

Scaring, Selling, and Solutions

By Mike Sawchuk

Could the onslaught of hurricanes last year, including Katrina, be the tipping point that accelerates the Green movement, including Green cleaning, into popular acceptance?

Or will the recently released movie *An Inconvenient Truth*, about global warming, jar citizens of the world to take serious steps to protect the planet? Will the movie help encourage people, including our jansan customers, to transfer to environmentally preferable cleaning products and systems?

Discussing these issues with our clients can create some ethical issues for many salespeople if it crosses the line from providing helpful information to using scare tactics. Although advocates for Green cleaning as well as many other hot topics have often historically had to “jar” people into their way of thinking by frightening them, generating fear in selling is not always helpful—and can even backfire.

Before “Just Say No”

Historically, most of the U.S. government antidrug programs have used scare tactics to discourage young people from using drugs. Some of these date all the way back to the 1930s, with movies showing drug users committing violent crimes or harming themselves as well as others while under the influence.

But studies conducted in the late 1980s found that most of these fear-based approaches were not very effective. Many reported that using scare tactics to convince young people not to take drugs showed only “minor effects” on drug use and attitudes.

Indeed, some programs even backfired. One study of 935 Michigan junior-high students found that those who took courses on the dangers of substance abuse using fear tactics used even *more* drugs. It was believed they were spurred on—perhaps by curiosity and the lure of risk taking.

Because of the disappointing results of many of these programs, the use of scare tactics to prevent drug use and abuse has been replaced, in many situations, with a more educational approach devoid of fear mongering. And, Nancy Reagan’s “Just Say No” program, although it had limited success, helped foster school programs to help students improve their self-esteem and cope with personal issues as a way to prevent drug use.

The More Positive Approach

Although comparing the selling of Green cleaning products to programs that encourage young people not to take drugs may be a bit of a stretch, we can learn a lot from these programs and their results.

For instance, scare tactics apparently did not work, and if they did, the positive results were only temporary. Instead, in recent years, a more positive approach showing there are *benefits* to not taking drugs has worked. Self-esteem improves, as does the ability to handle problems, and young people can expect lives that are more successful by avoiding drug use.

When it comes to selling Green cleaning products, taking the high road and emphasizing the benefits of environmentally preferable products is the most successful approach today. Most astute customers are well aware that global warming and similar issues are real and that we must all do our part to protect our environment. Being scared into Green cleaning is not what they want from their jansan distributors.

Instead, they are looking for solutions. Providing studies to school administrators on how student performance improves and absenteeism declines after facilities transfer to Green cleaning products can prove much more powerful—and help sell Green cleaning products—than discussing pollution or using fear.

Information offered to building owners and managers reporting that the “Greenest” buildings in New York City now command higher rents and secure better tenants than comparable non-Green buildings should prove interesting and influential reading. And again, the jansan distributor is helping the client by providing solutions that can help improve the customer’s business operation and bottom line.

We should sell Green cleaning products as a solution to many facility cleaning issues. Green cleaning—the system and the products—has proved itself; now all we need is to present this information to our customers.

Mike Sawchuk is vice president and general manager of Enviro-Solutions, a leading manufacturer of Green Cleaning chemicals and supplies.

Reprinted by permission of Maintenance Supplies Magazine