hocus-pocus, I feel it to be based in some level of reality. There is a universal understanding that when you continue to do something the same way and expect a different result, you are defining or trying to redefine the non-clinical version of insanity. Many of the salespeople that I personally coach will find themselves on the wrong frequency. They have been doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result, and they just can't see why things aren't going in their direction. Whether you believe that life operates on certain planes or frequencies is completely up to you. But, I can tell you that changing things up, changing your frequency, can be part and parcel to your success and getting out of a sales rut. Recently, I was working with a fantastic sales professional that found herself in a sales rut. I encouraged her to change things up. To leave home at a different time for work. To drive a new direction to the office. To listen to a different style of music on her way to work. To change her coffee. To park in a different parking spot. To wear a different type of outfit than she would normally wear to work. All of these little factors contribute to you looking at things from a different perspective. What's interesting is that we are all creatures of habit. Some of those habits become so ingrained in our lives that even though we're doing the same thing over and over again, we just don't see it as being that simple. After just 48 hours of doing things completely differently than she normally would, she closed a big dollar sales deal. Was it the coffee? Was it a magic parking spot? No. I don't think that this is a conspiracy theory by any means. A lot of times it's just about retraining your brain to see things from a little bit of a different perspective. Try something different today. You might be surprised at how impactful it is on your life.

3. **Call a client who loves you.** All of us have advertisers that we love. In some cases, I've been in the wedding of some of my favorite clients. After all, sales is about quality relationships with quality people. Do I love all my advertisers? The answer is ... no, I don't. But I do have a select group of advertisers and clients that I absolutely enjoy and would spend time with regardless of whether or not they did business with me. These are the types of people that I often call on when I'm having a bad day. I do not usually tell them that I'm having a bad day. But, I will engage in conversation with them knowing that they are not going to beat me up about price or frequency or Facebook. There are three things that can come from this. The first is that you just might find a sales opportunity. The second is that you are actually doing yourself a favor by retaining that customer. The third is that you created a positive conversation that will probably lead to another one. I'm not suggesting that you ask your advertisers to be your therapist. I'm merely suggesting that when you talk to people that really like you, you tend to re-energize yourself with positivity.

4. **Work your list of clients.** Within any competent Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, you are able to form a list of customers. I have three lists that I work on a daily basis. The first list is a standard prospecting list like the one we all have in front of us. The second list contains those clients that I've already met with that I consider "in progress" towards a sale. The third list is my active clients that I am looking to retain for a lifetime. When I'm having a bad sales day, I focus on my lists. I might put on some rock music and increase the strength of my coffee, and then I work my lists. What I find is that lists create focus. When you're mentally fatigued you often have a hard time focusing. With a focused list, I'm able to really laser-focus in on a particular group of people that I'm calling for a reason. Keep in mind, I'm not a big fan of leaving voice messages and asking people to call me back. Rather, I leave a voicemail to encourage a customer to reply to the email that I sent. So, when I'm working this list, I am usually using a cadence of phone call first, followed up by an immediate email. My lists are a living, breathing document. My goal is not to work a list from 10 to 0. My goal is to have a list that is always growing and changing. From a pipeline sales management perspective, I never want any of my list to get to 0. If your CRM system can't create a list, I would suggest you find a new CRM.

5. **Work new categories.** In addition to the list that I work on a daily basis, I will oftentimes change my sales approach on categories that I sell. Personally, I like to trade accounts with other sales professionals on my team. The reason for this is because when I give someone an account that I've worked hard and they trade with me, we almost always close a deal one way or the other. Many times customers just need to hear a different tone of voice or a different approach. From a team perspective, I like the fact that I can get out of a certain category and focus on another category to give my brain something fresh to look at.

6. **Get some sleep.** Sleep experts from the Mayo Clinic tell us that a lack of focus or mental fatigue can often be traced back to a lack of sleep. Don't fool yourself. Most adults need seven or more hours of sleep each night to function at a high capacity level. If you're like most salespeople, after a long day you'll have a couple of cocktails, a nice meal, and stay up late binge-watching Netflix. Completely normal. But also, this particular habit could lead you to a lack of sleep. One of the things I noticed when I was diagnosed with sleep apnea is that I was definitely not getting enough sleep. I am an eight-hour of sleep kind of guy. My body truly needs eight hours of sleep. Can I function on seven hours of sleep? Absolutely. But if I want to be at my prime, I need eight hours of sleep. I know this sounds like a basic thought. Sort of a 101 kind of thing, right? So do it! Sometimes it does take a village to be successful. You may need to talk to your significant other and make it a team effort. In the end, though, your success is a team success at home and in the office.

7. **Get back to the basics.** When things aren't going well it is a common practice for us to take random sales approaches to see what might stick against the wall. This is an absolutely bad sales strategy whether you're new or old in the sales business. There are fundamental pieces to the sales game that have to be achieved in order for you to be successful. Go back to the basics. Are your emails short and simple and to the point? Are your emails and voice mails relevant to the exact needs of the customer? Are you contacting your customers at the optimal time of day? Are you selling strictly on the phone or are you trying to get in front of people to have face-to-face meetings? These are just a few of the basics that you need to wrap your head around if you're going to be successful and get back on the sales horse for a long ride to victory. Look back at your sales life. What are the three things that worked best for you in the past? Go back and look at them closely.

In the end, you control you. While other people around you influence you ... in the end, the decisions that you make are the decisions that you will make. Please don't settle for the statement, "It is what it is." I don't accept that with myself or with my family members or with my team members. I truly believe it is what you make it.

If you're in a sales rut, choose just one of the seven ideas listed in this column and put it into action. Wrap your brain around it. Commit to it. And *own* it. Getting out of a rut is not about giving it half your effort. It's going to take everything you've got to get the train back on the tracks and rolling in the right direction. And finally, never, ever be afraid to ask for help.

As I stated at the beginning, you might find yourself in a situation where you just can't get yourself mentally correct. Please seek professional advice if that happens. Here are some resources to help.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255); En español 1-888-628-9454

Use **Lifeline Chat** on the web: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat/>

The Lifeline is a free, confidential crisis service that is available to everyone 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The Lifeline connects people to the nearest crisis center in the Lifeline national network. These centers provide crisis counseling and mental health referrals.

Crisis Text Line: Text “HELLO” to 741741. The Crisis Text hotline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week throughout the U.S. The Crisis Text Line serves anyone in any type of crisis, connecting them with a crisis counselor who can provide support and information.