

Competition may be losing you money

By Tia Nelson
Johnson County Business Leader

"Competition is based on the fear that the (pool) of customers is finite."

"Don't believe a word I say."

"Competition exists only because we think there is."

These statements from guest speaker Karl R. Zimmer III piqued listener attention at the June Lincoln Bank Roundtable for the Johnson County Business Leader luncheon. This monthly meal, hosted by Royal Oak Country Club on SR 135, offers business guests a casual, intimate setting to pick the brain of a key businessperson after the speech.

The prelude to the tasty lunch of picnic-style fare was a relaxed time of getting acquainted with the area business attendees. The guests welcome this time to learn new things and make fresh business connections.

Zimmer is founder of Zimmer Advisory Group of Indianapolis, which provides business coaching with out-of-the-norm approaches. His concept-message scrutinizes the usual business paradigm by focusing on relationships and leadership in business.

He further states that "the relationship a company has with its customers is directly linked to the spirit of the employees who touch the customer." Noting that people have an innate need to be valued and heard, Zimmer makes a case for understanding each employee's personal goals and allowing room for those to be incorporated into—become part of—the overall business goals of the

company. Realizing fulfillment of some personal goals within the context of their work environment generates life into the employees. These are the individuals who daily touch the customers. Harvard Business Review reported that "a 5 percent increase in customer loyalty increases profitability by from 25 percent to 85 percent."

Zimmer's own years in business have been out that profitability relationship. He joined the family business, Zimmer Paper Products Incorporated in 1975 and worked his way up through the ranks to CEO in 1993. Later, he was the founder and first president of Executive Limousines, LLC. That company was sold but still services central Indiana clients. He has since founded Zimmer Advisory Group.

The servant leader concept puts a new spin on how competition is viewed. It is as much about the needs of the customer as the bottom line. There is an organic business belief that the number of customers is not finite, but infinite. That attitude turns the company away from self-focus and striving to beat the other guy for the sale—competition—toward serving others first instead. That regenerates joy into the lives of internal customers—employees—and external customers. And again, employees touch—or impact—the lives of every customer for good...or for ill.

By that point in his talk, the Roundtable crowd was a bit puzzled, so a few minutes were invested in two types of listening exercises to illustrate the positive or negative power that can be generated in listening. Paring off, each group took one minute and talked about a subject he or she was



Karl Zimmer III discusses his presentation with Debbie Owens, sales consultant with Elwood Staffing

passionate about while the partner showed little interest. Being a group of good listeners, this was more of a challenge than expected. It was hard to ignore intriguing information.

The second phase of the exercise involved listening with intent to the other person. As one guest put it later, the more questions he asked of the talker, the more energy and power came into the connection between them. They both felt enthusiastic about one another and a new area of

information—a bond was formed in only two minutes. Zimmer's point was that your employees can give that same powerful energy to your customers if you create a business climate that gives it to them.

As for Karl's opening direction to not listen to a word he said at the beginning of the speech? That was to turn on our ears. Puzzled, we complied.

The next luncheon will be on July 19. If you would like to attend please call Roger Hurlinger and (317)787-3287.

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