

HOW TO GO FROM \$100 MILLION TO \$200 MILLION IN A FEW SHORT YEARS?

By Bob Oros

When I first arrived in Kitchener, ON, Canada, I was really excited about meeting the obviously talented and successful people who have had such amazing success in the competitive foodservice distribution business.

Although February is not the ideal time to visit Canada because of the chilly weather, the people I met more than made up for it with their warm and friendly welcome.

When I first talked on the phone with Brian Hopkins, the vice president of sales and marketing, Flanagan Foodservice, who hired me to do a MoreGrossProfit™ seminar for his sales team, he really put me through the wringer with his questions. He wanted to make sure I was going to deliver value as well as industry-specific tactics for his team. Every detail of the unique foodservice sales process was discussed to make sure I knew what I was talking about.



BOB OROS

And that brings us to the first step in achieving such an outstanding record of sales increases – attention to detail, or as Brian likes to call it, commitment to excellence.

To Brian, commitment to excellence are not just words, they are his standard operating procedure. Brian came in to the company as vice president of sales about three years ago through the door of a supplier, where he spent the previous 16 years. As a supplier, it took Brian several years to land the Flanagan Foodservice (one of the remaining few independent broadliners in Canada) account, the company where he now works.

Jim Grieb, vice president of purchasing and 27-year Flanagan Foodservice employee, is the person Brian called on for all those years. But, by following his own standard operating procedure, he was committed to making the sale and never gave up.

Brian cited one of his early mentors who told him that to make the sale you have to make the call. Sounds simple, but how many sales people don't do it? How many say to themselves 'what's the use?' Not Brian. When he sets a task for himself – you can consider it done.

Brian has pictures of John F. Kennedy and Tiger Woods in his office. John F Kennedy is someone he looks up to as an inspirational past president and someone that set new standards for the human race, and Tiger Woods is a man that has achieved exceptional heights while breaking down doors and setting new standards.

Those are people who pay attention to the details and make a commitment to be excellent at what they do. Brian sets an excellent example for his staff consisting of five sales managers, a marketing representative, 15 customer service reps, 32 territory managers, six key account managers and three key account administrators. The first step in going from \$100 million to \$200 million (Canadian – however even with the conversion it equals US\$170 million, which would easily qualify Flanagan for the ID Top 50) is everyone in the company has to be committed to excellence.

During our discussion the day before the sales meeting, Brian was giving me a tour through the warehouse. As we were talking, Brian used a word I have not heard before when describing his role as vice president of sales. The word was



BRIAN HOPKINS

“harmonize.”

Brian said his job is like that of a conductor leading an orchestra. Everybody has to be on key or the music doesn't make much sense. Brian is an expert when it comes to getting people to work together. As I was introduced to the other department heads it was obvious that he has earned their respect.

For example: Brian had been working with a particular customer that required a huge computer software program to be installed at the distribution center before they could take on the account. The quickest any of the competitors could promise was three years before it could be up and running. Brian worked with Ernest Krawetz, the company's vice president of information technology, and together they got it done in 30 days.

That's the kind of result you can get when you know how to implement the use of team work, also known as 'harmonize.' The second step in going from \$100 million to \$200 million is to have every department singing out of the same song book, in perfect "harmony."

As I was waiting for Brian to finish a phone call with a customer, I had the opportunity to read the company magazine called Selections. As I read, it immediately became obvious what the philosophy of the company is. I have never seen so many sincere, positive testimonials from customers. It is clear that the customer comes first at Flanagan Foodservice.



THE FLANAGAN
BROTHERS – Rick,
Murray, Dan and Jeff

After Brian finished his conversation with the customer we continued. Brian's phone conversation was with a small independent restaurant that needed help because of increasing costs. Most conversations I overhear are telling the customer that there is nothing they can do to fight inflation. This phone conversation was different.

Brian told the customer that he would find a way to help. And he did! Why? Because the success that Flanagan has achieved was not by catering only to the big guys, but by keeping the small independents competitive in their market. Brian truly believes it is "All about you – the customer."

Another example of how Flanagan will do "whatever it takes" was displayed when Brian was showing me their produce cooler. They have a customer that sells a specific type of potato. Since this potato is the main ingredient in the success of the 180 restaurants, the potato needed to be in a separate cooler. This would normally be an impossible roadblock for most distribution companies.

However, not for Flanagan. Its management said "no problem – we will build one!" And Flanagan built one. So the third step in going from \$100 million to \$200 million is the sincere belief that "It's all about you – the customer."

Flanagan Foodservice is a family owned independent. The four brothers who own the company, (pictured left to right – Rick, Murray, Dan and Jeff Flanagan, are a perfect example of what can happen when they "harmonize" together with their entire staff. The key to going from \$100 million to \$200 million is not "rocket science or brain surgery" as Brian puts it. It's commitment to excellence, harmonize, and make sure everyone in the company knows it all about you – the customer.

I'll probably be able to give this story a new headline in another six or seven years: How to go from \$200 million in sales to \$400 million in a few short years.

Bob Oros, CSP, CMC, is president and founder of More Gross Profit Institute. A long-time contributor of sales training articles to ID Access (and ID), he can be reached at Bob@MoreGrossProfit.com. The Institute's website is located at: www.MoreGrossProfit.com, where more details can be found.