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### FRONT PAGE NEWS

- Thursday, Aug. 19, 2010
- Wednesday, Aug. 18, 2010
- Tuesday, Aug. 17, 2010
- Monday, Aug. 16, 2010
- Friday, Aug. 13, 2010

[« Back](#)

Go to date:

Search News:

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- Wednesday, Aug. 18, 2010
- Tuesday, Aug. 17, 2010
- Monday, Aug. 16, 2010
- Friday, Aug. 13, 2010
- Thursday, Aug. 12, 2010

[« Back](#) | [Forward »](#)

Go to date:

Search Records:

### PUBLIC NOTICES

- Thursday, Aug. 19, 2010
- Wednesday, Aug. 18, 2010
- Tuesday, Aug. 17, 2010
- Monday, Aug. 16, 2010
- Sunday, Aug. 15, 2010

[« Back](#)

Go to date:

Search Notices:

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VOL. 125 | NO. 157 | Friday, August 13, 2010

## Skelton Shares Sales Training at SMS Luncheon

JEFF IRELAND | Special to The Daily News

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[Mike Skelton](#) has been in the sales game for 20 years.

So when he spoke to about 30 people Tuesday afternoon at Panera Bread in East Memphis for a Sales and Marketing Society of the Mid-South luncheon, he knew his audience didn't want to sit back in their chairs for an hour and listen to a speech about quotas and cold calling.

Skelton, an account manager and sales trainer at RedRover Sales & Marketing, went through a PowerPoint presentation and doled out some advice.

But, through most of the luncheon, he made things interactive. He asked questions and encouraged participation. In other words, he engaged his audience.

**“You’ve got to keep the customer’s perspective in mind. ... You’ve got to learn to play the record he wants to dance to.”**

– Mike Skelton

And that was one of the main things he stressed as important when trying to secure clients.

“Sometimes it’s hard to shake off our seller’s perspective,” Skelton said. “You’ve got to keep the customer’s perspective in mind. ... You’ve got to learn to play the

record he wants to dance to, or he’s not going to listen.”

Differentiation was another major theme of the presentation.

As most sales people know, one of the keys to increasing clients is to let them know how and why a business is unique.

Skelton used an example of a handyman who had the tagline: “On time or on our dime.”

The fictional business promised to give customers a discount if workers did not show up when they said they would.

“If you’re going to differentiate yourself, you want to talk about what makes your company different than the other guy,” Skelton said. “If a particular thing you offer is not different, don’t bring it up.”

Late in the meeting, Skelton talked about the “elevator speech,” a relatively short pitch that can be used in networking situations.

He asked several in attendance to stand up and give a quick summary about their business and what makes it unique.

While telling a potential customer how one’s business is great, Skelton stressed, providing proof is crucial. It’s something that several who spoke failed to mention, and Skelton pointed that out.

“Tell them something like, ‘Call this guy. He’s my best customer. He can prove it,’” Skelton said. “You’ve got to cite tangible results with proof points that are simple to explain.”

While many of the techniques explained by Skelton have worked for as long as salesmen have been around, a lot has changed in the business during the past couple of decades. In the last 20 years, the number of salesmen in the country has decreased by almost half, Skelton said.

There are several reasons. The Internet could be No. 1. In years past when somebody wanted to know about a company, the information came from a salesman. Today, just about anything about a company can be gleaned from a website.

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PROPERTY SALES	51	208	10,494
MORTGAGES	90	335	14,779
FORECLOSURE NOTICES	0	116	7,556
BUILDING PERMITS	0	585	26,675
BANKRUPTCIES	73	349	12,342
BUSINESS LICENSES	20	102	3,541
UTILITY CONNECTIONS	91	538	18,009
MARRIAGE LICENSES	26	94	3,572

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The old strategy of cold calling is much less effective these days.

“Done any cold calling lately?” Skelton asked the crowd. “I was 0 for 104 a month ago to be honest. ... Today we’ve got gatekeepers (who serve as a buffer between the salesman and the decision maker), voicemail and e-mail. It’s the evolution of our role. We used to be the glue between the customer and the vendor. Today the Internet does that.”

Networking, said Skelton, is the key.

“The only way to succeed,” he said, “is networking ... at places like this.”

Following Skelton’s talk, he encouraged the group to mingle, exchange business cards and, of course, network.

Rachel Renner, a student at the University of Memphis who is pursuing her MBA, said she got a lot out of the experience.

“I don’t have a business,” she said, “but I found what he said to be very helpful. I’m marketing myself right now.”

Chris Copeland, an account executive at EM Printing in Bartlett, said he will use what he learned next time he talks to a potential customer.

“I like what he said about giving examples of customers who have been pleased with your services,” Copeland said. “I’m going to take my existing speech and add something like that to the end.”



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