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IS THERE A LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL?

REPS FIND SIGNS OF HOPE IN A RECOVERING ECONOMY

EDITORIAL | JACK FOSTER

Martin Regalia's general session comments set the tone for this year's **Keystone Conference** and represented the commencement of the rep-directed event.

According to Regalia, who is vice president of economic and tax policy and chief economist for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, "Economically, we're in a decline and continue to slip. Whether this continues into a recession really depends upon how long we continue the slip. If anything, I think it will be a short and *mild* recession. I believe that a year from now we'll look back and agree that we dodged a bullet. I remain optimistic."

The majority of attendees at this year's **Keystone Conference** reported that their goals for networking with reps from their own and other industries were well met. But there was much more to experience at the three-day Baltimore event than just socializing.

While this third event, jointly sponsored by MANA, NEMRA and MAFSI, provided plenty of opportunities for reps to meet with like-minded sales professionals, a full complement of rep-directed programming met educational needs as well.

The passage of a couple of months' time since the meeting provides the perfect lens through which to view the economic comments of **Martin Regalia**, who kicked off the conference's first general session when he spoke on trends in U.S. manufacturing.

According to Regalia, vice president, economic & tax policy and chief economist for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, "Economically, we're in a decline and continue to slip. Whether this continues into a recession really depends upon how long we continue the slip. If anything, I think it will be a short and *mild* recession. We're not at the end of the decline yet, but perhaps we're seeing the beginning of the end. In my opinion, it's the end of the free-fall. There's a little improvement in housing. The administration's stimulus and actions by the Fed should get us going again. My prediction is not dire. What we're going to face is not a depression. I believe that a year from now we'll look back and agree that we dodged a bullet. I remain optimistic."

Harnessing Technology

To kick off his presentation, "Technology and Its Future Impact on You," marketing coach **Terry Brock** relayed a powerful quote from Jack Welch, former head of GE. He said, "An organization's ability to learn — and to translate that learning into action *rapidly* — is the ultimate competitive advantage."

That's where the understanding and use of technology comes in, according to Brock. "Your customers are accustomed to getting what they want, right now. If they can't get it from you, they'll get it elsewhere. Those of you who can use technology to change the way you conduct business and change your thinking will survive and thrive. Others won't."

Among the trends that, according to Brock, reps ought to be embracing are:

- ✦ Awareness, if not use of, the "Smart Phone" — "This is an example of an area of intelligent communications that reps ought to be embracing."
- ✦ The need for social connections that can be created and maintained through technology — "What these social networking tools (e.g., YouTube, MySpace) allow reps to maintain is a connection with others. You can create a YouTube message and present it to others at virtually no cost. This provides reps with a sense of immediacy and allows them to communicate important information that affects their industry and their professions."
- ✦ Brock reminded the audience that "Reps have enormous amounts of knowledge and information. It's critical to use technology to deliver that to the customer."
- ✦ "Use technology to dazzle and bind buyers to you."

The Power of Positive Thinking

"If you possess a negative frame of mind, it affects you personally, and it will ultimately affect your sales' performance." That was just part of the message delivered to Keystone attendees by **Dr. Jerry Teplitz**, Jerry Teplitz Enterprises. Speaking on the subject of "Increasing Your Selling Power to New Levels of Excellence," Teplitz maintained, "At the beginning of the day, if you're in a negative frame of mind, that mind-set will ruin your day. If you've ever endured an entire negative day, at the end don't you feel defeated and drained? Consider the opposite approach, and you'll be successful."

He continued, "As a manager, remember that you're at the top of the triangle. If you manage negatively, you create stress and limit your team's effectiveness. If you manage

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positively, you'll increase creativity and performance. Remember you can choose to be positive or negative — and you can do so instantly.”

Good Intel

And finally, a highlight of the Keystone Conference general sessions, as reported in the July issue of **Agency Sales**, occurred when the heads of the three sponsoring associations addressed the major challenges facing reps today, and then took questions from the floor on the subject.

In addition to the slate of general session presentations, a full schedule of breakout sessions addressed reps' specific educational needs:

- ✦ The lines between coaching and micro-managing were clearly drawn by sales coach **Nicki Weiss**, Sa1esWise, during her presentation devoted to “Creating a Team of Sales Superstars.” According to Weiss, “In order to be a successful sales coach, you've got to exercise two disciplines — you've got to be able to listen to the person you're coaching, and you've got to be curious about their needs and their accomplishments.” She stressed the importance of regularly scheduling coaching sessions, and emphasized the fact that “hands-on coaching results in an exponential improvement in sales performance.”
- ✦ “Effective Negotiation Strategies” were provided by **Barry Wright**, senior director, Strategic Partners Consulting & Training. Wright maintained that among the attributes an effective negotiator must possess and exercise are the ability to negotiate internally, patience, the ability to listen and a willingness to regularly use the word “because.” He described “because” as the most effective word that can be used in negotiations.

Wright also advised his audience to sell a price increase by using the following practices:

- Do it face-to-face.
- Be prepared to negotiate the increase.
- Let the customer blow off steam.
- Sell the increase as early in the process as possible.

- ✦ In previous issues of **Agency Sales**, tips for gaining control of email were offered by **Steve Turner**, Turner Time Management. He emphasized “the importance of recognizing that your email box is just that — a box. It is not a strategic device. Gain control of it and you'll become more productive.”
- ✦ A number of valuable recommendations for locating and hiring successful sales personnel were offered by **Mike Norton**, AxiomOne, Inc. According to the personnel expert, “It's important to have a plan in place for choosing new candidates before you actually have a need. As you develop that plan, the first thing you must do is talk to other people. Ask for their recommendations and referrals. Networking is the most effective means of finding new people.”

“As the search progresses,” he said, “there are two attributes a candidate must possess that are absolutely non-negotiable — they must be intelligent and curious.”
- ✦ Rounding out the Keystone presentations were **Scott Brenner, CPA**, Dylewsky, Goldberg & Brenner, who offered attendees tips on employing tax strategies that save time and money, and MANA and NEMRA counsel **John Satagaj**, who brought the audience up-to-date with happenings in Washington, D.C.  