

# The Book of Trade Show Proverbs

The show was over, my was packed away, and so I headed for the door, clinging to a bundle of leads tucked tightly under my arm.

However, I soon found the exit clogged by an angry mob. At the apex of the bottleneck was an aged man, dressed in an outlandish plaid suit, desperately trying to squeeze his pair of battered exhibit cases through the narrow revolving door.

The crowd was hurling curses upon him, which only disoriented him further. As he swayed in his turmoil, his matching plaid hat fell to the floor. Instinctively I pushed through the throng to pick it up. While near the floor, I discovered that his case wheels were jammed with garbage. I plucked the garbage out, took the handles of his cases, and helped him through the door.

We pulled to the side in a quiet spot away from the flow of traffic. I gave him back his hat, which he placed on his head, regaining his composure. He sat on his cases and even smiled, as if he had finally solved a dilemma that had long gripped him.

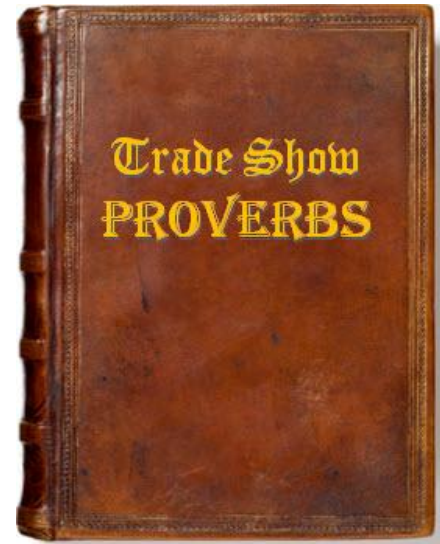
"Thank you, young man, for your help," he said in a voice stronger than I would have expected. "I had thought before coming to this event that perhaps my time on the show floor was at an end. Now I know it is. While I have spent many, many years and uncountable days ambling among the trade show aisles, I fear it is finally time for me to go to the great marshalling yard in the sky. I am grateful for you coming to my aid. Therefore, I feel it only right that I pass this on to you."

From within the folds of his plaid jacket he pulled an ancient, leather-bound book, its cover adorned with an embossed border and its ragged pages edged in gold. The book reeked of incense and myrrh that evoked open-air markets and tented bazaars thrown up at desert crossroads in centuries past.

"When I was but a lad," he continued, "fresh off the farm and newly commissioned as a travelling salesman, I was most fortunate to have befriended the silver-haired concierge at the great Conrad Hilton hotel. My first trip to a Chicago trade show was his last day on the job. Perhaps he saw something in me that made him trust me, for he gave me this book, which had been passed down from many others to him, and that I now in turn give to you."

On the book's cover, in golden letters, glowed the words, "Trade Show Proverbs." I opened it and turned its yellowed pages. Some pages held words certainly older than the man before me, while a few appeared to have been written on by him, or perhaps his most recent predecessor.

The book began with proverbs to help calm the nerves frayed during a set-up crisis:



*It's no use  
crying over a  
spilled crate*

**It takes a  
village to  
raise an  
island  
exhibit**

A booth on time  
is very fine,  
but a booth  
that's late is  
cause for hate

**DON'T SPOIL  
THE  
DISPLAY  
FOR A  
HALF ROLL  
OF  
VELCRO**

Many of the venerable book's trade show proverbs aimed to illuminate the booth staffer:

*Early to hotel and  
early to show floor,  
gives a man  
leads, sales, and  
much more*

*Never judge  
an attendee  
by his looks*

**A lead in  
the booth  
is worth  
two in  
the aisle**

*One lead  
does not  
make a show*

**A hungry  
booth staffer  
will work  
no faster**

**Clothes  
Make the  
Booth staff**

Don't count  
your leads  
until the  
show's over

Several trade show proverbs had sharp words of caution for those unfocused in their exhibit marketing:

Failing to  
Exhibit  
is  
Exhibiting  
Your Failure

*For want of a staffer  
the lead was lost;  
for want of a lead  
the show was lost;  
and for want of a show  
the company was lost*

If You Can't  
Stand the  
Competition  
Get Out of  
The Show

*You Are  
What  
You  
Exhibit*

'Tis better to  
light up your exhibit  
than to  
curse the darkness

*Exhibit Design,  
unaccompanied  
by Marketing,  
is like a flower  
without perfume*

The final two proverbs commented wisely on the human condition as found in the trade show world:

*Sales is Sales  
and Marketing is  
Marketing  
and the twain shall  
never meet, except  
at trade shows*

*Nothing is certain,  
except for  
show closing and  
overtime charges*

The words I read were new to me, and yet they rang so true, it was as if I had known them all my life. Riveted by the old book, I did not stop reading until the last page.

When I looked up to thank my benefactor, I discovered that he had silently rolled his cases away. But he had not really left me alone, having entrusted to my care the book of Trade Show Proverbs.