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Taking charge of your business leadership

By Marian Banker

Are you the owner of a small business? A professional in private practice? Or an executive in a small company? If you are any of these and you don't think of yourself as a "business leader," shame on you.

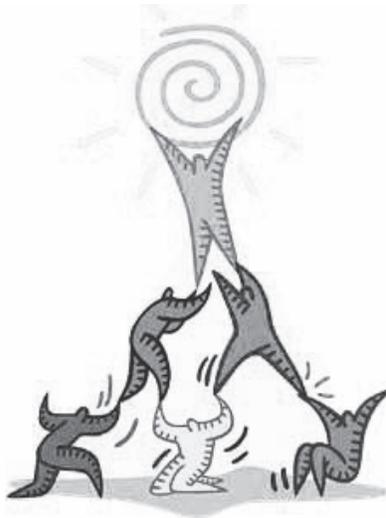
By default, when you have decision-making responsibility and authority, you are the leader.

An Entrepreneur Magazine cover text reads, "Who are America's future business leaders? You are. So what does it take to succeed? The best leaders combine bold new strategies with time-tested values. Are you up to the task?"

I couldn't have said it better myself. This is the message I continue to communicate. NOW is the time to accept the role. Allow it to challenge and motivate you.

The leader's old role of charismatic superstar has been redefined as a dedicated team leader with a mission. Spectacular business failures such as Enron, Tyco and others, have shown that short term glory is short sighted and will eventually come back to haunt you.

Strategies that effective leaders are using today are:



Down-Time Response: Use down-time to reassess how you want to lead (and where you want to go). Prepare yourself to start the next phase of your business on a stronger foundation.

Grassroots Strength: A leader gathers the strength of the group. Great leaders are able to attract followers within their company, their community and their industry.

Make Tough Decisions: Real business leadership means making tough decisions and getting them carried out. Take a stand and back it up. This requires accurate information and input

At A Glance

Customer service
at its best

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at work?

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business
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avoiding eye injuries

... and more

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What customers hate when they're looking for help

Remember the time you lost something, and asked for help looking for it and heard the response, "Well, look in the place you last remember seeing it," or something along those lines?

While that remarkably unhelpful (albeit, well-meaning) reply might meet your expectations, the same cavalier response won't fly when it comes to customer service. Simply put, customers expect more out of you when they need help.

What Customers Expect Out of the Service Experience

Your business makes a promise to your customers, but it's not enough to deliver on that promise. To provide the best experience possible, you have to understand your customers' expectations. Luckily, meeting those expectations don't have to be at a cost for your business. In fact, people are willing to

pay more for a better experience.

How much more?

Companies that deliver top-notch experiences reap big revenue growths. Precisely 4-8% more than competitors in their market.

So it's definitely worth it, but figuring out what those expectations are and how to meet them is another challenge unto itself.

While every customer base will be different and every business will have their own unique path to delivering the experience, there are some universal faux-pas that no customer service department should commit.

5 Things that Ruin the Service Experience When Customers Need Help

To help you capitalize on revenue growth and improve your customer experience, we've compiled a short list of things that your customers don't

want to run into when they're trying to get help from your service team.

1. Repeating Themselves to Every Agent

If a customer can't take care of their problem with a single agent and has to work across the team, they don't want to repeat themselves. Every minute that they have to spend explaining their problem again, is another minute that their problem isn't being fixed.

Similarly, they don't want to be told to try solutions they've already found on their own. If it didn't work for them when they were reading the help documentation, it probably won't work when the service agent is parroting the same instructions, either. Luckily, if your helpdesk has journey mapping, you can mitigate this challenge by keeping your agents — and customer — on the same page with a unified sys-

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Leadership: Learning from each other is key

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from trusted sources.

Good of Company First: Builders of strong and profitable businesses make decisions based on long term benefit to their company, not the short term benefits for themselves. This mindset is what's termed a level 5 leader in Jim Collins' book, "Good to Great," published by Harper Business. Collins' book is a great leadership reference even though the research is based on findings from large corporations.

Develop Leadership from Within: Great things come from trial and error. Of course, it's important to try on a small scale to limit damage from failure. Analyze it! Learn from it! Leadership requires courage - the

courage of one's convictions. Jim Collins reiterates this in his strategy of getting the right people on board first, then allowing them to learn how to lead through trial and error in their own area of expertise.

Being a great leader requires that you...

- Be able to communicate with a wide audience.
- Be willing to make unpopular decisions when necessary. (Take a stand!)
- Have a plan to make sure your message gets through.
- Create and implement quality systems and methods that will survive (after you're gone).

Some of these may not be your natural behavior. Business leadership coaching is certainly a great way to

develop courage, communication skills and perspective. You can also add these to your capabilities through affiliations and networking. It's more important than ever to have an active network that can be tapped for its expertise, new business potential and reinforcement of leadership skills.

I believe (yes, I'm taking a stand) that by small business leaders coming together to learn from each other, each will gain in their own leadership skills. As a result their business will be the direct beneficiary, becoming stronger and more valuable. Check the current calendar at <http://staging.primestrategies.com/calendar> for events and programs that bring together small business leaders.

Final words for the leaders of today's...and tomorrow's...strong and profitable businesses: recognize that you are the leader of your business. As such you must make good business decisions, take effective actions and get what you need to follow through.

Marian Banker, MBA, is President of Prime Strategies, offering individual, group, and virtual programs designed to help clients take command of their business. Marian's mission is to help small business owners be the leader of a strong and profitable business. Read more articles like this one at <http://primestrategies.com>.



LAW TALK

By Kenneth S. Grossbart
of Abdulaziz, Grossbart & Rudman



CSLB makes new B-2 license available

Effective June 1, 2021 the CSLB will begin accepting applications for the new B-2 Residential Remodeling Classification. Please see information from a CSLB Industry Bulletin below to learn more. Have any questions? Feel free to contact Abdulaziz, Grossbart & Rudman at 818.760.2000 or info@agrlaw.com.

From the CSLB press room:

On June 1, the Contractors State License Board (CSLB) will begin accepting applications for the **new** B-2 Residential Remodeling Classification. This classification is available to licensees and applicants whose principal contracting business involves working on existing homes with residential wood frame structures which require at least three unrelated trades or crafts for a single contract (SB 1189).

The B-2 classification provides a pathway to licensure for many unlicensed people who are currently working on remodeling and small home improvement projects that don't qualify for a B-General Building license because the contracted work does not include framing or rough carpentry. "Consumers employing a licensed contractor have reduced liability and greater consumer protection. Licensees benefit from licensure as they have opportunities to lawfully advertise, and compete on a level playing field for jobs," said Dave Fogt, CSLB Registrar.

To qualify for the B-2 Residential Remodeling Classification, contractors and applicants must have at least four

The Contractors State License Board will begin accepting applications for the new B-2 Residential Remodeling Classification, the first new classification in more than a decade, on June 1.

The classification is available to licensees and applicants whose principal contracting business involves working on existing homes with residential wood frame structures which require at least three unrelated trades or crafts for a single contract.

years of experience working in three or more trades or crafts for residential remodeling projects. Applicants can substitute up to three years of the experience requirement with qualifying education.

Please note that the B-2 license classification has the following restrictions:

- * Limited to working on existing wood frame structures
- * Cannot make structural alterations to load-bearing partitions and walls
- * Cannot install or extend electrical or plumbing systems but can make modifications (e.g., install recessed lighting or alter plumbing for two showerheads)
- * Cannot install or replace an HVAC system

Also, applicants will need to take and pass the B-2 exam as well as comply with other licensure requirements such as maintaining a license bond and complying with workers compensation insurance requirements.

For further information, please visit these links:

CSLB forms and applications:
https://www.cslb.ca.gov/About_Us/Library/Forms_And_Applications.aspx

Get licensed to build workshop:
https://www.cslb.ca.gov/Media_Room/consumer_education/licensing_workshops.aspx

SB 1189:
https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200SB1189

Service: Customers want human communication

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tem.

2. Playing the Waiting Game

Customer expectations are rising, and if you're not resolving tickets fast enough, you may not be meeting those heightened expectations. 67% of customers expect your service to be faster this year.

Instant is best, but it's not always viable over more asynchronous channels like social media and email. In the case of email, 44% of your customers expect a response to their query within a few hours at the most. Fortunately, that still leaves over half of them with the far more realistic expectation of a response within a business day or two, but it still puts the clock against your agents. A clock which doesn't let up with your synchronous channels like live chat and phone lines.

In fact, both present the same logistical hurdle for your business. If you don't have the funds to staff up according to the demand, you'll need to designate specific hours of service so customers know when they can reach instant help. Which means they'll still be playing the waiting game — it's just one where they'll know the parameters of the board. Alternatively, you can avoid this faux pas altogether by getting a little more technologically advanced and using AI-powered support agents for your live chat. Chatbots don't need rest, don't collect a salary, and can be programmed to address the most common issues. They can also help users find information in your knowledge base and get to their solution faster. Don't make your customers play the waiting game. The faster they can take care of their issues, the closer you are to meeting their expectations.

3. Going on an Archeological Dig for Your Support Team

If your helpdesk is buried in the wilds of your website, customers aren't going to be happy about having to dig through it to find it. They'll be even less thrilled about having to work through automated channels before they can get to a real person. That's why websites like GetHuman exist, and rank well on the

search engine results page.

Ranking in the top ten — behind only Target itself — sends a clear message that searchers want human-to-human communication as quickly as they can get it. In fact, 73% of your customers would rather get help from a live person than anything else. So while you should offer automated support, you should also make it simple for them to connect to your agents by putting your contact information front and center on your website. It's even better if it's in multiple locations, such as in your top navigation and footer menu.

Testing the visibility of your support information is pretty easy. Just squint your eyes. If you can't identify where your support information is within a few seconds of squinting, it's not visible enough. And believe it or not, this is a bonafide design test that user experience experts use to ensure visual elements are clear and organized in the correct hierarchy. So don't make your users strap on a pith helmet to find your service department, and if you're unsure if your contact information is clear, run the squint test. It's a small step, but for someone who needs help, it's a big impact.

4. Training Your Customer Service Staff Themselves

Eventually, everyone has to exit the training seminar and start taking live calls. But if you're not preparing your agents ahead of time with the resources and confidence they need, you put the onus to train your staff on the experience. And for a customer with a problem to solve, that's an additional frustration. While they may be willing to help a fledgling agent out when they have a sales call, their patience will be decidedly more strained if they need support. It's also more likely to burn out your staff and lead to a higher turnover rate in an already tumultuous industry. If you want to retain your staff longer, you need to put the extra time and expense into training them thoroughly.

Remember, customers are willing to pay more for a better experience, but they can't get that experience if your newest agents are being thrust into the highest-escalation cases before they're

ready. But like all of the previous faux pas, this is another thing that's surprisingly easy to solve and avoid. Even just adding two extra days of orientation can put your staffers in a better position to provide service and enmesh them in the company culture. And if they feel supported, they'll be able to transfer that support to the people who matter most — your customers.

So give your newest agents time to stretch their legs and get into the groove of customer service. Start by adding additional training time, then regularly check-in with your staffers to make sure they have everything they need before they work with high-stakes customers on a deadline.

5. Not Getting an Apology

Your agent's first course of action when a customer populates a ticket is to solve the problem and resolve the ticket as quickly as possible. But while expediency and a solutions-first focus is a definite boon for great customer experience, neglecting the small things can have surprisingly large impacts. Like forgetting to add a sincere but brief apology for their experience. Just make sure your apology is straightforward like Adweek's and doesn't take more time than it needs to or come with any caveats. If your customer service agents add an interjection, "We're sorry about your experience, but..." it's less likely to be warmly received. Psychologist Harriet Lerner says that any apology that includes a rationalization negates the sincerity of the sentiment. Your agents shouldn't try to explain what went wrong or provide an excuse, even inadvertently. They should just apologize and move on to addressing the problem. It's what you'd want someone to do for you, isn't it?

Ultimately, customer expectations are always going to keep growing, and meeting them is critical to keeping your business in best possible form, delivering the best experience to customers. Following the steps mentioned above, is definitely a sure-fire way to do just that.

Reliable Communication is a preferred sales partner for sales process outsourcing and call center services.

Mining the nuances of happiness

By Karla Brandau

Do you ever feel lethargic and lost at work? Do you ever feel vulnerable and powerless, like a tiny cog in a huge machine? Do you wish that you could be truly happy at work?

“Happiness at work is elusive,” says psychiatrist Dr. Kerry J. Sulkowicz. Sulkowicz teaches that a better goal is to enjoy your work and strive for high performance. That is more realistic. Why? Happiness is complex. It is difficult to sustain for long periods of time. It often ebbs and flows with the people around you and ultimately, happiness must be generated from within.

In your quest for happiness at work, it is important to understand root causes. When identified, root causes give you clues to why you feel vulnerable and powerless. I learned this when I worked in a corporation where I was expected to be merely a puppet, doing exactly what the manager said and acting precisely when he pulled my strings.

The behavior of my manager was my root cause for unhappiness as he drained essential life force from me but I displaced my anger on my family and work associates. Seeing my relationships suffer, I had to step back and analyze why I was so unhappy. As I consciously looked at my feelings and emotions, I realized that the root cause of my anger was a manager who did not allow me to collaborate, have input, think through and solve problems related to my work.

Once I identified, admitted to myself, and accepted this root cause of my unhappiness, my annoyance and irritation subsided. I was no longer a victim, but had a sense of power coming from my ability to cope with negative feelings. By insulating myself mentally and emotionally from the behaviors of my manager, I returned to a pleasant person. I restored my good relationships with friends and family, regained my mental energy, and climbed on top of my workload.

The ups and downs of work life are inevitable. Work is work! Only in

Cinderella fairy tales is work free from pressure, demands, and anxiety. Believing you are entitled to happiness at work every hour of the day makes you neurotic and causes your mental state to go up and down like a yo-yo.

Next time you feel unhappy and lethargic at work, look for the root cause which may not be your manager but an overdue project or an assignment just out of your skill set. Stabilize your identity as a valuable cog in organizational progress, believe in your inner power to manage your mental and emotional energy, and then focus on consistent and excellent results.

It is possible to find happiness at work when you understand the subtle nuances of creating a mental and emotional environment where happiness can thrive within.

Karla Brandau, CEO of Workplace Power Institute, is an expert in leadership, employee engagement and workplace productivity.

Fix your business partnership

By Marian Banker

I've found there are lots of people in a long standing business partnerships who are not satisfied with the status of the relationship. They may feel stuck, frustrated, angry...or all of these. They know they've been silent far too long, but just don't know what to do.

What can cause such a change in a relationship that started out with high hopes and good feelings? Here are some of the situations I see most often. Do any of these apply to your partnership?

One partner feels like he's carrying the bulk of the workload.

This may have happened because there wasn't an agreement about who would do what. Job roles, responsi-

bilities and accountability have not been discussed.

Expectations are not being met.

Expectations may be quite different for each partner. When expectations aren't met, it's a set up for negative feelings. It's important that each partner knows what to expect from the others.

Partner has lost interest in the business or changed thinking.

Over time new attractions and options will continue to present themselves to all partners. When a partner becomes disenchanted with how the partnership is going, she is more likely to lose interest over time.

Can't talk to each other. Communication is so criti-

cal to maintaining a viable partnership. When partners get so busy doing their own thing that they can't find time to sit down with the other(s), they will likely start to feel less engaged. An unresolved issue can also lead to partners being unable to talk about certain things.

It's a wrong partnership.

Sometimes the partnership has been a bad match from the beginning, but it was maintained for a variety of reasons. When the primary reason for the partnership was based on personal needs more than on business needs, if those needs aren't fulfilled, the partnership will flounder. Maybe one partner thinks and acts fast and the other wants to research things in great detail. These people may never be able to function well

together. Basic behaviors and traits will not likely change even if the person tries.

Are any of these your concern? How do you open the subject of improving the relationship for the good of the company? NOTE: Even if you think it may be a wrong partnership, it's worth making the effort to see if it's salvageable.

Be proactive.

If you want things to change, it's up to you to change them. Make the decision you're going to break the status quo, but you're going to do it strategically.

Be clear about what you want.

See PARTNERSHIP, page 8

Make your online presence the best it can be

By Alex Belsey

The online marketplace has never been more popular, or more competitive. Standing out in this environment is challenging, but will yield great rewards.

More businesses than ever are recognizing the power of the online marketplace. The internet offers unrivaled opportunities to connect with potential clients and customers, share your message, and convert interest to sales. But for many, the disadvantage has been that the online marketplace is crowded, even oversaturated. There is more competition than ever before, and standing out is a challenge. Clarifying your mission, offering genuine value, and ensuring that you are highly visible, are all vital aspects of achieving success online.

That's where the tips below come in! Here, we explore five powerful ways that you can raise your profile online and create a genuine connection between your business and its customers.

Search Engine Optimization

The first and arguably most important aspect of standing out online can be summarized as SEO (Search Engine Optimization).

When a potential customer types words related to your business into a search engine like Google, Bing, or others, search engine optimization is what will help your company to be one of the first results! Appearing high up — even on the first page — of the search results can be crucial for attracting customers.

Search engine optimization is one of the most powerful tools you can use to attract clients, achieve sales, and grow your business. This is because online search engines are now one of the first places that customers go when looking for specific products or services.

More companies than ever are recognizing the value of search engine optimization and investing in professionals who can create search engine optimized content for them that will generate huge amounts of traffic.



Social Media Campaigns

Social media platforms are a great way to generate interest in your business, engage potential customers, and convey your values and products in an interesting way. Standing out in this space can be challenging, but carefully constructed social media campaigns can help.

Perhaps you are launching a new product, have a special offer coming up, or want to engage in discussions of a pressing industry issue. In these cases, creating a week's worth of related content designed to drive customers towards a particular product, service, or blog post on your website, could be especially helpful— teaching customers step-by-step how your business can support them and what assistance you can provide.

Don't underuse social media by only posting fun or eye-catching material! Merge this approach with a strategic drive towards your products and services, while always conveying their value, and you will have a great chance of success.

Collaborations

You can stand out in the online marketplace by joining forces with colleagues, peers, and complementary companies in your industry. You could run joint offers, discounts, or campaigns, as well as give interviews to local magazines or websites.

A collaborative, engaging approach tends to work very well online, as this

is the perfect space for interaction between businesses and customers who may be all over the world!

Collaborating with others on a piece of content or specific project also means that when the time comes to promote your work, there will be several businesspeople immediately on hand to lead the promotional efforts— all of whom will have an interest in ensuring the work is seen by as many people as possible.

Events

Consider holding special events — whether online or in-person — that can generate additional interest and engagement with your business. Live Q&As or product demos, for example, can be conducted completely online, while in-person events could include conferences or ceremonies, or speeches from industry experts perhaps.

Whether you choose to operate remotely or in-person, events can be a great way to do a launch, create a buzz, or educate customers on the value and uses of your products.

Awards

If your circumstances allow and it is appropriate for your business, consider giving awards or recognition to peers for delivering excellence in your industry; this could lead to collaborations and mutual growth with businesses who complement yours.

If you run a travel business, consider reaching out to a market-leading travel insurance company, for example. Or if you run a stationery business, how about connecting with an art materials supplier?

By using an imaginative and collaborative approach which involves joining forces with others and celebrating their achievements, you can harness a powerful way to build connections and increase your reach!

Alex is a digital marketer who specializes in SEO. He also edits a B2B magazine and enjoys writing about topics such as business, politics, economics, wellbeing, and more.

SAFETY ... IT PAYS



Protect your eyes on the job

Every day an estimated 1,000 eye injuries occur in American workplaces. No matter where we work, flying particles, dusts, splashes or flying objects are apt to expose us to potential eye injury. Fortunately, we can protect against these hazards by using the appropriate protective eyewear for our jobs. A survey by the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) of about 1,000 minor eye injuries reveals how and why many on-the-job accidents occur:

- Not wearing eye protection. BLS reports that nearly three out of every five workers injured were not wearing eye protection at the time of the accident.

- Wearing the wrong kind of eye protection for the job. About 40 of the injured workers were wearing some form of eye protection when the accident occurred. These workers were most likely to be wearing eyeglasses with no side shields, though injuries among employees wearing full-cup or flat-fold



side shields occurred, as well.

What Causes Eye Injuries?

- Flying particles. BLS found that almost 70% of the accidents studied resulted from flying or falling objects or sparks striking the eye. Injured workers estimated that nearly three-fifths of the objects were smaller than a pin head. Most of the particles were said to be

traveling faster than a hand-thrown object when the accident occurred.

- Contact with chemicals caused one-fifth of the injuries.

- Other accidents were caused by objects swinging from a fixed or attached position, like tree limbs, ropes, chains, or tools which were pulled into the eye while the worker was using them. That is how eye injuries occur.

OSHA CORNER

Please visit the following address on the web to download helpful safety posters, guides and pamphlets for a safer workplace.

<http://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/PubOrder.asp>



The BLS reported that more than 50% of workers injured while wearing eye protection thought the eyewear had minimized their injuries. But nearly half the workers also felt that another type of protection could have better prevented or reduced the injuries they suffered. It is estimated that 90% of eye injuries can be prevented through the use of proper protective eyewear. There are several types of eye protection and it's important you wear the right protection for the task.

- Safety Glasses: We wear safety glasses anytime we're in the production area. Safety glasses with side shields are

Please see EYES, page 8

Partnership: Set goals for your business

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Start by thinking about what you want for yourself and the business.

Schedule time to talk business.

Once you have thought things through it's time to schedule a time to talk business. Give your partner plenty of lead time and full disclosure about what the meeting is about. Let him get prepared for the meeting, but don't let it be put off because he "doesn't have time".

Discuss actions you're each willing to take.



Be prepared with actions you are willing to take. You can request or suggest actions from your partner, but leave the topic open for discussion and agreement.

Write a PLAN for agreed upon changes.

Once you reach agreement, set Goals for yourselves and the business. To

keep things moving in the right direction it's a good idea to schedule periodic meetings to iron out details. This is the perfect time to start the habit of regular planned communications.

Set a timeframe for evaluation.

Three months is a reasonable timeframe to see if the Plan is achieving the results you want. Schedule an actual time where you will sit down together to see what has been accomplished toward the Goals you set. If you see progress, you may want to give it another three months.

If your evaluation tells

you there is no hope, it may be time to make that very difficult decision to end the relationship. If you can't come to agreement or you're clearly going in different directions, it's probably time to part ways. Why waste any more time on a losing proposition?

Yes, it's like breaking up a marriage. But sometimes it has to be. Rather than feeling defeated, congratulate yourself on gaining the freedom to move on to something better.

Take a good look at your partnership and decide if it's time to take action.

Eyes: Protection at home is important too

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a good form of eye protection for general use to prevent flying debris and or objects from coming into contact with your eyes.

• Safety Goggles: When we're using compressed air or handling harmful chemicals we need to wear safety goggles. Goggles offer superior protection from small flying debris and particles as well as chemical splashes.

• Face Shields: When grinding, changing propane or changing batteries we need to wear a face shield along with our safety glasses or goggles. This gives additional protection to our face

during these types of tasks.

• Welding Helmets: When welding you have the risk of harmful rays impacting your eyes from a short distance. That is why we have special tinted welding helmets. It not only protects your face from flying objects, but your eyes from the rays.

We all realize how important eye protection and the wearing of safety glasses is here at work. However, this topic is as important for home as it is here at work.

Lawn Care

Whether you are mowing the lawn, using the weed wacker or using a chainsaw or pruning shears to cut back

branches on a tree you should wear your eye protection. Each year thousands of people go to the emergency room with eye injuries while taking care of their lawn.

Sports

Every year thousands of people, many of whom are children, damage or lose their vision from sports-related eye injuries. However, the good news is that 90 percent of these eye injuries are preventable if appropriate protective eyewear is worn. Encourage your children or grandchildren to wear eye protection while playing tennis, baseball, softball or basketball. Unlike what we have here at work, many stores such as Dicks Sporting

Goods sell very stylish safety glasses. Buying a set of these for your children may encourage their use even more.

Other Activities

Paintball, hunting, target shooting, setting off fireworks, wood working and many other leisure activities also have a history of causing eye injuries without the proper eye protection. Ensure you and your families are protected during these activities.

Vision is a terrible thing to lose and prevention is pretty easy with just wearing safety glasses.

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