

# LONE STAR

**BUSINESS JOURNAL**

TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION FOR  
TEXAS CEOs & FOUNDERS

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## Hello Friends And Valued USM Clients,

Cybersecurity Awareness Month is the perfect time for this important reminder: no one is immune to cybersecurity attacks. Not even me. For me, it came through the Allen Independent School District, where my children go to school. I never thought I'd open up my phone to a threatening text message from a cybercriminal. Still, my family and many other families in the district felt the shock of becoming another victim of cybercrime that day.

"If the Allen Independent School District fails to pay ransom, we'll release personal information about your children online." I couldn't believe my eyes as I read the text message. Because I'm trained in cyberattack response, I knew the proper steps to take that day, but not everyone does.

In the hours right after a cyberattack, a lot can happen. It's a critical time window where things can get a whole lot better or a whole lot worse, depending on how victims respond. Last month USM Technology partnered with the Allen Economic Development Corporation to host an Executive Cybersecurity Roundtable. A special agent from the FBI's cyber task force joined us at the event. The special agent and I led a conversation with business leaders from across North Texas on the most effective techniques to successfully repel a cyberattack.

During the event, the FBI special agent explained exactly what the first 72 hours after a cyberattack should look like when leadership makes the proper preparations. If people only remembered a few insights from the conversation, I hope these were the ones:

- 1. Keep your cyber insurance policy hidden.** If a hacker breaks into your network, they'll look for your policy to see how much coverage you have and use this to negotiate higher ransom payments.
- 2. Prepare your "speed dial" before a cyberattack occurs.** Organize a list of parties that will be crucial to your recovery efforts such as forensic specialists, cyber



response and recovery experts, public relations support, your cyber insurance carrier, and legal representation.

**3. Create a secure meeting space.** You never know what a hacker will compromise—your email, phones, and computer network could be the very things that hackers use to eavesdrop during recovery efforts.

If you want to read the full whitepaper we published from this event, please visit <https://usmtechnology.com/first72>.

Knowledge can help prevent these types of attacks, and this magazine is filled with knowledge from industry professionals that can help keep your business safe. Former FBI hostage negotiator Chris Voss shares three tactics to avoid during your next negotiation. This could be extremely helpful if you find yourself negotiating with a hacker who is holding your business hostage. Discovery Channel's Mike Rowe discusses how he came to host the iconic show *Dirty Jobs* and what he's learned throughout his career regarding the power of authenticity to influence your audience.

World-class customer service consultant John DiJulius explains why creating an emotional connection with your clients in today's digital world is the key your business needs to enjoy continued, long-term success.

Happy Cybersecurity Awareness Month!  
What are you doing to celebrate? ■

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**Mike  
Rowe**

**INFLUENCING  
A MOVEMENT:  
Discovery  
Channel's  
Mike Rowe On  
The Power Of  
Authenticity In  
Communication  
To Influence  
Your Audience**



**MEET MIKE!**



# INFLUENCING A MOVEMENT

Discovery Channel's Mike Rowe On The  
Power Of Authenticity In Communication  
To Influence Your Audience

**M**ike Rowe's mother, Peggy Rowe, always finds a way to outdo her son — and she does so in a way only mothers can.

"I am so brutally and relentlessly upstaged at every turn by my mother," Mike said.

Peggy Rowe is a retired teacher, mother of three boys, wife of more than six decades and the author of two books, but it's her simple, tell-it-like-it-is one-liners (with a mother's touch) that Peggy is known for. They dig at the root of the stories she's uncovering as a journalist, author, wife and mom.

At least, that's what happened one day when Peggy called Mike about his grandfather, Carl. As Mike explained, everyone knows a man like Carl. He was the product of a seventh-grade education, but he could solve more problems with his hands than a mathematician could with a calculator.

Mike explains: "By the time he was 30, [he was a] steamfitter, pipefitter, mechanic, welder, amateur architect — a jack of all trades. I was determined to follow in his footsteps as a kid, but the handy gene is unfortunately recessive. So, I wound up with a very different toolbox."

That toolbox led Mike through a career in the arts. He sang on stage as a Viking in the Baltimore Opera, landed a gig selling random trinkets and items at 3 a.m. on the QVC shopping channel on a \$100 bet, and, at the time of his mother's greatest guilt trip to date, hosted the San Francisco CBS affiliate KPIX's "Evening Magazine." On the show, Mike would fill the role of expert, leading just a handful of viewers through winery openings and art galleries.

It was a standard day for Mike at that TV station when Peggy felt compelled to dial up her son about his 92-year-old grandfather and say to Mike, "It sure would be great before he dies if he could turn on the television and see you doing something that looks like work."

That was what Mike calls the beginning of his "peripeteia," the Greek word for a turning point upon which a protagonist's perspective changes. His mother had planted the seed in his head that by coasting for the past 15 years, picking up little acting gigs and hosting jobs to pay the bills, Mike was actually heading down a path he hated.

"My business model all the way up to 'Evening Magazine' was a controlled failure," Mike recalled. "I didn't want a hit show. I was looking to have four to five months off a year and work three weeks [each month] tops."

Since that phone call with his mother, Mike's peripeteia has sent him on a spiral into the world of hard work, exposing some of America's "dirtiest" jobs and simultaneously becoming an advocate for trades and skilled-labor education. Mike recently shared his journey into the grimy yet powerful work that keeps America churning.

From singing in the opera and hosting Discovery Channel's hit series "Dirty Jobs" to narrating countless other series and creating a foundation to fight for America's trades, Mike continues to live out the request his mother had for him all those years ago, proving yet again that getting your hands a little dirty is the best formula for success.

## DISCOVERING AUTHENTICITY AT 3 A.M.

From the moment Mike hung up the phone after that life-changing chat with his mom, his mind raced. He had been at KPIX for 15 years at that point, a stop in a climb he had begun in Baltimore as a member of its opera company. On the hour-long break he had during shows, he would sneak across the street in full costume for a beer and watch football with his friends. It was there that a buddy challenged him to get a callback for a QVC audition slated for the next day.

Mike was given the job after he successfully sold a yellow No. 2 pencil to the QVC producer for eight minutes, likening it to the very device Albert Einstein could credit with  $E = mc^2$ . That was when he first discovered his ability to influence others just by talking.

"It's never about the pencil," Mike said about his uncanny — and personally unwanted — ability to sell. "It's always about the thing you can do with the thing you're talking about."

Admittedly, Mike had no idea what he was doing on camera, so rather than fake it, he told the viewers as much, going so far as to ask those who happened to be watching at 3 a.m. to call into the channel and tell viewers about their experience with the tools he was selling. And to his surprise, it worked. Mike had created a small hub of testimonials, filled with stories from people who had used the devices.

"I had no idea how valuable it was for me until 10 years went by, and everything I needed to know to work in television I learned at three in the morning. It was that toolbox that gave me the [ability] to book a lot of auditions," Mike explained.

QVC wasn't Mike's dream job, and he also claims to have been fired three times by QVC, but to this day, he credits those early morning gab sessions with happy customers as his first test in humility.

Later, that same lesson would smack him in the face—literally—and it encouraged him to put his talents toward a cause that fueled his passion.

## A SEWER MAY NOT HAVE BEEN WHAT PEGGY HAD IN MIND

The afternoon after his mother called him at KPIX, Mike went into his boss's office and pitched doing "Evening Magazine" from a trades position, like at a factory or in the sewers. His boss didn't care what he did because the show only had 60 viewers.



So, after a quick call to city officials, Mike and his cameraman, Branson, were scheduled to meet with Gene Cruz at a San Francisco intersection in the Tenderloin District.

From the moment he climbed into the manhole with Gene, Mike was completely out of his element.

Mike explains: “The sensory overload is so intense that your brain doesn’t know what sense to focus on first. As your eyes adjust to the gloom of the sewers of San Francisco . . . you’re standing up to your knees [in sewage], the ceiling is 5 feet high . . . you spend a couple of minutes watching the flow of this terrible chocolate tide.”

It was at that point that Mike knew he needed to document the moment for his grandfather. He asked Gene to stop his trek, made sure Branson was rolling, and began his opening.

“Good evening, San Francisco. Welcome to ‘Evening Magazine,’” Mike began. “Tonight, I’ve brought you to a different sort of place, a special place, an important place I’d dare say any of you have ever been before . . .” As Mike candidly shared with us, “And that’s as far as I got.”

At that moment, a gurgling noise caught Mike’s attention just in time for human excrement to hurl toward Mike’s face, and the second piece soared over his head.

Mike stared in disbelief. His cameraman puked.

Gene just rolled his eyes and said the line that would become Mike’s mantra: “Down here in the sewer, it’s best to keep your mouth shut.”

Yet, Mike didn’t learn at that moment. In his time spent in the sewer, Mike tried his line two more times, resulting in a tidal wave of sewer cockroaches — one of which crawled in his cameraman’s mouth — a rat perching on his shoulder, which would later crawl into his boot, and face planting into the “chocolate” pool beneath him. All Gene could do was shake his head before finally asking if Mike was ready to work. “Mike, when you’re done screwing around with the local wildlife, maybe you can come over here and give me a hand.”

Still rolling, Branson recorded footage of Gene and Mike rooting out rotted sewer bricks, and for the first time since he had climbed down the manhole, Mike shut up and listened. Gene then regaled Mike on his background and expertise as a sewer inspector for the city of San Francisco. He learned about replacing bricks and the sewer system that keeps one of California’s major cities humming day in and day out. He also learned that Gene was a skillful engineer.

Back at the studio—after many showers—Mike’s peripeteia unfolded.

Mike recalls: “As I watched our conversation, it killed me because what I saw was me at about 10 years old working with my grandfather in 1,000 different ways. Digging a spring cellar, putting in fence posts, running electricity, doing

basic plumbing—this whole apprentice-expert relationship was suddenly unfolding in front of me at my desk.”

At that moment, Mike created the first show he knew his grandfather would be proud of. He listened to Gene and didn’t force being the host or expert on the show. He let the real worker speak instead.

The viewers of San Francisco were a different story. After the segment aired that evening, hundreds of letters poured into the studio. Half of the viewers were upset that their dinners were ruined, but the others were much more excited.

“The other half of the letters were from people who were saying, ‘Oh my god, you should meet my brother, my cousin, my uncle, my sister, my mom — wait until you see what they do,’” Mike said. “I got into my head that there was a possibility to do nonfiction television in a different way.”

He was right.

## THE AUTHENTICITY OF HARD WORK

Mike’s idea landed him at the Discovery Channel, which bought his pitch to turn from TV host to apprentice who just happens to have a camera following him to the jobs that keep America functioning.

That’s how “Dirty Jobs” was born, and today, the eight-season show, its reruns and its spinoffs continue to amass fans. Mike has transformed his talent of selling, pitching and hosting into a platform for America’s workforce, teaching him and his viewers along the way the value of authenticity, acknowledging your discomfort and finding satisfaction in the opportunity to work.

But it wasn’t so much the strange and creepy jobs that had America watching; it was the people Mike featured. With an innate sense for storytelling and an ability to get people to listen, Mike let those he featured on “Dirty Jobs”—and today on his Facebook show, “Returning the Favor,” which gives back to those helping their communities—command the attention of the public.

At this article’s publish date, Mike’s personal Facebook page has more than 6 million followers, with interactions on his posts ranging anywhere from 50,000 likes to more than 3 million views. (For the record, Peggy’s Facebook page is quite popular, too.) Unlike other users in today’s politically charged landscape, Mike veers into the controversial without choosing a side.

In 2020, Mike’s foundation, mikeroweWORKS — which advocates for trade jobs and funds scholarships to lessen the skills gap in the U.S.—began creating and selling masks to raise funds for scholarships, Mike didn’t choose to endorse masks, other than to say how politically charged they had become and how much he hated those conversations. Instead, Mike did what he has always done: He steered the narrative into the benefit of purchasing the mask. The funds go directly into the workforce and help fill America’s skills gap with qualified, young, excited

workers. That narrative drove thousands of buyers from Mike's Facebook page to the ordering page, credit cards in hand.

Today, "Dirty Jobs" and the legacy found in the sewer culminates on Facebook in what Mike believes is the single most important thing he does.

Says Mike: "My Facebook page is the single most important thing I do because it allows me to create the news I want to create. It allows me to respond to headlines that are good for my brand and foundation ... I realized along the way that I never actually worked for Discovery Channel. I worked for the people who watched me, and that's where they are. They're on my f\_\_\_\_\_ing Facebook page."

It's actually not far off from what Mike has done with his entire career since he began "Dirty Jobs." When Discovery Channel wanted to create a chat room called The Mud Room, Mike was hesitant at first. But as he had more conversations, real and knowledgeable conversations, Mike realized he had stumbled into a gold mine.

The balance, Mike reiterated, is that his authenticity cannot be the sacrifice he makes for his sanity. Toeing the line between authentic and personal has made it easy for Mike to deliver his message without alienating hordes of people or the pursuit of his own goals.

"On the one hand, you're saying to your customer—your boss—'I want to know what you're thinking. I want you to know that I understand this is the most important relationship I have with you,'" Mike explained. "But every once in a while, you have to log off."

### THE BIG REMINDER FROM THE SEPTIC TANK

During one of the first episodes of "Dirty Jobs," Mike found himself in a septic tank on a sticky, humid, Midwestern day with Les Swanson. Les had quit his job as a guidance counselor and psychologist of 15 years to begin his septic tank pumping business just outside of Madison, Wisconsin. In that boiling tank, Les told Mike he was just tired of dealing with other people's s\_\_\_\_\_t.

Joking aside, Les confided in Mike that he left his stable career in counseling to open his own business because he saw a need in his community.

"It was Les Swanson who said to me, 'I'm not here because I'm passionate about septic tanks,'" Mike recalled. "'I'm here because I wanted to do something different. I looked around to see where everybody was going, and I went the other way.'"

By that time, Les was enjoying a lucrative career and had built a loyal following around Madison. In many ways, Mike, whose career had begun at the opera and landed him—sometimes literally—in the toilet, was doing the same thing. He had stumbled out of the sewers and into an opportunity to use his talents for good.



**"REAL JOB SATISFACTION COMES FROM FINDING AN OPPORTUNITY AND FINDING A WAY TO BE GREAT AT IT, AND THEN FINDING A WAY TO LOVE IT."**

"It's just the idea that you go into your life or career expecting to be surprised, expecting to be uncomfortable," Mike said. "The lesson isn't to not have passion. Passion is important to follow. Bring it with you in all things ... Real job satisfaction comes from finding an opportunity and finding a way to be great at it and then finding a way to love it."

Mike had left a cushy career covering wineries and restaurant openings to dig into the infrastructure that helps daily life chug along. His grandfather's prowess and ability to fix anything and everything wasn't a trait he acquired, but it was his passion for trades and ability to be uncomfortable and incompetent that has enabled millions of viewers to this day to learn something new about the world around them. It's his authenticity that drives this message forward.

Mike took his opportunity and transformed it into his life's work and dedication. Today, Mike hosts his podcast, "The Way I Heard It," to continue sharing stories that fascinate him. He also hosts numerous shows on cable networks, and his Facebook videos have garnered millions of viewers.

All of this—the work he does to "close America's widening skills gap," the legacy he's left of telling seemingly small stories with a big purpose and the lessons he has learned along the way — came from a motherly guilt trip and a face plant into someone else's poop.

That's about as authentic and opportunistic as anyone can get.

"It's very easy to trust someone covered in someone else's crap," Mike explained. "There's just no way a guy like that is going to lie to you. He's been utterly humbled."

If Mike's career is a testament to anything, it's that the best way through is wading into the crap and letting others know you're not afraid to do it. ■



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# “SAVING A FUTURE DAY”: USM Technology Assists Heritage Health Solutions With A Backup Recovery Center Project (And More!) To Mitigate Future Technology Risks

**H**eritage Health Solutions specializes in creating customized healthcare solutions for government entities, private companies, and even correctional facilities. The team at Heritage Health removes the complexity involved in providing pharmacy and medical solutions. They offer pharmacy benefit management services, third-party administration services, and provider network services nationwide. Because of the specialized expertise within the organization, Heritage Health helps its clients achieve major



cost savings, delivers better benefits to covered parties, and refreshes their benefits approach year over year.

For many leaders, navigating medical and pharmacy benefits is out of their expertise. The industry is incredibly nuanced and ever-changing, making it hard to keep up with new regulations, coverage changes, and more. They're used to being the experts, but just like they encourage their clients to do, it's important to understand internal limitations and find the right support to overcome those limitations. Although Heritage Health has an internal IT team, USM Technology was brought into the fold in 2019 to help the organization update its IT infrastructure and technology strategy.

## MOVING TO THE CLOUD SAVED HERITAGE HEALTH

Dan Hoffman, the Vice President of Information Technology at Heritage Health was introduced to Stephen Cracknell, the CEO of USM Technology when his boss—who had worked with Stephen previously—reached out to get help with some IT focus areas that needed a lot of support. “We were adopting Office365 and moving to the cloud from locally managed servers. We needed some help in that transition, so we contacted USM Technology. They helped us with licensing as well as moving everyone to the cloud,” Dan said, explaining the start of the partnership.

By some stroke of luck, Heritage Health's upgrade to the cloud that USM Technology completed in 2019 saved them from the challenges of 2020 when the global COVID-19 pandemic put most companies in precarious situations. Had they delayed the changes any longer, the team at Heritage Health would have struggled to work remotely at a time when it was imperative. “It was almost seamless. It was amazing how it worked out. Dumb luck, I guess, but it was a game changer for us. We shifted to 100% remote work for a time and COVID-19 didn't really impact our ability to work,” Dan recalled.

Concurrently, while moving Heritage Health to a cloud-based infrastructure, Stephen and his team at USM Technology helped back up most of the organization's servers to the Azure Site Recovery Center. Maintaining quality backups of all financial data, customer data, and system information helps insulate Heritage Health from cyber threats of all kinds. As Dan put it, “The recovery project saved a future day.” Being proactive about cybersecurity and IT infrastructure is one of the best forms of protection a company can have. Before partnering with USM Technology, Heritage Health was more exposed to IT-related risks.

Because of the effective partnership forged between USM Technology and Heritage Health, when a section of Heritage Health was divested last year, USM Technology was already in a great position to support the divestiture from a technical perspective. With a proven track record, Stephen and his

team drew up a separate managed IT contract with the divested arm of Heritage Health and began supporting that business during a critical window. “USM Technology came to mind right away. We got them involved, and everyone has been super happy with them. They took a huge load off our plate. That whole process went really well,” shared Dan.

## THE VALUE OF STRATEGIC THOUGHT PARTNERSHIP

“We've worked with vendors before where it's more work to work with them, but as far as USM Technology is concerned, they've always been a value-add,” Dan said when asked about the level of service provided by Stephen and his staff. When it comes to working with vendors, every business leader has horror stories. Some vendors don't deliver the expected results, others provide less-than-stellar service, and the worst may even expose their clients to questionable business practices. Focused on long-term results and business success, USM Technology is a reliable IT service provider that companies can feel confident about. “If something comes up that we're not familiar with, they are the first people I reach to,” admitted Dan.

USM Technology isn't into passive partnerships. They are at the forefront of strategic conversations, ensure their clients have the most up-to-date security measures in place, and are trusted business advisors when needed. As an IT expert, Stephen keeps an eye out for new solutions or cutting-edge applications that fit specific client needs. For instance, Heritage Health had a situation where an employee who was exiting the organization refused to return his laptop. To prevent a similar situation in the future, Dan connected with USM Technology and learned about an asset management tool called Absolute. The solution has been in use ever since.

## ADDRESSING BLIND SPOTS FOR PEACE OF MIND

The peace of mind that comes with knowing your organization is protected from one of the biggest business threats in the modern world is unmatched. To other business owners, who may not be in the same position that Heritage Health is with the help of USM Technology, Dan Hoffman has some advice, “Having partners that have knowledge in the areas where your blind spots are is one of the biggest assets to have. You need people to rely on and get you to the right spot. You can't know everything. It's impossible.”

With the USM Technology team providing protection from blind spots and stepping into the role of trusted business partners, leaders at Heritage Health can spend more time acting as a liaison between their clients and the intricate world of medical benefits. Heritage Health saves its clients time, money, and stress when developing coverage plans, but it wouldn't be possible without USM Technology's thoughtful and effective managed IT services. ■

# 3 Ways For A Business To Avoid Taking Itself Hostage

BY CHRIS VOSS



**"NO MATTER WHAT YOU'RE TELLING YOURSELF ABOUT THIS, YOUR WIN RATE IS LOWER THAN IT SHOULD BE, AND YOU ABSOLUTELY ARE LEAVING MONEY ON THE TABLE."**

**A**s a former hostage negotiator for the FBI, I have been writing about ways negotiators take themselves hostage and what you can do to avoid making these same missteps.

I've recently identified three new negotiation tactics that end up putting you in a terrible position at the table.

Read on to learn more about each of them and what you can do to avoid having these negotiation tactics derail your efforts.

## **1. YOU BELIEVE IN LEVERAGE ("THERE IS NO SPOON." FROM "THE MATRIX").**

Jim Camp, the author of "Start With No"—one of our top 12 must-read books for expert negotiators—has always said that there's no such thing as leverage.

In the early days of my company, The Black Swan Group, we used to say the opposite: "There is always leverage."

How do you sort this out? Change "leverage" to "influence"—"trust-based influence," more specifically.

If you're not trained in The Black Swan Method®, you believe that leverage is an external thing—either the circumstances have given it to you or they have not.

This is a passive stance that surrenders control to the situation. In other words, you've allowed the situation to take you hostage.

When you believe in "influence," you take back control — and also your ability to affect the outcome. You switch from the zero-sum game of bargaining to the positive-sum game of negotiation.

One of the many insights about life from Molly Bloom's book "Molly's Game" is that everyone pretty much has the same luck. In case you're unfamiliar, Molly ran high-stakes poker games in Los Angeles and New York City. To keep the games together and thriving over time, she needed to make sure the players were all at about the same skill level. The players would have good nights where they won big, and they would have bad nights where they lost big. But over the course of a year, if the players were evenly matched, they would all pretty much break even.

Leverage equates to luck. So what's the difference maker? The time you spend increasing your skills.

## 2. YOU'RE AFRAID TO STRESS-TEST WHETHER OR NOT YOU ACTUALLY UNDERSTAND.

The great misinterpretation of the advice from Stephen Covey that tells us to "seek first to understand, then to be understood" occurs when people convince themselves they actually do understand — usually based on prior research or experience — and then tailor their pitch/value proposition (i.e., "argument") without checking with the counterpart (prospect or client) to see if they are right.

No matter what you're telling yourself about this, your win rate is lower than it should be, and you absolutely are leaving money on the table.

If you're not willing to stress-test your understanding with your counterpart, what are you really saying? What are you afraid of?

Did you work too hard on your research to be willing to be surprised? Are you too embarrassed by potentially being corrected?

Many people learned a phrase when they were young that has paralyzed them for life: It's better to be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt. This may be some of the worst advice in the history of humankind.

Whatever is holding you back, release yourself from this fear! Please don't allow it to keep you hostage.

## 3. YOU FEAR NEGATIVE EMOTIONS VERSUS PROACTIVELY DEFUSING THEM (THE VOLDEMORT EFFECT).

Actually, it's exactly the opposite. Naming negative emotions defuses them more effectively than anything else. And if they don't yet exist? Inoculation. Ridiculous, right?

You probably do this wrong or inefficiently in one of three ways:

1. You deny negative emotions (e.g., "I don't want to seem ...," or "I don't want you to feel ...").
2. You ignore them (e.g., "They must not be named!" and "Speak about them, and they will appear.").
3. You let people vent.

Let's start with number three and why you do that.

It's primarily a learned response to number one. You tried to tell someone not to feel some negative emotion and they blew up! So, you at least learned to keep quiet and wait for them to run out of energy.

The problem with that is it takes a really long time. Most negative emotions have a "self-righteousness" feeling that goes along with them, and it tends to feed the beast of negativity.

Along those lines, you start to engage in number two — you don't bring them up at all and hope they don't rear their ugly head. The problem there is that unexpressed negative emotions never die. They fester like an infection. Sometimes they even turn into cancer.

Because of these dynamics, it seems ridiculous to think that naming them defuses them, let alone inoculates us from them. But it does, and it's really that simple.

This may be one of the most powerful aspects of The Black Swan Method and one of the key reasons our clients accelerate and make life-changing deals on a regular basis. ■

**Christopher Voss** is the CEO of The Black Swan Group, a firm that solves business negotiation problems with hostage negotiation strategies. Chris founded the Black Swan Group, in 2008 upon his retirement from the FBI where he was the FBI's lead international kidnapping negotiator. Chris is also an Adjunct Professor at the University of Southern California (USC) Marshall School of Business and Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business where he teaches business negotiation in both MBA programs.



# How To Create An **EMOTIONAL** **CONNECTION** In A Digital World

BY JOHN DIJULIUS



**R**ecord-setting 10.1 million jobs opened in the United States last year. About 11.5 million workers quit just in the second quarter of 2021. Forty-one percent of the global workforce would consider leaving their current employer within the next year. Fifty-four percent of Gen Z are considering quitting.

When is the best time to invest in your customer experience? Eighteen months ago. When is the second-best time? Now!

Now is the time to make your organization's customer experience your single biggest competitive advantage.

***You and your company are either an expense that can be found cheaper somewhere else or one of the few businesses that customers can't live without.***

In order to be the brand customers can't live without, you need to focus on creating an emotional connection on every interaction with your customers. Here are seven ways to create an emotional connection with your customers:

1. Focus on the Micro Moments
2. Address the Relationship Deficit
3. Avoid Empathy Fatigue
4. Make your Customers Feel Something
5. Find the Conversation Gifts
6. Utilize Relationship Hacks
7. Justify a Relationship Tax

### **1. FOCUS ON THE MICRO MOMENTS**

Too many companies and employees think that if the results/outcomes are achieved, the customer will be happy. However, it is scientifically proven that outcomes have the least to do with customer loyalty. The order was accurate, my steak was prepared medium rare, my tooth no longer hurts. Those all better happen, but by themselves, results and outcomes are a commodity.

Customer loyalty is a result of consistently delivering on the micro moments, at each touch point, whether a customer calls, emails, checks in or needs support. Were your employees knowledgeable, empathetic, patient, passionate about their job, easy to do business with and willing to make it right?

### **2. ADDRESS THE RELATIONSHIP DEFICIT**

Technology has made it easier for us to navigate through our busy lives, but it also erodes the fundamental element of human connections. When communicating digitally, often it can lack a human touch, which creates a sterile transaction and a lack of emotional connection. Today, being forced into a virtual world is adding to these unintended consequences, which we call a relationship deficit.

When we were forced to practice social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic, people realized how much they crave human connection. Not being able to dine with friends, see family members or interact with co-workers put a strain on the human spirit. That is why the businesses that create emotional connections will dominate.

At John Robert's Spas, the first business I started, some of the hair stylists are the most talented technicians on the planet. And there are others that are pretty good, but technically can't hold a candle to the first group. Yet some of the less technically talented hair stylists are completely booked out for weeks, way more than the more talented ones. Why? Because of their relationship-building skills.

### **3. AVOID EMPATHY FATIGUE**

Empathy fatigue usually occurs in industries that constantly deal with customers who have high emotional pain, like funeral homes, behavior therapy or oncology. However, with today's world, every business is dealing with customers who have high stress and anxiety. This can cause our employees to feel emotionally and physically drained which leads to a diminished ability to empathize or feel compassion for others. That is why as leaders, we have to constantly be helping our employees reenergize, rejuvenate, feel appreciated and understand the critical role they play in their customer's lives. This not only results in the customer feeling better but the employee will be less likely to burn out.


### **4. MAKE YOUR CUSTOMERS FEEL SOMETHING**

The No. 1 best customer service experience we can provide is being a positive escape with every person we come in contact with. You have to create an emotional connection that's so engaging and compelling that the customer literally feels something afterwards.

What drives today's customers are emotions and feelings, some of which can't be expressed in words and are triggered unconsciously. The most important element in customers choosing whom they buy from is how a brand makes them feel.

So how do you create such an experience and train your employees to provide it? Examine every touch point in the customer journey to see if you have built in the feeling of "cared for" in the journey.

### **5. FIND THE CONVERSATION GIFTS**

It is all about finding the conversation gift. There is a gift in every conversation. If you look for it, you will see it. By now, most of you are familiar with FORD (family, occupation, recreation and dreams) and probably have implemented it in your business. Now more than ever, focusing on FORD during conversations, especially virtually, is critical and easy. This helps you find the conversation gift — professionally and personally. Let me show you how. 

Many of the clients we work with have easily customized their CRM system to add FORD fields, something you check either before or during an interaction with a customer and update afterward. I want to show you a fantastic best practice we use at The DiJulius Group, and many of our clients have started doing the same with great results. Even though we have the FORD fields in our CRM system, we strongly recommend that when you are at your computer, you use a FORD tablet (see below).

Name: _____		Company: _____	
Title: _____		Hometown: _____	
Pre-Call Prep		CRM Research: _____	
Past Purchase History: _____		LinkedIn Research (Alumni of): _____	
<b>FAMILY</b>		<b>OCCUPATION</b>	
Spouse _____		Years at company _____	
Children _____		Previous position/company _____	
Pets _____		Company Highlights _____	
		Preferred Communication _____	
<b>RECREATION</b>		<b>DREAMS</b>	
Hobbies: _____		Personal _____	
Vacations: _____		Professional _____	
Favorite Beverage _____		Dream Vacation _____	
Charity _____			
FORD Call to Action: _____			
Business Discussion: _____			
_____			
_____			
_____			
Business Call to Action: _____			

This FORD tablet not only helps to collect key customer intelligence during calls but it is also a great tool to prep for a call. Now for any scheduled calls/meetings I have on my calendar, I will do a little prep before the call. Typically, first thing in the morning, I will fill out what I already know from what I may remember, what we have in our CRM system, the city they live, any FORD already documented and their past purchase history. It reminds me to do some exploring on LinkedIn for mutual connections we have and where they may have graduated from.

Then during the conversation, I just write down any additional information that comes up. Using this and paying attention, I always find the conversation gift that allows me to follow up with something. Many times, it could be a link to an article or video of a topic we discussed, an introduction or some great restaurant suggestions for their upcoming trip. It takes less than 30 seconds to do after the call. You can see the rest of the FORD Tablet has space available for the business discussion and the call-to-action needed.

Video conferencing calls are so much better than the old traditional conference call. Recently I was on a Zoom call with someone I had never spoken to before. There was so much FORD information in plain view behind him—his diploma, a

photo of his wife and kids, and his favorite sports team. This type of information allows for the conversation gift follow-up.

## 6. UTILIZE RELATIONSHIP HACKS

Many little investments in relationships are key to building that emotional connection. I learned a great relationship hack from reading Adrienne Bankert’s new book, “Your Hidden Superpower.” Adrienne talks about taking a few minutes to video text people instead of just texting them, and the power of doing so. So I tried it, and to my amazement, it was fast, easy and the responses I got were incredible. I have always texted my employees on their company anniversary dates to thank them. Now, I send a video text, which actually takes less time than typing and has a significantly bigger impact. I am trying to force myself to think before I text anyone—employees, my sons—and ask: Would this be more powerful as a video message?

## 7. JUSTIFY A RELATIONSHIP TAX

What if your business started charging every customer an additional 5 percent relationship tax that was nonnegotiable? This is a great exercise to do with your employees. Tell them you are implementing a relationship tax on January 1. The tax is for the relationship they have built with every customer during each interaction. Ask them what will they do as a result to ensure no customers complain about the new relationship tax?

Typically, the answers employees come up with are simple ideas that they realize they should have been doing all along. When you can justify the relationship tax, without actually charging for it, you start becoming irreplaceable in your customers lives.

You absolutely can become the brand customers can’t live without by training your employees to create an emotional connection every time they interact with your customers.

***The organizations that understand that the human touch is the most important part of any experience—especially a great customer experience—will flourish. ■***

**John DiJulius**, best-selling author of five customer service books, is the Chief Revolution Officer of The DiJulius Group and works with the top brands in the world on customer and employee experience.



# The One Lesson Business Owners Miss When Training Employees That Can Cost Them Thousands

BY STEPHEN CRACKNELL

**T**raining employees on anything can be an expensive process. You incur the cost of investing in necessary materials plus the time it takes away from your employees performing revenue-generating activities. But what's worse when it comes to cybersecurity training is the expense you'll incur if that training fails.

Recent studies show that *human error* plays a role in a shocking 90 percent of data breach cases! Smart business owners are taking a proactive approach and training their employees on cybersecurity dos and don'ts. While we applaud their efforts and encourage all owners to take this step, research suggests that their efforts aren't paying off. Despite their willingness to train employees, the number of data breaches continues to increase.

What gives? We'll be the first to say it—cybersecurity training can be boring. And what happens during boring presentations? People aren't engaged, so they tune out and miss the critical information needed to keep your company secure. After the presentation, they sign off saying they have learned the lessons, but have they really, or are they a ticking time bomb in your organization?

The latter is likely true. If you want the information to stick, you must take some additional steps—and the most important is putting them to the test!

According to *Education World*, interactive activities are six times more effective when learning and remembering material than simply listening to a lesson. You can incorporate this tactic by putting employees to the test to find out whether or not they can apply what they learned.

One of the best ways to do this is to use phishing simulations. Here's how the process works:

1. A third party creates a realistic but fake phishing email that shows identifiable signs discussed in the training. An

example could be creating an email that is similar to the CEO's requesting private information, an outside company sending a bad link, etc. You can customize it to look like something relevant that your employees could potentially see and fall for.

2. The employees are then put to the test. You choose which employees will receive what links and what dates the emails will be sent.

Will they be able to identify the threats, or will they fall for the scams?

3. The results are collected and shared with you to develop more comprehensive training programs and help you identify which employees are your biggest risks so you can provide specific coaching.

Another great way to use phishing simulations is to send out the tests before the training. When employees see that people in the company are making mistakes, they are more likely to pay attention to the lesson.

It's not enough to just teach the information! It must be learned and implemented every day to be effective and keep your organization secure.

If you're looking for effective cybersecurity awareness training for your employees, our team has a comprehensive program that will engage, teach, and test your employees. This enables you to mitigate the risk, knowing they are working to keep your company safe. Get in touch with our team and get started on your cybersecurity training session today. ■



**Stephen Cracknell** is CEO of USM Technology. They are based in Texas and to find out more about what they do and how they could help you, please visit [USMTechnology.com](http://USMTechnology.com).



# USM Technology Introduces The 72-Hour Post-Attack Cyber Response Action Plan

The immediate aftermath of a cyber-attack can be chaotic, with the potential to cause significant damage to your company's reputation, operations, and bottom line. A well-orchestrated response in the crucial 72 hours post-incident can make all the difference. Our 72-Hour Post-Cyber Attack Preparedness Service ensures your business has a robust and proactive response plan in place.

## Key Features Of Our Service:

- **Tabletop Exercise:** Simulate a cyber incident in a controlled environment.
- **Penetration Test:** A hands-on examination of your digital defenses.
- **Vulnerability Scan:** Comprehensive scans of your systems to identify weaknesses.
- **Phishing Simulation:** Mimic real-life phishing attacks to test your employees' ability to detect & respond.
- **Key Cyber Response Policies:** Draft or refine your essential cyber response policies.
- **Build Your Cyber Response Network:** A complete list of your trusted cyber response partners on speed-dial.
- **A Secure Office 365 Recovery Tenant:** A digital bunker to store recovery documents & coordinate your recovery.

## Benefits

- **Stay Ahead of The Threat:** You're not just reacting to threats – you're staying one step ahead of the attackers.
- **Peace of Mind:** Sleep easier knowing you have a tested & proven response plan for the critical hours after an attack.
- **Protect Your Reputation:** A swift & effective response safeguards a company's most valuable asset, your reputation.
- **Save Costs:** A well-planned rapid response can minimize downtime & save hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Join the ranks of businesses that are not just hoping for the best –  
**they're prepared for the worst.**

**Contact us today to strengthen your post-cyber-attack capabilities.**

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