

Where's Your Tipping Point?

BY MICHAEL T. FERRIS



In his best selling book, “The Tipping Point,” Malcomb Gladwell makes the case that change happens dramatically, and ideas spread like an epidemic. The concept is simple. For every product or service, there is a tipping point when the message takes hold yielding powerful results. In home care and hospice, there is a tipping point that defines the change from a reactive service provider to a proactive sales organization. The change is necessitated by many factors, from increased competition to mounting financial losses, and everything in between.

Gladwell cites three characteristics of change at the tipping point: first, contagiousness; second, little causes have big effects; and third, change happens not gradually but in one dramatic moment. To make use of this in the context of home care and hospice, recognize when the train is leaving the station. Then make sure that you are on it!

Where is your tipping point? What will be your wake up call? Once things start to tip, change happens in a hurry. It takes a long time to get a flywheel to move enough to make the first rotation, but gets easier and quicker from that point forward. That is, of course, as long as we continue to exert the energy

required to keep it moving. I have found that there are still agencies that have not yet felt compelled to focus on developing a comprehensive sales and marketing strategy. But more agencies are planning their growth strategically with a sales mentality. The more advanced they become in this process, the more effective they are and the momentum starts to build.

Competition is getting more aggressive. This is a time for expansion by many organizations which are not necessarily moving into underserved areas. Your key accounts are by definition your competition's targets. Keep close to key accounts with visibility, listening at all times for their needs. Stay on top of your numbers to spot trends and changes quickly.

Now that quality is quantifiable with benchmarked and Home Health Compare data, agencies are able to “prove” that they provide better quality. Know what you have available to show your quality, and start the conversation with the referral sources. Now that marketing and sales are no longer new elements for home health and hospice, there are more board of directors and CEOs that are initiating the dialogue about what the agency should do to sell itself in the community. Be prepared for this if you are showing any of the signs


that might lead to a knee-jerk reaction to start a new sales and marketing program immediately. The sales cycle takes two to six months to see results from new initiatives.

When looking for ways to revitalize or initiate your sales and marketing program, start with what got you there. Look for what worked in the past but got put aside because your agency grew, thereby putting less focus on new referrals. If it worked in the past, it should be considered. Conversely, don't make strategic decisions just because “that's the way we have always done it.” Every initiative has to make sense as a part of the overall program.

If you have invested in telehealth or a specialty program, make sure that one of your returns on investment is increased market share. To know this, have a way to measure return on investment. Start with good tracking of where the business is coming from and why. Agencies are making big investments in technology to stay on top of this and other data to stay ahead of the competition.

What will it take to push you to the tipping point? Will it be declining revenues, increased staff turnover, difficulty recruiting, lack of traction with specialty programs, or maybe long-time good referral sources whose volume of referrals is declining? These are symptoms present in agencies that have not started the process of building a sales oriented organization.

You have worked hard to get where you are.

Look for tipping points and seize the opportunity. If the word “sales” carries any negative connotations in your organization, its time to get over it! Happy Selling! 

About the Author: Michael T. Ferris, Principal, Home Care Marketing Solutions, Chapel Hill, NC, is author of “How To: Market and Deliver Legendary Service,” “Managing Home Care Sales Teams for Legendary Results,” “101 Home Care Promotional Strategies”, and “The Complete Guide to Home Care Sales & Marketing for Legendary Results.” Mike may be contacted at mike@hcmarketingsolutions.com. Sign up for his free home care and hospice sales and marketing newsletter at www.hcmarketingsolutions.com.