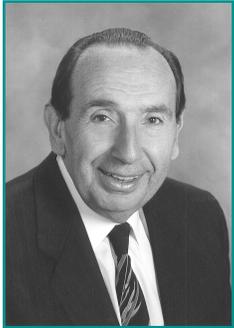


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PRO's Prose

by Ray Silverstein,
Founder and President

Mary, Mary, quite contrary...how does your garden grow?

As entrepreneurs, we should always be looking for ways to grow. Right now, nature's growing season is underway. Let it inspire you. If you haven't done so already, take your cue from Mother Nature: pick up a shovel and plant some seeds!

After all, your business isn't going to grow by itself. You are the gardener. Are you going to sow flowers, vegetables, or weeds? It's all in your hands.

The good news is, gardening doesn't have to be a solitary business. And you already belong to one heck of a garden club. Your fellow PRO members make a fine group of master gardeners. Take advantage of their knowledge and experience.

I urge you to make the most of our upcoming meetings (see the article on page 4). Plan what you want to discuss in advance. Don't hesitate to air your new ideas or ask for input—that's what PRO is all about.

In addition, listen closely to what your fellow members say. Do them a favor: hold them accountable for the actions they commit to—just as you count on them to do the same for you.

Now is the time to role up your sleeves. As Lou Erickson once said, "gardening requires a lot of water...mostly in the form of perspiration."

Ray

It's Planting Time! Seven Ways to Sow a Bumper Crop

Finished your planting yet? If you want to reap the harvest this fall, you'd better get going! Take advantage of the hot sun, warm earth, and long daylight hours. Here's seven easy ways to germinate some seeds.

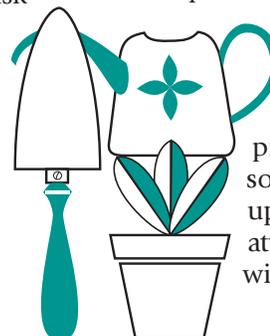
Walk the Back 40

Take stock of your acreage now. How are your sales for the year so far? Are you meeting your goals? If not, why not? If you are, what's the reason for your success?

Take that old marketing plan out of the drawer. Are you on target? Is it time to run some ads...send out a mailing...or update your website? In the press of day-to-day business, marketing projects often fall by the wayside. When business is good, it's easy to postpone your marketing initiatives. Yet a consistent market presence is one surefire way to minimize barren periods. Don't slack off!

Turn Over Some Fresh Earth

Make it your habit to ask for customer referrals. Referrals are one of the most powerful sales tools at your disposal, but many entrepreneurs hesitate to ask for them.



Whenever a customer thanks you or compliments you on a job well done, request a referral.

Re-condition your staff—and yourself—to continually scout for them. To get your sales people in the habit, sponsor a contest—who can get the most referrals in a month?

Play Johnny Appleseed

Are you ready to tell your story, anytime, anywhere? If you don't have a 30-second "commercial" for your business, take the time to craft one. Imagine you're in an elevator, and someone asks you what you do. Your response should be direct and memorable. Don't be afraid to use humor.

Don't just show up for networking events—prepare for them! Be ready to talk about your business in a positive, upbeat way. When someone asks "How are you?" or "What's new?", have an interesting answer ready. Talk about your new product, newest client, or some fresh ideas you picked up at a PRO meeting. Success attracts success, so sound like a winner.



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Haul Out the Fertilizer

Your staff needs to grow, too! Offer some meaningful training or sponsor a day of brainstorming. Start planning your company picnic. There are few tools more valuable than an engaged, motivated staff.

Don't be afraid to ask your employees for input and ideas. People on the front lines are a wealth of customer information—they know what's working, what isn't, and where the problems are. But if you don't ask for the information, they may never share it with you.

Aerate Your To-Do List

Still schlepping around last winters' to do list? It's time to bring it up-to-date.

If any project has remained untouched on your list for more than a month, just how important can it be? Delegate it to one of your employees. Some action is better than none—and any progress they make will facilitate things even if you need to get involved later.

Practice Pest Control

Don't let pests overrun your garden. If you have a chronic problem customer—one who always makes unreasonable demands or never pays his bills on time—root him out.

The easiest way to do this? Announce a rate increase. Even if the customer decides to stick around, you'll feel you're compensated for the additional hassle factor.

Yes, it goes against the grain to turn business away, but while your staff is busy nurturing bad business, you're missing the chance to attract the real deal.

...And Trim the Dead Wood

Have you been ignoring a personnel problem?

If a non-performing or toxic employee is dragging your organization down, you owe it to yourself to bring the problem under control. Tell the employee what the problem is. Start documenting the files. And be ready to take action if you need to.

Pest control is no easy task. But your fellow PRO members can help you get through this. And once it's over, your garden will be so much healthier.

While you're busy revitalizing your business, take time out for fun. Golf, tennis, travel—be sure to indulge in your favorite warm weather pursuits. It's important to get your garden in shape—but don't forget to stop and smell the roses.



Pop Quiz: How Does Your Sales Operation Stack Up?

Is your sales operation poised to help you grow? Find out in 60 seconds—just answer "Yes" or "No" to each of the following questions:

QUESTION	CIRCLE ONE	
Do you have a defined sales process?	Yes	No
Do you have a scripted sales presentation?	Yes	No
Have you developed a personality profile of your most successful sales type?	Yes	No
Have you identified your next best prospects?	Yes	No
Do you have a sales training program (internal or external)?	Yes	No
Do you have written, measurable sales and activity goals?	Yes	No
If so, do you compare actual sales and activities to your stated goals?	Yes	No
Do you reward or incent strong sales performance?	Yes	No
Do you have written, measurable service standards?	Yes	No
Have you asked customers to evaluate your service in the last year?	Yes	No

SCORING

Give yourself one point for every "yes" answer.

Points Diagnosis

- 9 - 10 Outstanding! You are doing the right things—keep up the good work.
- 7 - 8 Good—however there is room for improvement.
- 5 - 6 Fair. Your sales process, management, and format needs better organization and structure.
- 4 or less Red alert—take action now! Your sales structure and management needs immediate attention.

Your next step? Review the questions to which you answered "no"—and start addressing these areas of improvement.



ROSS FRIEDMAN, WINDWARD BUILDERS

It's smooth sailing these days for Ross Friedman, president and founder of Windward Builders, a luxury builder/developer on the North Shore.

Once a professional sailor, Ross just broke ground on Regents Row, a \$40 million dollar "vertical living"

development in Lake Forest. Twelve of the 20 upper-bracket row houses are already sold.

Hard to imagine, but at one time, Ross was among the many mom and pop builders "who work out of the back of their pick-up trucks."

Ross is one of PRO's original members—and he credits PRO for helping him grow his company over the course of the last decade.

"I was a young man when I started with PRO," he says. "PRO gave me the chance to extend myself, push the limits, and think creatively. And Ray has been a very important influence for me."

Ross, who today has 35 employees, wasn't content to be a mom-and-pop shop.

"There's not much planning going on in the back of a pick-up. That's why you hear about all these home-building nightmares. I realized there had to be a better way."

That's why Ross developed a methodology for his projects—a comprehensive, repeatable building process. He also developed 'The Windward Way,' a communications program that gives customers a detailed project roadmap and ensures they're included each step of the way.

"Another thing I learned from PRO is to surround myself with good consultants. Our attorney, accountant, and financial planner are all part of our team."

Ross says he values the ideas, suggestion, and care he receives from his fellow PRO members, who act as his personal board of directors. Ross hosts his group's monthly meetings in his Lake Bluff office.

"I welcome new members and their new ideas—it's important to continually reinvent ourselves."

Meet Our New Sponsor—ORBA, Ltd

PRO's resource network just got a little smarter. Ostrow Resin Berk & Abrams, Ltd. (ORBA)—a highly-acclaimed CPA firm based in Chicago—has just signed on as our newest sponsor.

ORBA provides a wide range of financial services to small and mid-sized companies, and consistently makes Crain's list of the Top 25 CPAs in Chicago.

"ORBA is a great resource for PRO members," says PRO founder Ray Silverstein. "The firm specializes in many of the same issues we focus on in our meetings."

Beyond tax preparation, ORBA offers expertise in strategic planning, business acquisitions and disposal, succession planning, budgeting, and valuation services. Its 16 CPA directors specialize in various industries. You can learn more about the firm and its services at www.orba.com.

"Yes, we have something to offer PRO members," says ORBA Director Mark Thompson.

"But we also look forward to learning a great deal from PRO. Entrepreneurs have a broader approach to business—we want to better understand how business owners look at various issues."

We all look forward to chatting with Mark and other ORBA directors at upcoming PRO events. In the meantime, if ORBA can help you with a business matter, feel free to contact Mark Thompson at 312-670-7444.

How To Get the Most From Your PRO Meetings

We want you to get the most out of each and every PRO meeting. You should emerge from meetings feeling reinvigorated, optimistic, and bursting with ideas.

Yes, you're in business *for* yourself, but as a PRO member, you're not in business *by* yourself. PRO helps fill in the many gaps of being alone at the top. Still, it's easy to fall into habits at meetings. Make sure you're taking advantage of ALL the benefits of belonging to PRO.

Remember, PRO is...

Your Board of Directors

Are you using your PRO group as your personal advisory board? You should be! This is a safe place to discuss those gut-wrenching issues that keep you up at night. All of us are smarter than one of us.

A Source of Insight

Sometimes you're too close to a situation to see it clearly. Diverse experience within your board brings different cultures, backgrounds, and viewpoints to bear. Don't dismiss other points of view—they can give you a fresh perspective.

Your Sounding Board

Go ahead, think out loud. This is the place to air those emotional issues you can't bring up with families and employees. Be willing to give and receive unbiased feedback.

A Fountain of Knowledge

Did you know the average advisory board has more than 200 years of business management experience? Use it! Don't hesitate to ask pointed questions. Why reinvent the wheel, when fellow members have already "been there, done that?"

A Think Tank

Brainstorming is a proven method of generating unique solutions. Your advisory board is full of creative, entrepreneurial thinkers—put all that brainpower to work for you.

A Place Where You're Held Accountable

As a business owner, you report to no one. PRO members can provide that much-needed accountability. Need a push taking an uncomfortable action? Tell your peers about it—they'll hold your feet to the fire until it's done.



A Support Group

Who else can understand the pain, risk, and fear of running a business? Whether you're cutting your workforce or stepping up to invest in new equipment, your PRO group can support you like no one else. Don't be afraid to admit tough feelings.

A Trusted Network

Need to find a good accountant or IT firm? Your PRO members are a great source of referrals. And while PRO is not designed to foster inter-group sales, it does happen—because when you have confidence in someone, you want to do business with them.

Your Risk Consultants

Bankers, lawyers and accountants are trained to eliminate risk, but your fellow business owners are experts in evaluating risk. Considering a risky venture? Ask your PRO group to weigh in.

A Keeper of Confidences

The cornerstone of any advisory board is confidentiality. Please feel comfortable bringing up difficult situations, such as personnel or financial issues. Your group can help.

A Wellspring of Camaraderie

PRO is your personal club. Enjoy the kinship that grows between members. You are each others' coaches, mentors, advisors, and friends. Enjoy it!

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