

# SMALL BUSINESS SUCCESS



SOCIÉTÉ FÉDÉRALE DE DÉVELOPPEMENT  
BASSIN NICKEL BASIN  
FEDERAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

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[The Power of Common Ground](#) | [Ten Tips for a Successful Presentation](#)  
[A Glossary of Terms for Home-Based Businesses](#) | [Garage-Saling Your Business](#)

## Anticipating Needs

### The Key to Your Customer's Heart

**H**ave you ever been in a relationship where the other person provided you with just what you needed before you even asked for it? Do you remember what that felt like? How it made you feel that person cared about you enough to know those small details and take care of them? Sometimes the key to your customer's heart lies not so much in giving them what they ask for, but in anticipating what they will need and giving it to them before they ask. Michael E. Gerber in his world-renowned book "The E-Myth Revisited" (which by the way should be required reading for ANYBODY who owns a small business), tells the story of how a little-known inn off the highway in the Pacific Northwest gave him one of the most memorable customer service experiences he'd ever had. When I read the story I wanted to jump in my car and drive there as quickly as possible so that I too could experience that kind of care. The book is worth the price just to read that story! Anyway, I don't have space to repeat Michael's story, but I will tell you one of my own that illustrates this point. The story takes up most of this article, but the message really is in the story. As you read it, think about how it makes you feel as a potential customer.

My job requires me to travel from time to time, and last fall I was spending a lot of time on the road. Every night in a different city, a different hotel, a different restaurant, isn't as glamorous as some people might think. In fact, it's very tiring, predictable and often soulless. I arrived late one night at a hotel in Prince George, BC on the last night of my travels. When I checked in I went through the usual routine of giving my credit card, asking questions about locations of restaurants, the location of the conference room where I'd be meeting the next day, etc. While the front desk staff was friendly, my experience until that moment had been very ordinary. What happened next was what made this one of my most memorable customer service experiences.

I took the elevator up to the 7th floor and trudged down the hallway to my room. When I opened the door I immediately noticed something was different from every other hotel I'd ever been in. The light was on, the room was warm, and there was music playing softly from the radio. I felt instantly

calm, and at home. I had never noticed until that moment how much I hated walking into a cold dark hotel room, and fumbling for the light switch. I also knew that the first thing I did when I get into a room is turn on the heat and the TV. For me it lessened the lonely feel of the room. The radio playing immediately gave me a warm fuzzy feeling of not being alone.

I put down my bags and walked farther into the room. The bed sheets were turned over on one corner in an inviting manner, chocolate mints were carefully placed on the pillow, and a clean, crisp white housecoat was laid across the bed, in anticipation of my arrival. When I sat down on the bed, I noticed a large, chocolate chunk cookie wrapped on a plate beside my bed. I was already pleasantly overwhelmed, but my experience was not yet over. On the table beside the television was a large bucket filled with ice containing two bottles of water. Next to it was the room service menu, and a voucher for a free full breakfast in the restaurant the next morning.

Finally, when I entered the bathroom, I felt a cozy warmth under my toes in contrast to the cold tile floor I usually experienced. The hotel had heated bathroom floors, and the heat had been turned on in preparation for me.

I had not asked for any of these special touches. In fact, if you had asked me what I most needed in a hotel room I would not have even thought of any of those things. But someone had.

Someone else had recalled walking into a cold dark hotel room and made sure it wasn't going to happen to one of their customers. Someone else knew that after a long day of traveling, a cold bottle of water was more welcome than you could know, and that not having to walk down the halls looking for the ice machine was a gift! Someone understood that traveling is expensive, and that a lovely breakfast I didn't have to pay for was something to look forward to. Someone else was like me, and preferred to have the sound of a friendly voice in a sterile room. Someone anticipated how nice it would feel to have a warm bathroom floor, and someone even knew how much I loved chocolate! I'll never forget that experience (which no other hotel has come close to repeating - even in large Canadian and American cities), and I figure if a hotel in a little town like Prince George can provide that kind of memorable experience, anyone can!



So what can you do to anticipate your customers' needs? Put yourself in their shoes. If you were shopping for tires, or a chiropractor, for coffee, or furniture, what would make the experience memorable for you? What needs might you have? What emotions might you be feeling as you go to make a large purchase? How might a company minimize your fears? What would make you feel appreciated and valued? Ask people you know about their most memorable customer service experiences and see whether you can replicate any of them. Look beyond the obvious and reach down to a deeper level.

If you direct your customer service efforts toward anticipating and meeting your customer's needs before he or she even knows they need them, I can guarantee greater success in your business. I can guarantee customer loyalty, and I can absolutely guarantee customer referrals. Can you imagine how many people I have referred to that hotel since my stay in November? Imagine how many hundreds of people are reading about it right now!! That kind of customer service is irresistible, and given how increasingly rare it is, will give you an enormous edge over any other

competitor in your industry. I hope you're inspired to give your customers as memorable an experience as that little hotel in Prince George did for me!

[Top](#)

## The Power of Common Ground

### A Tool to Help You Gain Consensus on Any Issue

**If you've ever been involved in trying to get consensus on a hot issue with people that have very polarized viewpoints, you'll know how frustrating that process can be. Sometimes meetings just degenerate into opposing sides trying to voice their positions more loudly than the other side. The difficulty in reaching consensus is sometimes the result of opposite behavioural styles, or people with very different values. Whatever the reason, this process can be exhausting and demoralizing to your team. If you can reach common ground however, it is exhilarating and can profoundly motivate your team to a new level of understanding and cooperation. So how do you do it? How do you take those strong opposing viewpoints and reach that magical place called common ground?**

I've used a tool called the Common Ground Matrix very successfully, and you can get great results using it as well. It is a lot of hard work, but the results are terrific. Here's how it works. I divide the group into two opposing camps. It's very important that you have strong opponents to make this process successful. You want to create a tension with two opposing viewpoints - one for an issue and one against, or one side looking at an issue from one perspective and the other from a completely different one. If you have a very large team you might want to break it down into four groups, making sure each group has opposing positions. Then you present your goal, or describe the issue for which they need to come to common ground.

Let me give you an example. In my training sessions I give two groups of participants the hypothetical task of laying off four people within their department. As you can imagine, the two camps looked at this task from very different perspectives. One side had a bottom-line, results-driven approach (let's call them Triangles), while the other came from a more compassionate, people-oriented perspective (we'll call these folks Circles).

I introduced the common ground matrix and told them that they would all be allowed to express their opinions, but that they must proceed through the matrix from the first step to the last, and come up with common ground in the end. At first, everyone tends to remain true to their own point of view, but as they work through the matrix, they are literally forced to listen and understand each

other's perspectives. In the end, each group is able to come up with an action plan with 100% consensus, and everyone feels great about their progress. By using this matrix, both groups were able to come to common ground.

Here's how the matrix works. As you can see, in column A, each group has an opportunity to express their position on the issue. In this example, the Triangles' position is that they want to do what's most efficient and effective for the company. The Circles' position is that they want to do what's most effective and compassionate for the individuals involved.

## Common Ground Matrix

Position A	What A Needs	How A's Needs Could Be Met	Common Ground
Position B	What B Needs	How B's Needs Could Be Met	

In the second column, each group moves to a deeper level - expressing what they need in order to make the decision. The Triangles said that they needed to know that the decision would have a bottom-line dollar benefit to the company. They said that they needed to make a decision quickly, before too much more time and money was spent. The Circles said that they needed to know that the individuals involved were going to be considered in the decision-making process, that it would be fair, and take into account more than just the bottom line. The process in the first two columns is really designed just so the two sides can hear each other, and understand the different perspectives from which they are approaching the problem. The real work begins in the third column.

Now the two sides began brainstorming, always taking into account the information from the previous two columns. They began to make concessions on what they wanted, what they needed, and started to ask each other how their needs could be met. Here's how it played out in our example.

The Triangles conceded to meeting the Circles' needs by setting up a one-month timeline in which all factors would be considered. They agreed to set up a formula by which they would consider not only performance and salaries of each employee, but also their particular personal circumstances. The Circles agreed that they would meet the Triangles' needs by not pushing this process beyond the agreed-upon deadline. They also agreed that in order to make a fair decision, the cost needed to be considered, and assured the Triangles that they would in the end, make decisions that benefited the company. Most of the hard work was over after column three was dealt with. The final task was to come up with a plan that was workable and agreeable to both parties. They'd already done some of that work, so they began by writing down their common ground, or what they could both agree to. Here's what it looked like:

- have a one-month decision making timeline
- set up a smaller committee to deal with the process
- ensure at least two people from each side are on the committee
- design an information gathering form for each employee to fill out
- look at the budgetary constraints and needs of the company
- brainstorm for creative options other than layoffs

With this process, in the end each side gets some of what they want, and each has to give up some of what they want, which in essence creates a win/win solution. You can use this process with just two people (try it with your spouse the next time you're faced with making a big decision), or with large groups. This is an extremely effective tool for gathering consensus and is one way to get your team to start understanding and appreciating each other's perspectives.

[Top](#)

# Ten Tips for a Successful Presentation

**Presentations are part of business life. You do it on a small scale every day when you're selling your product or service to a potential customer. But every once in a while you may be required to make a presentation on a bigger scale, and it's good to know what will set you apart from others who may also be vying for that job. Here are a few things that will give you an edge. Don't cheat - if you have to make a presentation, pay attention to all ten. Leaving even one out will affect the success and power of your presentation, and potentially your credibility. A great presentation is not just about good content, or having a great personality, or even being a good public speaker. It's about having all the right ingredients.**

**Know your subject matter.** There is nothing more nerve-wracking than not knowing your subject well. Avoid reading a prepared script - it will make you more nervous because it won't be natural. Just do your research and know your stuff. If you do you'll be more confident, and will be less likely to be rattled by questions or comments from listeners.

**Know your audience.** Think about what they want to hear. Do they want technical data or are they more interested in how what you have to offer is going to make them money? The presentation is going to be more successful if you give the audience what they want and what they expect.

**Develop a theme.** What are you trying to achieve with the presentation? Is there an overall theme that comes to your mind? It should encompass everything you want to say. Think about your theme like a title. The title of this article is "Ten Tips for a Successful Presentation". It's also the theme of the article.

**Outline what you are going to say.** You can use any method you want for this, but you will need an opening, main body, summary and after questions (if there are any) a closing. (**NOTE:** If you are doing a keynote presentation, you will be finished after the questions and the MC closes the session. If it's a sales presentation or something you're doing on your own, you can go back after questions and recap with a closing.) Your outline should guide you through each of those elements in detail.

**Carefully select your visual aids.** These days it seems there is no end to debate on the use of visual aids for presentations. PowerPoint has long been the choice of presenters for a more professional and organized presentation, but other professionals feel that PowerPoint sucks the life out of presentations as participants are subjected to an endless stream of text on a screen. Overheads are also still used, as are flipcharts and whiteboards. Unless you are a spellbinding public speaker, you should try to use something to draw people's attention to important information. Use whatever medium is most comfortable for you as that will make you less nervous and more confident. I also strongly recommend handouts. People should have something in their hands to follow where you're going, as well as to take away with them so that they can remember what

they've heard. It is critical however, that handouts are professionally prepared and printed so they don't detract from your presentation.

**Be prepared.** Whatever can go wrong, will go wrong. Always have backup to whatever presentation you are going to deliver. Have an extra copy of your notes, an extra disk or overheads, the AC adapter for your laptop, and spare bulbs for your electronic projector. If you can move through potential disasters smoothly and without a lot of fuss, people will stay focused on what you have to say, not on what's going wrong.

**Rehearse, Rehearse, Rehearse.** I can't emphasize this enough. One of the most valuable lessons I've learned as a professional trainer is that you're never too good to stop practising. Even when I've presented material dozens of times, I still rehearse it, time myself, tape myself, and practise the words I'm going to use. You can never know your material too well. The more you practise, the easier it will come to you when it's time to deliver it.



**Arrive early.** In doing so you can inspect the room, check out your visual equipment, go to the restroom to check your appearance, take a quick walk up and down the halls, or around the block, and be there to greet your participants as they arrive. By shaking hands with your audience you can begin to establish a rapport as well as get rid of excess energy. Remember, people will form an opinion of you in as little as 11 seconds. If you've got your nose in your materials at the front of the classroom doing some last minute cramming while people are coming in, they'll get an entirely different picture than if you are greeting them warmly, confident that your preparation has already been done and that you're ready.

**Don't be overly critical of yourself.** Most audiences have low expectations, and expect the speaker to be boring. When you begin with your wit and charm, knowledge of your material and effective visual aids, they'll be pleasantly surprised. Most people also know how difficult public speaking is (in fact, most people rate fear of public speaking ahead of the fear of dying!) and admire you for doing it at all. If you make a mistake just ignore it and keep going. Only a very small portion of your audience will notice that you've missed something or made a mistake. If you draw attention to it, they'll all know!

**Evaluate.** Where appropriate (obviously not at a sales presentation) find out what the audience thought of the presentation and accept their comments as valuable constructive criticism and not as a personal affront. Learn from the input and improve your performance every time.

Now that you have the ingredients for a successful presentation, use it every time. You won't be disappointed and your results will more than make up for the effort you put forth into your preparation.

[Top](#)

# A Glossary of Terms for Home-Based Business Owners

Recently I saw a commercial on TV that made me howl because of the inherent truth in the absurdity. The camera focuses in on two average-looking guys in jeans and T-shirts, sitting in an old warehouse space with their feet up on a battered old desk (which happens to be the only furniture in the room besides a telephone and computer). The phone rings and one of the guys answers very officially with the company name. It turns out to be a huge potential client from overseas who wants to come down to their "office" to chat about doing business together. The two of them look at each other, look around at the decrepit state of what is their office, and race out the door. In the next scene, the office is beautifully furnished (the ad was for an office supply store), the guys are wearing business suits, and the client walks in just as they put the finishing touches on their new office. The client looks around, nods his approval and shakes their hands, obviously happy to do business with such a professional, successful company. The irony of course, lies in the fact that less than twelve hours earlier, they were just two guys in jeans in an empty room waiting for something big to happen. In business, sometimes perception is everything!

If you're a home-based business owner, I'd be surprised if to some degree, this hasn't happened to you. You're sitting at your kitchen table in your pajamas, enjoying your second cup of coffee and reading the latest business journal when your company phone rings. You leap from the table and run into your office, pick up the phone, and in your most professional voice answer, "ABC Company, how may I help you?" In a nanosecond, you've been transformed from the guy in his pajamas to a well-respected business owner. This month we thought we'd take a light-hearted look at how things are not always what they seem when you're a home-based business owner. Hopefully you'll have a chuckle as you recognize a few of these home-based "businessisms".

**What you say:** "Could I put you on hold for a minute?" **What you mean:** "I'm just going to put the telephone receiver beside the radio while I scrounge through this stack of files to find your letter."

**What you say:** "We're expanding our facilities." **What you mean:** "I'm cleaning out a closet for extra space."

**What you say:** "Let me put you through to our accounts receivable department." **What you mean:** "I'm just going to grab another cup of coffee - I'll be right back."

**What you say:** "We're experiencing a period of unprecedented growth." **What you mean:** "My wife is expecting twins."

**What you say:** "Have you had a look at our current promotion?" **What you mean:** "I'm make something up if you're interested in buying it."

**What you say:** "I'm going to have to see how that fits in with our timeline. Can I get back to you?" **What you mean:** "I'm going to stare at my empty calendar for an hour so you'll think I'm really busy."



**What you say:** "Of course we can do that for you. We have a team of experts at our disposal." **What you mean:** "I'm really going to have to scramble to find someone who knows how to do that."

**What you say:** "I'll need some more information and statistics before I'm ready to proceed." **What you mean:** "I am behind schedule and need to buy some time."

**What you say:** "No problem. We can work within that deadline." **What you mean:** "Great, I guess I'm going to be pulling an all-nighter."

**What you say:** "Can I just discuss this with my colleague and get back to you?" **What you mean:** "I'll run it by the cat and see if she purrs."

So the next time someone asks you about the square footage of your storefront, or how many departments you have, or what your anticipated growth margin is, pour yourself another cup of coffee, smile and realize your success is all in the eyes of the perceiver. And go ahead, say something brilliant. Only you and your coffee mug will know!

[Top](#)

## Garage-Saling Your Business

**I have a love/hate relationship with garage sales. I love going to them and discovering new treasures, but I hate putting them on. I've been talked into having a garage sales twice and each time I swore I would never do it again. Why? Because it's too hard, and it's too much work. I don't like taking a hard look at my stuff and deciding what I want to keep and what I want to get rid of. I don't like all the energy it takes to determine what each item is worth and pricing it accordingly. Worst of all, I hate haggling with people who have decided that they don't think the item is worth what I think it is. In the end, I suppose holding a garage sale is worth it because I've accomplished two important things - I've simplified my life by getting rid of junk I didn't need, and I've increased my bank account (OK, so it was only \$200 - still that's \$200 more than I had before the sale!). Could your business benefit from the garage-sale process and help you de-junk and increase your revenue? If you find yourself stuck in a bit of a rut in your business, you might want to consider looking at it from a garage sale clutter-clearing perspective. Remember, it's hard work but you may be surprised at the results when you dare to de-clutter.**

The first step in having a garage sale is taking a long hard look at all the stuff that until that moment, you thought was a necessity in your life. In your business, are there things (or even people) that you're holding on to that you really don't need, or that hold you back from being successful?

**Physical Stuff** - that rickety old filing cabinet that you've been keeping just because you think it's an "antique" (by the way, that's just a word people use to justify keeping junk). That 7-year old computer on the back shelf you keep thinking you'll use for "parts". The broken down fax machine you say you're going to fix. The textbooks you've kept from University that are now about ten years out of date. Your ultra-slow computer that you keep saying you're going to upgrade when you have time. When you de-clutter your physical space, you will feel better emotionally. You'll be more productive and more motivated.

**People** - are there people in your business (or even in your life generally) that you need to consider letting go? Do you really think that employee is going to improve their performance after the fifteenth warning if he/she didn't do so after the first fourteen? Does that negative, abusive customer cost you more in demoralizing your staff than he/she's worth? Does that business colleague make you depressed every time you have coffee with him/her because of their constant complaining and negativity? This isn't always easy, but people can clutter your life just like things can, and if there are people that distract you from your goals, or that you find just drain your energy, it may be worth considering whether you need to let them go as well.

**Systems** - you may not even be aware of them all, but there are systems all over your business. How you process your invoices, how you deal with customer complaints, what process you use to determine which vendors you'll use, how you do your performance evaluations, how you evaluate your sales stats. Every business activity has a system, and sometimes it's useful to evaluate whether those systems are worth keeping. Look at all aspects of your business (and if you have staff, ask those



who are using the systems for their input). Are there some systems that could be simplified? Is there software that you could use to combine tasks or speed up processes? Are there tasks that are overlapping between staff members (more than one person doing the same task)? Evaluating your systems can improve your productivity in a huge way, but it is time-consuming. Make sure you are willing to go all the way once you start the process.

Ultimately, a garage-sale look at your business will have benefits. The de-cluttering itself will make you feel better, make your staff feel better, and will improve productivity. This leads to the second benefit of more money in your pocket. When your systems are more efficient, the people who are working for you are not draining your resources, and your world is more organized, it will show itself in a stronger, healthier business. As you head into garage-sale season, think about giving your business a cleanout as well.

One final word - if you yourself are a garage-sale junkie who is tempted to purchase someone else's broken down fax machine because you plan to fix it some day, give up the dream. The chances of you actually making the time to do that are slim. Learn to say NO! Once you de-junk you may be tempted to fill up those empty spaces with new junk, but if you do, you're only going to have to repeat this process a year from now.

[Top](#)

Nickel Basin Federal Development Corporation  
200 Brady Street Tom Davies Square  
Sudbury Ontario P3E 5K3  
Tel: 705-673-9802  
Fax: 705-673-7722  
[rene.quesnelle@city.greatersudbury.on.ca](mailto:rene.quesnelle@city.greatersudbury.on.ca)  
[www.nickelbasin.com](http://www.nickelbasin.com)

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