



By Richard D. Czerniawski

K-I-S-S

My wife asked me to help her pack away some items. She had an Office Depot box in which to store them. Specifically, she wanted me to assemble the box. Not being particularly crafty, my first instinct was to search for the instructions. These were printed on the box material for easy access. However, I thought of Andy Smith and how he would approach the problem.

Andy Smith was our Sales Merchandising Manager at the P&G (Procter & Gamble) Folger's Coffee Division. He served as the liaison between marketing and the field sales force. He was a former sales manager, and his function was part of the sales force. His role was to review all marketing materials intended for use by sales personnel. This included correspondence, pre-packaged floor stands, promotions, and so forth. If he didn't approve something, then we could not send it out. His veto power was absolute, and he wielded it with authority and experience working in sales!

I recall sharing a prototype pre-packaged floor stand with Andy. This required assembly, similar to the Office Depot box, by sales personnel at retail (i.e., in the stores). Andy opened the carton containing the floor stand, took out the printed assembly instructions and proceeded to rip them up. I was astonished that he ignored or, perhaps, a better word is blatantly "disregarded" the directions intended to assist salespeople in successfully assembling the displays.

Andy noted my shocked and bewildered expression, as he had been lying in wait for it. In fact, the tearing-up of the instructions was a dramatization designed to capture my attention. He was setting up a valuable teaching moment. In his practical, no-nonsense matter he informed me that his salespeople would not use the instructions. They were too busy to take the time to read detailed instructions and deal with anything that they thought might be complicated. And, if it needs instruction, it's complicated.

To get the sales' force execution we needed, we had to adhere to the K-I-S-S principle – the acronym for "Keep It Simple Stupid." If Andy could not readily assemble the pre-packaged floor stand without the instructions, it would fail. In simple terms, he would not approve it for use by the sales force.

Thankfully, the floor stand passed the test. However, it was only Andy's first test. He left the floor stand out overnight in his office. The second test focused on its durability. Andy wanted to determine what would happen after the cleaning crew mopped his office floor and slobbered water at the base of the cardboard floor stand (as is likely to occur at retail). Would it hold up or not? Ah, but that's a story for another time.

The key learning is that we need to follow the K-I-S-S principle in all that we do. If something is

complicated or perceived to be complicated, then our intended customer or support staff will not take the time to do it. Execution will fail and so will our initiative, whatever that might be. We may engage others, but if we make them work, they will simply refuse to do it.

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