

## **The Effective Key for Face-to-Face: Quality Booth Staffers**

**by Joyce McKee**

To be blunt, you have been waiting for this moment— why waste it? The bestselling book, *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*, by Malcolm Gladwell, informs us: “A person watching a silent two-second video clip of a teacher he or she has never met will reach conclusions about how good that teacher is that are very similar to those of a student who has sat in the teacher’s class for an entire semester. That’s the power of our adaptive unconscious.” Considering the implications of this, in trade show terms, here are some items to be aware of in working with buyers and prospects in your exhibit and creating the best possible impression.

We know that most attendees come to the show with an agenda and use the time to evaluate vendors before making a final decision. When a buyer is in the information-gathering mode, as is generally the case at an event, there is a relatively small window of opportunity to grab their attention. What happens is they use this time to count in and leave out suppliers based upon their experience in the booth with them.

Let’s suppose an attendee goes to your competitor’s booth – a vendor he/she had wanted to check out – and is not paid attention to or is brushed off by their personnel. He now wanders down to another vendor that was not on his list and is given the royal treatment at their booth. It is an easy choice at this point, and where a good “pick-up line” could come in handy. (By the way, do you know what yours is?)

If you compare a trade show to a movie, then what you’ve been doing so far is writing the script and acting as the producer at the same time. Now its time to make the film, so to speak – and the camera is on your exhibit. Who’s the most important part of the movie at this point? The actors...or, as you know them, your staff.

### **The Booth Staffer**

*YOU are your company’s most important part of the whole trade show effort. That’s why it is important to understand your role and your company’s role in this unique marketing environment. People want to talk to people. Prospects want to shake your hand, look you in the eye and believe they can trust you (and your company) to deliver what you promise. At a show, You are Your Company....The most expensive show you can do is the one where your exhibit does not arrive. Or you are stuck in a corner, behind a post, in the auxiliary hall. While it is very important getting visitors to your booth, the design and location will not write an order.*

Your product or service may be hot; the newest thing on the market, but it will not sell itself no matter how much you think it will. Literature, demos, and samples are important

in furthering the sales process, but people are necessary to answer questions and provide assurance of quality.

Your staff should be like professional actors who know their lines inside and out and focus all their energies on the particular character they portray – and most importantly, on the potential client or customer that’s in your booth. I say this because we have all been at shows where the sales people are doing one of the following: huddled together in an intimate conversation between themselves complaining about working the weekend, how tired their feet are, how slow the show is, what a rotten location they have and, my favorite, how hung-over they are from last night’s vendor reception turned all-night bar hopping. Those 8 am call times can be a nightmare for the party animal!

### **Acting Lessons for the Trade Show Professional**

The following material should be reviewed by your booth staff as they prepare to be “on stage” and engage your future customers.

- Basic etiquette skills – no gum chewing, answering or playing with your new cell phone, or eating food. Save multi-tasking for the office.
- “Look ‘em straight in the eye” when communicating – don’t get distracted by others in the booth or walking by.
- Have a pad of paper and take notes while you’re listening – it will show the customer you care enough to remember what you actually discussed. It also helps to transcend a universal human trait – we tend to remember what we want to remember.
- Don’t gossip or knock the competition – ever. If your product or service is really that good, you don’t have to.
- Use the Fibonacci rule to your advantage – apply a 2/3 listening to 1/3 talking ratio. Anything that works that beautifully for Mother Nature will undoubtedly work wonders for you, too.
- Offer benefits over features for emotional impact.
- Acknowledge someone who stops at your booth right away. If you are with another customer, let them know you will be with them as soon as possible. Don’t ignore them, but don’t leave your current customer, either. Sometimes it can work out to include them.
- Don’t judge by appearances – you never know who you might be talking to.
- Only speak the truth – that which you can confirm, whether you are talking numbers, or other information. Avoid sentences that begin with, “They say...” or “Everybody...” Very few people actually know “everybody,” except teenagers

who, of course, not only know “everybody,” but, apparently, everything about them.

The idea when you have a live human being is to interact with them, and there’s no better place to do it than a trade show or event. Booth dialogue has different and distinct aspects that must be covered in specific training for each show for it to be effective. You want to think in terms of creating an experience which will translate into a positive emotional connection.

In my eBook, I have additional tips for booth personnel. Feel [free to download](#) it and share it.

**Joyce McKee** is the CEO of Let’s Talk Trade Shows. She has a broad perspective of the trade show and event industry starting as an exhibitor 28 + years ago. Her philosophy is to “be brilliant at the marketing basics!” This means you need to know and understand the basics of marketing and how your company can heighten them to outshine your competition and win business.

Besides her [own blog](#) (this month’s “Solutions…” article is a sample; we also featured her in the February issue), Joyce facilitates two of IAEE’s blogs – [The Center for Exhibition Industry Research \[CEIR\]](#) and [The International Center for Exhibitor and Event Marketing](#). Her eBook, *The Secret to Achieving Brilliant Returns at Your Next Event: a Guide to Maximizing Your ROI and ROO* has been downloaded more than 7,000 times.