

Fear of Riling

Piola to Chamber: No Worries of Rejection

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By: Carl Rotenberg

NORRISTOWN — "Excuse me, I wonder if you can help me out?"

That opening line has gotten Chuck Piola through many doors and helped him create hundreds of sales for NCO Financial Systems Inc. of Horsham. The accounts receivable management company has grown from four employees in 1986 to more than 9,000 workers worldwide, with gross sales of \$701.5 million last year.

Piola, the former executive vice president of business development for NCO Financial, ran the sales side of the business while his partner, Michael Barrist, ran the operations side. The two men built the collections management business after Barrist purchased it from his family. The privately-held company became a public company in 1997 and Piola retired in 2000 at the age of 52.

On Friday afternoon, Piola regaled 130 business people from the MONTCO Chamber of Commerce with his war stories about "cold calling" - the nearly lost art of making closed doors open.

"I made some of my greatest sales because I found the owner in," said Piola, "without protection and without secretaries guarding the door."

Piola repeatedly told his collection company's "story" - the reason another firm should hire them - as many times and to as many people as he could reach in each workday.

When he was selling NCO Financial, the story was "a company that specializes in discreet recovery work for companies having trouble collecting receivables." But cold calling can work for any company, according to Piola.

In his working life, Piola made more than 15,000 cold calls on potential customers. To conquer the fear of rejection, he read the best books on sales, including "How to Win Friends and Influence People," by Dale Carnegie, and "The Greatest Miracle in the World," by Og Mandino.

He also married a nurse who always urged him to find a new person to tell his sales story to and who tolerated the many missed dinners. "She said, 'You're not telling your story to someone new. Go find somebody new,'" he said. "So I would."

Piola described his emotional life as a salesman as a seesaw battle between self-esteem on one side and competition and confrontation on the other side. When he confronted his fear of confrontation with new clients by making cold calls, his self-esteem would go up.

"The number one emotion in America is fear. The American school system teaches us how to not take a risk," he said. "Don't be afraid to make a mistake."

Piola urged the businesspeople to embrace change if they want to improve their business. He also suggested telling family and friends about the planned changes so they could nudge him if he didn't make them.

"Tell everyone about your goals," he said. "Tell your parents, tell your boss, tell your whole family. And then wait for them to remind you. In other business Friday, the MONTCO Chamber of Commerce and the Verizon Foundation announced the recipients of \$6,000 grants from the 4th annual charity ball in 2001. They are Family Services of Montgomery County, the Fellowship House of Conshohocken, the Kelly Anne Dolan Memorial Fund, the March of Dimes, the Pathway School of Audubon and the YMCA of Philadelphia.

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Chuck Piola addresses the Montco, PA Chamber of Commerce