



***Stop Wasting Your Time
At Trade Shows
&
Start Making Money***

(Sample Chapter)

**by
Steve Miller**

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Who is this Steve Miller Guy?

Steve Miller is first and foremost Kelly's Dad, and Kay's first husband.

He is a student, teacher, and designated thinker of curious, forward thinking, and continually restless (defined as dissatisfied-with-status-quo) organizations. He operates a virtual strategic laboratory developing practical tools for applying the concepts flowing from his research and experience. (OK, he's a consultant, but he likes to call himself a Strategic Handyman.)

The essence of Steve's work is to develop creative and implementable ideas that create value propositions for associations and corporations. He has been variously called a change agent, alchemist, visionary, gadfly, and pain-in-the-butt. Some people actually don't like him, and even say bad things about him.

His clients are unquestionably elite, and in his own words, "*very way cool people*," including many of *Tradeshaw Week's* Top 200 expositions and *Fortune 100* corporations:

CONEXPO-CON/AGG	Coca-Cola
Intl Manufacturing Technology Show	Boeing Commercial Airplane
PACK EXPO	Dana Corporation
Food Marketing Institute	Volvo
International Housewares Assn	Philips Electronics
Society of Manufacturing Engineers	Starbucks
National Assn of Home Builders	Precor
National Assn of Broadcasters	Cincinnati Milacron

...to name a few.

Steve has presented over 1000 speeches, workshops, and seminars around the world. Besides his five books, he has written for and has been featured in over 250 publications, including *Fast Company*, *Business Week*, *Fortune*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, *Sales & Marketing Management*, ASAE's *Association Management*, PCMA's *Convene*, TSEA's *ideas*, and *Highlights for Children*. (OK, he made that last one up.)

You want operational efficiency? Call someone else. There are plenty of those consultants around. You want to move from insight to innovation to implementation? Call Steve.

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Chapter One

Making Trade Shows Work For You When They Don't For Others

The vast majority of trade show staffers are Unconscious Incompetents. They don't know how to work a trade show and they don't know that they don't know how to work a trade show!

My feet hurt, I thought. Shifting my weight from side-to-side I silently cursed the guy who developed the original trade show. Who was that guy, anyway? I'll wager he didn't have to wear dress shoes and a coat and tie.

Did he have to stand around all day? Did he have to watch all these people walk by his booth without stopping ... smiling that fake smile ... acting like he was glad to be here? Why doesn't anybody stop? I remember when this was a selling show. Those were the good old days! I'd write a ton of orders, more than paying for the time and expense of being here.

I need to sit down for a few minutes. Maybe get something cold to drink. Geez, I wish I hadn't been out so late last night partying with those other reps. But then, I guess that's the only good thing about working a trade show! I'll sure be glad when this show over and I can get back to my real job.

Sound familiar? For many trade show staffers this is all too real ... an unwelcome bump in the calendar, a necessary evil, a sacrifice of time that you can ill afford to lose.

But it doesn't have to be this way. In fact, it *shouldn't* be this way. Trade shows can and should be great sales and marketing tools for corporations today. But like any other tools, they have to be approached carefully and intelligently. The problem is that too many exhibitors and exhibit staffers don't take the time to do their homework when preparing for a show. Sure, they put together a great looking exhibit and jam it with lots of products. Sure, they take thousands of brochures and catalogs to give out to "prospects." Sure, they have preshow meetings to teach staffers about what

products are on display, what the shifts are, where the bosses will be hanging out, and where everybody will be having dinner.

But the hard fact is that most exhibitors rely on the “experience” of their staffers to ultimately achieve success. They rely on staffers to already know how to work a show. They rely on staffers to know how to approach attendees, initiate conversations, determine the quality of the interaction, identify top prospects, capture contact information, and establish a mutually agreed-to, post-show follow-up action step.

And too often that reliance would be sadly misguided.

A too-high percentage of trade show staffers are what is called “Unconscious Incompetents.” They don’t know how to work a trade show and they don’t know that they don’t know how to work a trade show!

This may sound a bit confusing, but it’s really true. Think about it this way. When you were growing up, you rode in your parent’s car a lot. You did not know how to drive a car, but you probably didn’t know that. After all, how hard could it be? We just jump in the car, Mom or Dad turns the key, and off we go! It looks easy.

At least it looked easy until you actually got behind the wheel the very first time. Maybe it was with Mom or Dad. Maybe it was with a Driver’s Education teacher. Maybe it was with an older brother or friend. But at that moment, as he or she explained everything you needed to think about – slide the seat...adjust the rearview and sideview mirrors...check the gauges...put your foot on the brake...carefully scan around the car (especially that blind spot!)...flip the turn signal on...put the car in Drive...watch for an opening in traffic...take your foot off the brake...place it on the gas...press down on the gas pedal...a little harder...no, not that hard!...turn the steering wheel a little to the left...not that much...you’re doing fine...stay in this lane...eyes ahead...now look at your speed limit...eyes back on the road...now look in the rear view mirror...back on the road...get back in your lane...

Do you remember? And as that experience happened, we had an epiphany. *I don’t know how to drive!*

Up until that moment, you were an Unconscious Incompetent. You didn’t know how to drive and you didn’t know that you didn’t know. That first experience behind the wheel opened your eyes and you realized the need to learn.

The same applies to exhibit staffers. Many of us have a lot of experience with trade shows, both as attendees and as staffers. But almost none of us had anybody actually teach how to work a show. Right? Oh sure, you might say you learned from a boss or another staffer, but who taught *them*...?

This is important. Trade shows are not the same type of sales environment most of us work in the rest of the time. Let me give you a few examples of what I mean:

- You aren't going to someone's office or place of business. They're coming to you! This is good news/bad news. Going to their office, you know who you're seeing. When they come to you, you may not know them at all.
- You don't take the competition with you on sales calls, yet they might be right across the aisle from you at the show. You're watching each other and attendees have an immediate competitive comparison opportunity.
- In the field, you might typically meet with one person. Even when there is more than one person in the meeting, they're all from the same company. At a show, you might have a group of people around you from several different companies.
- In the field, you ask for a one-hour appointment, and you might get it. At a trade show, you might only get to talk with a prospect for a couple of minutes.

There are more differences, but you should get the point. Working a trade show is very different from working out in the field. Yet the vast majority of exhibit staffers have never received an education in the proper preparation and approach to successfully working a trade show!

The good news is that successful exhibit staffing is not rocket science. The better news is that when you learn how to work a trade show correctly, your odds of success dramatically increase. Because so many other staffers don't know how to prepare and work a show, you'll have a decided advantage over them.

The best news is that qualified attendees are looking for educated staffers. Attendees come to trade shows looking for solutions to their problems. The days of traveling on a boondoggle are long gone. Who has that much time anymore? Attendees are looking staffers who can help them; who can answer important questions; who are ready and willing to work;

who are prepared to work in the exhibit environment; and who have the ability to make the time spent in an exhibit worthwhile.

If you know how to work a trade show, attendees are looking for ***YOU***.