



# ***BULLETIN***

## **NATIONAL TRACTOR PARTS DEALER ASSOCIATION**

"USED, REBUILT AND NEW AGRICULTURAL AND INDUSTRIAL REPAIR PARTS"

FALL 2015

VOL. 25, NO. 3



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# **KANSAS CITY**



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## BULLETIN

PHYLLIS COX, Editor

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## Where Did The Time Go?

I remember growing up hearing my Grandparents talk about how time flies and I used to think – wow, they're old and out of touch, so that must be what happens when you get old. Uh, yeah....it sure does!



**Jeff Griggs - President**

I simply cannot believe that it's been five plus years since I took over as your President. Like my working life and my personal life, time really has flown by. I now find myself with a son who is 40, a Granddaughter who is a high school senior, a wife who is talking about retiring and a constant voice in my head that says "you need a convertible." Oh, and did I mention that I turn 60 in December? I just can't get over all of this. But enough of that.

So we've established that time flies and before you know it we will be gathering again for our annual Conference and Trade Show – this time in Kansas City. Kansas City is centrally located for our membership - driveable by many - and is very easy to get to by air, which made it a viable geographical option for our convention.....but way more important than that is the program content that's being put together for our membership. NTPDA Boot Camp is the theme and we have been working diligently to make sure that each and every attendee goes home with a plan to increase their business.

Along with the Boot Camp content, the Trade Show / Marketplace will again be a major

part of the event, PLUS you get to visit with people in our industry during several social events to find out the latest happenings in the ag world.

Soon we will be registering for Kansas City and I'm really excited about this one. I personally guarantee a couple of things:

- 1.) It will be here before you know it.
- 2.) You're not going to want to miss NTPDA Boot Camp.

See you in KC!

Jeff

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# Message from Phyllis

Welcome to cooler weather - well, maybe where you live but not in Texas. But...I'm not complaining..yet...I hate cold weather but a little cooler would be okay!

In this issue of the Bulletin we will give you detailed information regarding our 32nd Annual Conference and Trade Show to be held in Kansas City at the Sheraton - Crown Center. Please check out the Program at a Glance located on page 16 along with other articles related to the trade show.

This year our theme is "Boot Camp" - so if you are a displayer and would like to follow that lead in your booth or your "give aways" - please feel free to do so. Can we have a pirate in fatigues? This year we will kick-off our trade show on Wednesday with a great reception and a presentation on Networking from Danny Beyer. Please see page 27. Danny is noted for his bow ties - so we're calling this Early Arrival Party - "Tie One On" - wear a tie (doesn't have to be a bow tie - any type of tie will be fine) - receive a prize! Just another way to continue networking and enjoying the camaraderie we all share!

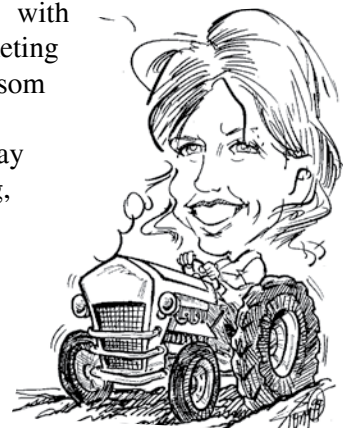
On Thursday please make plans to join us for "Marketing Boot Camp" - see page 9 for detailed information regarding

this presentation. It will be presented by our own Steven Haas with SAV, Michael Libbie with Insight Advertising, Marketing and Communications and Elsom Eldridge.

Friday will be a full day of fun, friends, networking, Marketplace, visiting with displayers, and our Friday night cocktails and dinner!

And...don't forget...throughout our trade show time we will be raising money for St.

Jude. We would like to continue with the auction on Friday night. So...if you would like to bring an item to auction please let me know. We raised \$12,000 last year and we want to do better this time around. Thank you again to all of you that donated your time, money and auction items!



See you in KC!

*Phyllis*

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## Marketing Magic

BY STEVEN P. HAAS

For months, or even years, your sales charts looked like the foothills of the Himalayas. You know you were headed for Everest – but now you're stuck somewhere in central Tibet.

Sure, your sales are right up there. And you deserve to be proud. After all, there was a time when you were starting out from zero, right at sea level. You've reached a respectable elevation. But the fact is, you're on a plateau.

What got you where you are will most likely not get you to where you're going. To take your business to the next level, you'll need to explore the concept of leverage marketing.

### 1. Increase traffic

Obviously, every business needs more customers. The more the merrier. Whether those clients are literally walking through your front door or using the Internet to walk through your "virtual" front door, getting them to walk in is your first step.

Here's how you do it.

- Try public speaking – preferably before audiences filled with potential clients. Don't be afraid to promote yourself and your business. Why is it that people speak of "shameless self – promotion"? What is there to be ashamed of?

- Get published – preferably in publications read by thousands of potential clients. It doesn't matter how many readers you're reaching. What matters is how many of the right readers you're reaching.

- Hook up with noncompetitive partners. An alliance can be a simple referral or cross promotion, or a full scale partnership. When you join with a nonprofit organization to advance an important cause, the alliance takes the form of an endorsement and can often lead to a variety of media and public relations opportunities along the way.

- Overcome technophobia. Leverage new technologies every chance you get. Consider all the possibilities, because this very minute, that's what your competitors are doing.

### 2. Increase closing

Antiques dealers often speak of "lookers and be-backers." Whether you're an accountant, an attorney, or a consultant, your business has them too. Until you've closed the sale, all those clients pouring through your door aren't clients at all – they're only prospects. And prospects don't pay the rent.

You can increase your closing percentages by devising new strategies to follow up on all bids, quotes, and proposals. If at first you don't succeed, find out why. Sure, asking clients (or not-quite-clients) such questions will demand a little initiative and a lot of courage. Most businesses never dare to ask why they've lost a sale, but the ones that do lose fewer sales each day.

You may also consider a comprehensive sales training program to help you and your staff turn more prospects into paying clients. Sometimes it doesn't matter how hard you're working, but how you're working hard. Sales training is often a large part of the solution.

## The Biz ON MARKETING WITH MAGIC

**Your sales were climbing, but now they're stuck?**

**Here's how to get off the plateau and push your sales to the next level**

### 3. Increase average client worth

Once you've closed the initial sale, how much will that client be worth to your business in the long run? Will the client return – or walk out the door, never to be seen again? All of these factors add up to increased average client worth or total client value (TCV) to your business.

It's no accident that those last few questions may have described situations like, well, a relationship. That's because relationships – ideally, exclusive long-lasting relationships – are what TCV is all about.

To increase your average client worth, ask yourself: Am I really building relationships with my clients? Or am I just completing transactions?

After you've built that initial client relationship, work on strengthening and deepening it. Up-sell, cross-sell, and resell your products and services – after all, they are quality, aren't they?

Consultants, for example, can focus on the problem at hand and then help their clients position for the future and long-term growth. When they do that, they position themselves as a partner who becomes the obvious choice to guide their clients through any troubled waters that may lie ahead.

TCV. It's a powerful concept. But by itself, it's not enough. You've

probably met people who are great at only one of these things. They're certain that the one that allows them to remain within their own personal comfort zone must be the one that's most important. "After all," they argue, "it got me this far, didn't it?" Convinced that they've found the key to marketing success, these people are stubbornly proud of the one-dimensional approach they use to market their businesses.

How many times have you heard statements like these?

- "Even if I only get a half-percent return rate on my next direct mail campaign, that's still over 10,000 new clients!"

- "It's not how many calls you make, it's how many sales you close!"

- "I tell you, you can't expect to close every deal. Let's face it, this is a numbers game."

- "Long prospect lists don't impress me. What really counts is your closing ratio."

They all sound plausible, but they seem to contradict each other. Which is more important, traffic or closing? Who's right, anyway?

Everyone and no one. To be really effective, your marketing strategy must increase both traffic and closing. And while you're at it, you'd better not forget about TCV, that third dimension of marketing.

If you're already working on all three of these dimensions, you're way ahead of the crowd. Even so, chances are good that you're working hard on only one or two of them, while still neglecting the third.

The old cliché is true: If you keep on doing what you've always done, you'll keep on getting what you've always gotten. Whatever marketing efforts you've used to get your business this far may not take it much further. That's why you should think leverage.

## The bottom line

Here's an example of the impact that each of the three dimensions of marketing can have on your bottom line. Let's watch a hypothetical business as progresses through the phases of leverage marketing.

### Current situation

100 prospects x 50% closing ratio = **50 clients**

5- clients x \$200 average sale = **\$10,000**

### Phase 1 (increasing traffic)

200 prospects x 50% closing ratio = **100 clients**

100 clients x \$200 average sale = **\$20,000**

### Phase 2 (increasing closing %)

200 prospects x 75% closing ratio = **150 clients**

150 clients x \$200 average sale = **\$30,000**

### Phase 3 (increasing average client worth)

200 prospects x 75% closing ratio = **150 clients**

150 clients x \$300 average sale = **\$45,000**

What does that all mean? Let's take it step by step.

In **Step 1**, we're just starting out. We see 100 potential clients every day. At a 50 percent closing ratio, that means 50 sales. If each client pays us \$200 for our services, then our daily sales are at \$10,000.

In **Step 2**, we've doubled our Traffic. It required a tremendous effort. All the low-hanging fruit has been plucked, and further gains won't be easy. Still, working hard at just this one dimension has allowed us to increase our daily sales to \$20,000.

In **Step 3**, we've worked hard to increase our Closing percentage from .50 to .75 percent. Realistically, we know that further gains will be tough; we can't expect to make every sale. Even though nothing else has changed since Step 2, we're not up to daily sales of \$30,000.

Finally in **Step 4**, we've increased total client Value (TCV) by 50 percent, to \$300. Although all other variables have remained constant, this on change boosts our daily sales to \$45,000. But it only brought us here when our daily sales were already at \$30,000.

It's unlikely that any of these improvements alone could have brought us from \$10,000 to \$45,000. It took all three.

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# MARKETING MASTERS BOOT CAMP



Here's what you'll learn when you attend Marketing Masters Boot Camp. This is an overall package and, to get the most out of the sessions, please attend them all.

## 1st hour – **THE MAGIC MESSAGE**

In this session your instructors will introduce the entire program and challenge you to identify your Key Marketing Messages. They will help you identify how your business is unique and how it fills a specific void within the marketplace.

When the session is complete you'll have a sixty second elevator speech and crystallized marketing message that can be utilized in all of your oral and written communications. This message will be the foundation of the four module program and can be leveraged throughout your traditional and online marketing efforts.

## 2nd hour – **MORE THROUGH THE DOOR**

The second module focuses on traffic building techniques... your instructors will help you evaluate your current "marketing mix" and help you arrive at more refined methods of approach.

When the session is complete you will have a synergistically-integrated marketing plan that you can implement with AVAILABLE RESOURCES and key metrics for measurement to ensure optimum impact.

## 3rd hour – **COUNTER INTELLIGENCE**

In the third session, you'll be challenged to look at every aspect of your sales program from selection, to your compensation, to your training and motivation...

When this session comes to completion, you'll have a firm grasp of what you need to do to make your sales pros more effective and key metrics for measurement to hold them accountable to their goals.

## 4th hour–**BACK-ENDING YOUR BUSINESS OFFERING.**

In the fourth and final session, you'll be challenged to evaluate our business offering and determine what additional products and/or services you might provide to your customers.

When it's all said and done, you'll have a clear understanding of how you can "back-end" your business offering and implement up-selling, cross-selling and re-selling techniques that will help increase your average "ticket" and lock your customers down for life.

## A BIT MORE ABOUT YOUR INSTRUCTORS

### Michael Libbie

is the founder of Insight Marketing and Communications

### Elsom Eldridge Jr.

is the founder of the Retail Sales Institute

### Steven P. Haas

is the Director of Business Development for the SAV Transportation Group.

These three professionals have over 100 years combined sales and marketing experience. They have worked with banks, chambers of commerce, tribal councils, trade associations, governmental agencies, economic development groups and educational institutions on both a national and international level. They have served a variety of noteworthy clients including Nestles, Radio Shack, Paramount Pictures and Treasure Island Casino and have inspired, motivated (and educated) over a quarter million seminar participants throughout their combined careers. Together, they possess a unique combination of competence, excellence and experience that makes them the perfect team to challenge you in the ongoing development of your business.

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# ~~Bad~~ News is Good News for You!

– By Michael Libbie

The USDA now says farm income for this year will fall to \$58.3 billion; that is a 36% drop and the lowest farm income level in nine years. It also means that, if these numbers hold true, this could be big news for your business.

## **The impact on your business?**

Already John Deere has laid off over 1,500 workers because farmers are going to be putting off new purchases and that means they will repair with they already own. This is a huge opportunity for your business and it's one of the topics we'll cover at the NTPDA Marketing Bootcamp in Kansas City.

## **What is the NTPDA Marketing Bootcamp?**

We've put together an intensive sales and marketing program designed to help you boost your revenue base by as much as 30%. This isn't guess work. This comes from years of helping business people, just like you, grow revenue numbers by making some simple adjustments to how you are currently doing business.

And best of all, when you leave this session you'll walk out with a solid plan that you can take home to...grow your business!

Look, you have told us you want real value from your membership dollars. How's this? If you had to pay to attend this sales and marketing seminar in a group setting the cost would be \$495 per person. We're giving it to you with your Annual Trade Show and Meeting Registration.

So, in Kansas City you'll not only learn how to better network, meet new people with new products and services but you'll also walk out of that meeting armed with the tools to grow your business.

Value? Yeah, we thought so!

See you in Kansas City.

Michael Libbie is a long-time member of the association and the owner of Insight Advertising, Marketing & Communications the advertising agency of record for the NTPDA.



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# To Bee or Not to Bee - is that a scientific question?

By Tom Winkleblack

I am sure most of you noticed this headline as it appeared throughout the media this spring, “Lowe’s to Stop Selling Bee-Killing Pesticides to Protect Pollinators.”

“EcoWatch” reported that after two years of pressure by the hard-hitting campaign by Friends of the Earth and partners, Lowe’s Home Improvement announced yesterday it will begin to eliminate neonicotinoid pesticides—a leading contributor to global bee declines—from its stores.

“We are pleased Lowe’s is listening to consumer concerns and to the growing body of science telling us we need to move away from bee-toxic pesticides by taking steps to be part of the solution to the bee crisis,” said Lisa Archer, Food & Technology program director at Friends of the Earth.

Consumer concerns have been fueled in large part by a parade of alarming news stories that even convinced the European Union to establish a moratorium on the use of neonicotinoids.

Let’s examine some of this “growing body of science” for what it really is.

According to Wikipedia-Colony collapse disorder (CCD) is the phenomenon that occurs when the majority of worker bees in a colony disappears and leaves behind a queen, plenty of food and a few nurse bees to care for the remaining immature bees and the queen.

Merriam-Webster defines apiculture as—the keeping of bees especially on a large scale. The Sioux Honey brand is the number one retailer of honey in the US and was founded in 1921 in Sioux City, Iowa. According to Global Research-Center for Research on Globalization they produce more than 35 million pounds of honey at their Sioux City and Anaheim, California facilities through a cooperative of over 300 beekeepers from the Midwest and Rocky Mountain states. Vice President for research and development Bill Huser stated in a local newspaper interview that, “One of the wrinkles is focus on increased diversity in genetics, which the [USDA] report’s authors said could help improve bee’s resistance to disease. Specifically, they said, genetic variation could help the bee’s body temperature steady, even if the surrounding environment changes.”

The U.S. Department of Agriculture points out those modern pesticides can hardly be blamed for CCD as the mysterious disappearance of hives has been documented in the 1880’s, 1920’s and 1960’s.

While such disappearances have occurred throughout the history of apiculture, and were known by various names

(disappearing disease, spring dwindle, May disease, autumn collapse, and fall dwindle disease), the syndrome was renamed colony collapse disorder in late 2006 in conjunction with a drastic rise in the number of disappearances of western honeybee (*Apis mellifera*) colonies in North America. European beekeepers observed similar phenomena in Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain, Switzerland and Germany, albeit to a lesser degree, and the Northern Ireland Assembly received reports of a decline greater than 50%.

Several possible causes for CCD have been proposed, but no single proposal has gained widespread acceptance among the scientific community. A large amount of speculation has surrounded a recently introduced family of pesticides called neonicotinoids as having caused CCD. Other suggested causes include: infections with *Varroa* and *Acarapis* mites; malnutrition; various pathogens; genetic factors; immunodeficiency’s; loss of habitat; changing beekeeping practices; or a combination of factors.

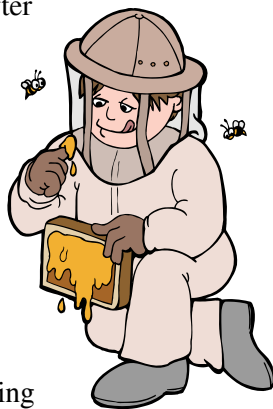
In America the common practice of feeding bee colonies high fructose corn syrup to harvest all of the natural self-made food honey is another probable factor.

The Competitive Enterprise Institute reports that according to a 2010 United Nations study, only about 7 percent of hive losses can be attributed to CCD, and 93 percent to compromised hive health. Hive health is affected by a combination of factors including: poor queen bee health, hive transport for pollination services, nutritional and habitat issues, parasites and diseases. Pesticides are thought to be the least among these factors and neonicotinoids the least among those, if they have any impact at all.

The U.S. Agricultural Research Service notes on its website: The neonicotinoids were developed in the mid-1990s in large part because they showed reduced toxicity to honey bees, compared with previously used organophosphate and carbamate insecticides.” If farmers cannot use neonicotinoids, they will use other chemicals that are more toxic to bees.

According to the United Nations Food Agricultural Organization (FAO) statistics the number of beehives kept globally has grown from nearly 50 million in 1961 to more than 80 million in 2013.

Once again we have allowed the media to create alarmism that is not supported by scientific fact!



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**Program At A Glance**

**Wednesday, January 20, 2016\***

2:00 p.m. – 5 p.m.	Displayers early set-up – Gillham Hall
3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.	Workshop – TractorHouse – “Sandhills System” - Empire
6:30 p.m.	“Early Arrival Party” – Let’s “Tie” One On – Danny Byer – Location TBD

**\*Please NOTE there is NO Early Registration on Wednesday. Please register on Thursday morning beginning at 8:00 a.m.**

**Thursday, January 21, 2016**

7:00 a.m.	Displayers complete set-up. Must be completed by 3 p.m. – Gillham Hall
8:00 a.m. - 12 Noon	Registration – Outside Gillham Hall
Noon	Lunch – On Your Own
1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.	Registration – Outside Gillham Hall
1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.	Marketing Masters Boot Camp: The Magic Message
2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.	Marketing Masters Boot Camp: More Through the Door
3:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.	Break
3:15 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.	Marketing Masters Boot Camp: Counter Intelligence
4:15 p.m. – 5:15 p.m.	Marketing Masters Boot Camp: Back-Ending Your Business Offering*
1:15 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.	Spouse tour – TBD
6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.	“Welcome to Kansas City” – Reception/Opening of Trade Show/Gillham Hall
7:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.	NTPDA Marketplace I – Regular members meet in small groups for potential business opportunities with exhibitors. (Details to follow.)

**Friday, January 22, 2016**

7:30 a.m. – 8:00 a.m.	“Let’s Get Physical “– Boot Camp Session and Networking!!! Door Prizes!!!
9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.	Registration - Outside Gillham Hall
8:00 a.m. -9:00 a.m.	More Networking- “Coffee & Conversation” – Spend some one on one time with your NTPDA friends and colleagues. Gillham Hall
9:00 a.m.	Trade Show Opens – Gillham Hall
10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.	NTPDA Marketplace II
11:00 a.m. – 12 Noon	General Session/Election of Officers – Gillham Hall – All members please attend.
12 Noon	Lunch/Trade Show Area
1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.	NTPDA Marketplace III
3:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.	Displayers Meeting – Trade Show Area – Board members please attend.
4:00 p.m.	Trade Show Closes
7:00 p.m.	Cocktails/Dinner – Empire

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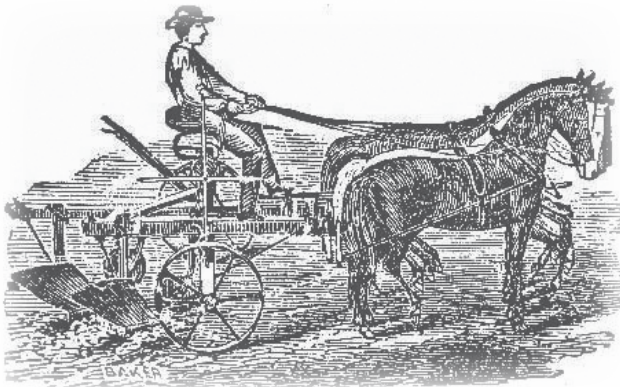
# THE ORIGINAL TRACTOR WAS A HORSE

by Charles Niemann, Sr.

The original tractors didn't need parts. My Grandfather worked his farm with horsepower, literally.

When I was a kid I vaguely remember my Grandfather going to a lot of trouble each morning to get the horses rigged up to a farm implement. Of course, that was a long time ago and it wasn't long until he bought a tractor. I don't remember what brand it was. But, it was a big change from the horses. Somehow it wasn't quite as manly as using the horses. But, it sure was a lot easier.

Before the first tractor, my grandfather built a building and constructed a forge to actually make parts for his horse drawn farm equipment. If you could get parts at all, they were expensive and most could be replicated or repaired with the forge and a hammer. There was a hand cranked bellows for the fire and a hand cranked grinding wheel cleaned up the parts quite well. Granddad even made his own coke to burn in the forge. Everything was hand operated since there was no electricity at the time. My Cousins and I had fun playing with all the hand driven equipment. The bellows usually got soot all over since there was no fire when we were playing.



The equipment was not particularly complicated and since there was nothing electrical, parts were pretty basic. To some degree, that still applied after the tractor came. I did not realize it at the time, but once the tractor was invented, everybody was making them. If you picked the wrong brand, you could be stuck with a real parts problem. I am told that I am a distant relative of John Deere and I know my Grandfather had John Deere tractors; although, he and my two uncles (they all had adjoining farms) had a number of different brands over the years.

With the early tractors, the belt power takeoff was close to a miracle. I remember it being used to do almost everything the tractor could not do by itself. It could even be used to power the water well before electricity. The use that impressed me the most was to power a sawmill. Granddad and my uncles built a sawmill from scratch. About the only things that were not made by hand were bolts and the blade

and I am not too sure about the blade. Of course, my cousins and I were not allowed anywhere near the sawmill when they were actually using it. But it was tough to keep us in the next pasture behind a fence.

I wasn't really a farm boy. My Mother and I would go to the farm most weekends since my Dad was a salesman and traveled a lot over about five states. I had a lot of rides on tractors and hay wagons. Though I never drove any of the tractors, three of my cousins did as they grew up and I know how proud they were of helping to work a farm.

One of my cousins later was crippled in a car accident and still became a heavy equipment operator of all kinds of earth moving vehicles. One became a lawyer and one became a successful real estate developer and inventor with a number of patents. I think growing up on or being on a farm or ranch regularly while growing up is a great way to start a successful life. There is a type of freedom and self reliance that is developed that can not be found in cities. A child experiences the natural world we live on, not the one engineered by humans.

I bet a lot of old time, and maybe some new, farmers today still know how to create mechanical parts from raw material. Farm equipment has become so sophisticated and specialized with computers guiding the work that the business of repair has become just as technical.

Finding the right and reliable parts at a reasonable price has evolved into a world wide trade network. The right part at the right time with the right service is a must to keep farm products flowing to the increasing world population. The horse just will not do anymore.

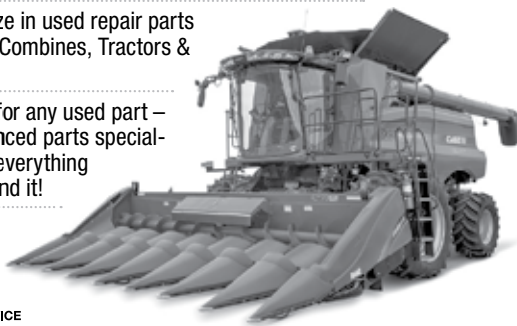
*Charles Niemann will receive a \$50 gift card from Cabela's for subitting his article. We would love to publish YOU!*

A funeral procession pulled into a cemetery. Several carloads of family members followed a black truck towing a boat with a coffin in it. A passerby remarked, "That guy must have been a very avid fisherman." "Oh, he still is," remarked one of the mourners. "As a matter of fact, he's headed off to the lake as soon as we bury his wife."

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## News About Our Members



Carl and LaVonne Vande Weerd pinning on their son, Chris' 2nd Lt. bars after his commissioning into the United States Marine Corps.



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I am being told that we need more "meat" in our Bulletin, but I would like that to come from you...our members.

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*Charles Niemann will receive a \$50 gift card from Cabela's for his article about "the original tractor" (page 19).*



Congratulations Aubrey and Dakota Kieffer. Dakota is the son of Nancy & Terry Kieffer, **Plastics Unlimited** in Preston, IA.

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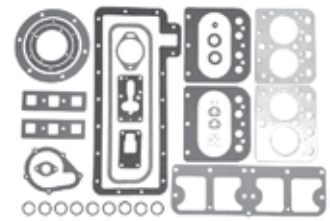
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# How a cup of coffee can change the world

by Danny Beyer

I grew up in small town in Iowa where every morning the business owners and farmers would congregate at the local restaurants. The conversations typically centered on the weather and how crops were doing. Occasionally this trend would break when the high school football or basketball team was doing exceptionally well. I remember thinking how great it would be someday when I could spend my mornings sipping coffee and bantering back and forth with old friends.



This is the main reason I've been fascinated by coffee shops for years. Places like Starbucks, Caribou, and Panera intrigue me not for the caffeinated beverages they sell but for the environment and community they provide. Spend enough time in any coffee shop and eventually you'll start to see the same faces having the same conversations. However, over the years my perception of these conversations has changed drastically.

Sure, people are still making idle chitchat about things like the weather and weekend plans. But something much more important is also taking place. Sales people are meeting with prospects and clients to sell their products. Entrepreneurs are pitching ideas to investors. Professionals are meeting with other professionals to network and build relationships. Every day of every week millions of dollars are exchanging hands as networks are being built, relationships are forming, and ideas are being exchanged.

In his July 2010 Ted Talk Steven Johnson makes that case that without the invention of the coffee house the "Enlightenment" would not have happened. Coffee houses were a space where people could get together from different backgrounds and a "space where ideas could have sex."<sup>1</sup> He goes on to explain how most great and innovated ideas have a coffee shop somewhere in their background.

Coffee shops, or settings like them, provide the ideal environment for individuals to exchange ideas and innovations to occur. They provide an open space for people to connect and to expand their networks. This is one of the main reasons so many successful organizations like Google and Apple now provide similar spaces inside their corporate headquarters. They are, in essence, encouraging their employees to network, to exchange ideas and allow those ideas to mingle into bigger and better ideas.

Very few good ideas or revolutionary innovations have happened by themselves. Steve Jobs had the general idea for an MP3 player in the late 90s but it took a talented team

of innovators to create the first iPod.<sup>2</sup> Tim Berners-Lee is given credit for inventing the Web but it took years of work by teams in different fields of expertise to create the backend networks that support our obsession with online surfing.<sup>3</sup> One person may have a good idea, but it takes a network of different perspectives and different experiences to make that idea great.

This is why networking is so crucial to innovation. Real innovation and creativity takes the mingling of ideas to solve problems. It is connecting unrelated ideas or objects and creating something entirely new. Great innovation simply cannot happen by itself because of this need of connections and outside influence. Even if one person has an incredible idea it still takes a team of trusted partners to see that idea to fruition.

Take the story of a Swiss hiker named George who took his dog for a walk one afternoon in 1948. Upon returning home he noticed that his companion's fur was covered in cockleburs. This intrigued George so much that he took out his microscope to examine the burrs in greater detail. He discovered that each pod was covered in natural hooks that allowed it to cling to all sorts of fabrics and furs. These hooks gave the plants the ability to travel far distances and distribute their seeds. They also gave George an idea.

He began working on a prototype fabric with hooks on one side and a companion fabric with loops on the other. George de Mestral had just invented Velcro, a fabric that has allowed shoes to stay on toddlers and rockets to be sent to space. However, this breakthrough idea that happened in a moment of inspiration on a random walk with his dog would never have seen the light of day without help from and around Mestral's network.

Initially, the idea of Velcro was met with resistance and laughter by some, but Mestral stuck by his invention and was able to partner with a weaver from a textile plant in France in order to perfect the hook and loop fastener.<sup>4</sup> In 1955 he patented his design and formed Velcro Industries some time later. Today Velcro Industries is a multimillion-dollar business operating all around the globe. All thanks to a walk, one man's curiosity, and his ability to work with experts in other industries to launch a completely new product.<sup>5</sup>

A solid network can even help new ideas happen by accident. In mid-2012 I started wearing bow ties after a couple of close friends encouraged me to do so. Initially, I took a lot of grief with references to Pee Wee Herman and the like. Over time, the bow tie became part of my image and the banter subsided. I thought it was just going to be a fad that I would get over after a couple of months. That all

*Continued*

changed on December 12th, 2012 when I received a text from a friend.

The text was innocent enough – a selfie with the caption “Hey buddy, it’s Bow Tie Wednesday. Are you wearing a bow tie?” I responded with a selfie of my own proudly owning up to the bow tie around my neck. He photoshopped the pictures together and posted them to Facebook announcing that it was Bow Tie Wednesday to the world.

We received an immediate and overwhelmingly positive response from both of our networks on this new creation. We knew we had something. An official Bow Tie Wednesday Facebook page was created the following day, which quickly gained a following. To date we have received pictures from people all over the world proudly wearing their bow ties on Wednesdays.

But the story doesn’t stop there. You see, Zac and I are both very philanthropic people and we like to give back to the community that supports us. We met for coffee one afternoon at Panera and decided that if our silly Facebook page could get 500 likes we would try and create a bow tie centered event that would allow us to raise money for a local charity. We hit that number three short months later.

Another coffee meeting happened and, after some brainstorming and collaborating, we created the 1st Annual Bow Tie Ball in 2013. This unique and fun event centered on a bow tie that we designed to feature the charity of our choice, Variety. We found a designer through Twitter who could help get our bow ties produced. Sponsors were found through our business connections and through our business connections’ connections. A single selfie sent on a cold December afternoon has helped raise close to \$25,000 for

local charities over the past two years with no current end in sight.

Being innovative or having the next big idea doesn’t happen in isolation. It takes inspiration. It takes being creative and connecting two previously unconnected ideas into something completely new.<sup>6</sup> It takes different perspectives and expertise in a variety of backgrounds and fields. Even if you’re lucky or creative enough to come up with a truly innovative idea that idea is useless without other people supporting it.

Surround yourself with fantastic people if you want to be truly innovative. Build a network with individuals who are different from you but want to accomplish something great. Find individuals who are making a difference and ask them to have coffee with you. Spend more time in those coffee shops and watch for the same faces to appear every day, the faces that seem to always be meeting someone new or influential. Introduce yourself and exchange ideas. Allows those ideas to “have sex” as Mr. Johnson would say.

An idea is only as good as the people who are behind it. A solid network is essential to any innovative process. Those farmers back in the coffee shop of my hometown may not have been changing the world but they were part of an innovation cycle. By exchanging techniques, ideas, and wisdom through years of experience they were helping the next generation to achieve greater success than they themselves could hope to. They were building relationships, creating trust, and quietly changing the communities they loved all under the guise of a black cup of a coffee and a friendly hello each morning.

<sup>1</sup>Johnson, S. (2010, July 1). Where good ideas come from. Retrieved December 16, 2014, from: [http://www.ted.com/talks/steven\\_johnson\\_where\\_good\\_ideas\\_come\\_from?language=en#t-111092](http://www.ted.com/talks/steven_johnson_where_good_ideas_come_from?language=en#t-111092)

<sup>2</sup>Edwards, B. (2011, October 23). The birth of the iPod. Retrieved December 16, 2014, from: [http://www.macworld.com/article/1163181/the\\_birth\\_of\\_the\\_ipod.html](http://www.macworld.com/article/1163181/the_birth_of_the_ipod.html)

<sup>3</sup>Strickland, J. (n.d.). Who invented the Internet? Retrieved December 16, 2014, from: <http://science.howstuffworks.com/innovation/inventions/who-invented-the-internet.htm>

<sup>4</sup>Bellis, M. (2014, March 5). The invention of Velcro - George de Mestral. Retrieved December 16, 2014, from <http://invent>

<sup>5</sup>About Velcro Industries. (n.d.). Retrieved December 16, 2014, from <http://www.velcro.com/about-us>

<sup>6</sup>Paustian, A. (2012). *Beware the purple people eaters: A personal look at leadership*. Des Moines, Iowa: BookPress Publishing.

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