

MARKETING PANEL

Raymond H. Johnson, Jr. (Panelist)
Key Technology, Inc.
Jonestown, PA

SUMMARY: CREDIBILITY WITH RADON CUSTOMERS

Radon customers are largely motivated to test and mitigate for radon on the basis of two concerns: 1) the possibility of radon exposures leading to lung cancer, and 2) the possibility of buying a house with a potential radon problem that will cost money to fix. The majority of people with concerns for health risks from radon have already tested their homes. Therefore most radon testing is now done for real estate transactions, because no one wants to buy a house with hidden financial risks. So they call for a professional radon tester, but how do they decide who to hire? Will they hire you as a radon tester if your name is first in the phone book, or if you have the lowest prices, or are there other elements of credibility? Are perceptions of quality a factor in the decision to hire your services? I believe the answer to both of these questions is, Yes, and quality judgements will be based on the following elements.

Two Elements to Credibility - 1. Knowing your stuff and 2. Showing you care

From the first moment that you begin talking with a customer, either directly or by phone, they will start evaluating your responses as a basis for retaining your services. They will decide if you seem to know what you are talking about, i.e., are you technically competent. If you are listed with EPA's RMP/RCP programs, or with your state program, you will likely be viewed as a radon expert without further proof. Besides, if you advertise your radon testing or mitigation services, you are expected to be equally competent with others who are offering the same services. This then leads to the deciding factor: showing your customer that you care. One way to show caring is to attempt to communicate in the customer's preferred decision making language.

THINKING VS FEELING LANGUAGES

Some people prefer to communicate and make decisions on choosing a radon tester or mitigator on the basis of logical, rational, analysis using a Thinking approach. They often want to know the "whys" and the "hows", and may ask more questions about principles, rules, protocols, and the technology of radon testing. They may also be more persuaded by costs and future financial risks of radon. On the other hand, many people prefer to communicate and make their choices on the basis of sentiments, values, empathy, and caring, using a Feeling approach. They will more often ask questions about the well-being of the people involved, such as the children who may play in the basement, or the family dog. They will also often ask questions about what is safe and what are the risks. They are also more likely to choose the services of someone who identifies with their concerns, relates to their values, and feels their feelings.

Marketing success may often be related to using the appropriate Thinking or Feeling languages according to the client's preference. Since most people in radon testing have technical backgrounds, they are often naturally proficient in the Thinking language. These technical Thinking types often have difficulty in communicating in the language of feelings. Many have learned through experience the importance of empathizing with customers, who will choose you on the basis of a "good feeling" about you. Successful marketing is often a matter of speaking the preferred decision making language of the customer. This is one way to show that you care. When you hear a customer say "I think" and ask Thinking type questions, you can respond in a logical analytical manner. If you hear them saying "I feel" and raising feeling type questions, you can respond in terms of sentiments, feelings, values, and empathy. Learning to communicate in the Thinking and Feeling languages is not easy. It requires

training and practice. However, your efforts to communicate in your customer's preferred language will often be rewarded with their confidence in both your competence and caring.

CONCLUSION

The long term success of your radon business will depend on your customers' perceptions of quality. Clients will evaluate your competence and your caring. One way to show that you care is to speak in the customer's preferred language, either Thinking or Feeling. This is especially important when feelings are involved.

* Ray Johnson is also Director, Communication Sciences Institute, 16440 Emory Lane, Rockville, MD 20853