

The Science of Office Salesmanship

"A Correspondent Who Does Not Realize the Importance of His Position, and Who Writes Letters That Do Not Possess that Come-Hither Spirit, May Ruin a Million Dollar Institution"

BY ROBERT G. RUXTON

THE SPIRIT OF CORRESPONDENCE.

Did you ever write to a man and receive back a reply that individualized him in your eyes—if you have, carefully note his method, for that man is a correspondent—not a letter writer, but a correspondent. He got right up against you, met parry with parry, wit with wit, logic with logic, sword thrust with sword thrust, praise with appreciation, blame with vindication, paradox with aphorism, aphorism with epigram—in short you realized quickly that you were crossing swords with a swordsman and at once felt an added respect for your opponent in the friendly business battle.

And this is what I want to talk with you about. Catch the spirit of your correspondent and he feels the same joy as the wrestler or a swordsman feels when he meets "a foeman worthy of his steel." Some letters are individual—the man stands right out and shakes hands with you with a good hearty, friendly grip. Don't send him back an epistolary handshake of the flabby, "I'm half-dead" kind. Return his "shake" with interest.

If you're a correspondent you will study your correspondent, but if you're a letter writer you will send him back one of those half-frozen messages that leave him wondering what sort of a dummy was at the other end.

If you want to make an impression get some ginger into your finger tips and make your letter as individualistic as the one you receive. Let it be a reply, hot with anger, vibrating with indignation, incisive with sarcasm, cutting with wit, warm with friendship, pregnant with logic, buttressed with reasons, or tingling with praise, but make an impression—make the recipient fairly tingle to write you again—make an enemy if you must, a friend if you can, but, in the name of personality do something to get away from writing the class of letter that reminds the recipient of getting into a damp and soggy suit of clothes.

The fact of the matter is, the good correspondent is a man who is alive. His mind is as responsive to praise or blame as the harp strings to the fingers that manipulate them. He enjoys getting a gingery "rouse up" kind of letter and flashes back "a Roland for an Oliver" in double quick marching time.

Such a man studies each letter he answers, catches the view-point of the man who wrote it, and lets him see that he does catch it. If a word of praise is sent a word of appreciation goes back, phrased so as to make that man feel that hereafter, between the two, there exists a friendship—this is the very best kind of an impression to make.

Praise is a rare commodity, and when it is given the giver should know that it has been appreciated; a man that takes the trouble to write something nice about yourself or your

goods knows that he is doing something that on the whole is rather gracious and courteous, and he likes, we all like, to have our courtesy recognized. To answer such a man's questions, and ignore his commendation is not alone unpolitic, but is in the highest degree ignorant and boorish. Even if you do think all he said is hardly good enough—even if you do think he has only voiced the opinions that thousands should voice—remember that he is the one man among thousands who has warmed up sufficiently to you to give you that very rare and grateful cordial—a kindly word of encouragement or commendation.

STUDY YOUR LETTERS.

Study your letters. Here is a correspondent that flashes at you a spark of wit. Catch it. Acknowledge it. Match it if you can, but let him know that an appreciative reader exists at your end and your letter will go far.

So many men are deficient in this. Send them a witty, incisive, or logical letter and their reply indicates that, metaphorically, you have "thrown pearls before swine." What a joy to find a man who "flashes back!"

As I write this article I have a letter before me evidently written by a man of wit, intellect and education. He opens it generously:

"I was much pleased to receive your letter, simple in dictation—plain in statement—correct in principle, large in scope."

Now isn't that generous, appreciative, cordial? How many correspondents will tell you that, though you reach them by thousands? Shouldn't that cordial handshaking little opening be recognized?

Of course! The common courtesy by which society is governed demands an exchange of compliments here even if a more generous feeling does not dictate it.

Then the correspondent flashes a little "bon mot" that evidences a man of wit and culture:

"I find influence in Promotion is just as valuable, and just as variable, as Beauty in matrimonial work."

Good! distinctly good, as every one who knows finance will immediately recognize. An exceedingly apt comparison, wasted if it falls before a clod.

"I would like to confine myself to high grade promotion work based on knowledge reverent with age and active with youth."

Epigrams fairly glisten through this correspondent's letter—how many men will he strike who will recognize them, respond to them?

Some men will write back and leave that man "cold"—his wit ignored, his kindness floated by silence—he probably won't do it again.

Lillian Whiting, writing not on correspondence, but on psychic subjects, expresses the thought the writer is endeavoring to bring out, in the following words:

"Spiritual receptivity is not a negative attitude. It is not holding up languidly an empty cup, expecting that at some time, and

in some way, it will be filled without exertion on our part. The condition of the very highest receptivity is that of the very highest spirituality. When electricity flies from the static to the dynamic, and leaps across any gulf or through any obstacle, it is not because the object to which it leaps is inert, but rather because that object is in a highly charged state, which attracts the corresponding potency to itself."

That's it exactly. The correspondent should be a "live" electrical battery "charged" with life, appreciation, and the desire to get business. Then he will attract "the corresponding potency to himself" because it will be seen that he is appreciative of it—and of all things in this world people do like to deal with an appreciative man.

And so, all through the mail. If a correspondent hits you, hit back. If in a logical incisive letter he challenges you to a game of fence let your steel meet his, mind cross mind; then, after a good and hearty bout at fence, when you both have a hearty respect for each other's powers, you may shake hands, and you, the correspondent, may record the order.

And now I want to talk to you about another subject—the use of "form" letters, and "form" paragraphs, which I explained in an earlier paper and which I have reason to believe received deep attention at the hands of numerous readers.

THE CURSE OF ROUTINE.

The "form" book is good in its place, but for heaven's sake don't place it in the hands of a lazy letter writer, nor subject a real correspondent to its enervating influence unless he has a strong will.

Here is a letter to answer—it requires the personal note—the correspondent should answer it personally, but if infected with the form letter virus he'll write, "No. 10, Paragraph 8," and let it go at that.

Using "forms" when good, hot, original stuff is required, is one of the quickest ways to bankrupt a business I know of. One use of the "form book" is to know when a "form" is not to be used—and then refuse to use it but to sit right down with the more or less pretty stenographer and send the man that needs it a real reply—a real answer to his questions—not the mummified paragraph that you have dug up in your series of "forms" and which you delude yourself will, by some possibility, answer.

If an answer to a question is not in the "form book," why write it, or dictate it, but answer it—there is nothing quite so exasperating in correspondence as to write, and write, and write—to an "inveterate" form user, and receive back those classical sentences giving such beautiful explanation of something else, anything else but what you have asked.

However, it's good for the lively competitor.

And he knows it—you bet. You'll see him studying the replies for the personal note which, if he catches, he knows will lever the waiting dollar into his capacious pocket.

It's a great game, the game of business, and it calls for men with good red pulsing blood in their veins to play it.

Sometimes—if you happen to be the recipient of such crystallized stupidity you will come back hot and strong at the "corres-