PROFITS

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YOUR SEVEN LETTERS TO SUCCESS

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Preface

This book is about the abilities, capabilities, assets and/or inherent skills needed to be a professional sales person. After I realized that snap-shot management (looking at a specific point in time) is not a way to determine my success, I looked at my career as a motion picture. After thirty plus years in sales, management, marketing and training, I asked myself a few questions … here you can find the answers.

No self-respecting author would ever begin a training or self-improvement book without their own personal view of what they believe, so I will provide my definition here;

Definition of a Sales Professional:

A Sales Professional:

- *Is a* ***PEAK PERFORMER*** *who has the abilities and understands the importance to* ***PLAN*** *and* ***PREPARE***
- *Understands and acknowledges their* ***RESPONSIBILITIES*** *to their organization and customers, and can* ***RETAIN*** *their business, while maintaining* ***RESPECT*** *with their clients, companies, and most importantly themselves*
- *Takes* ***OWNERSHIP*** *and are* ***ORGANIZED***
- *Maintains a* ***FOCUS*** *on their duties and goals*
- *Has a character built on* ***INTEGRITY*** *and they have personal* ***INITIATIVE***
- *Has the ability and* ***TRUST*** *to work in a* ***TEAM*** *environment*
- *Provides all this to their internal and external customers with the utmost* ***SINCERITY***

Talk about a mouthful … this is the short answer to what I believe makes "up" a great sales person. Yes, the short answer. The long answer is provided in the next several chapters so enjoy.

Introduction

Let me first introduce myself to get some credibility among my fellow professionals. First of all, most of you do not know me, nor have you ever been to one of my seminars. I cannot claim to have closed the biggest deal ever in a specific industry, nor can I claim to be "salesman of the universe." I don't have a fee based blog or website where I have espoused my thoughts, concerns, and ideas for $19.95 per month (at least not yet anyway)

What I am though is a true sales professional, one of millions of sales people around the world that keep the world turning. One of many that believe our profession is under rated and disrespected. I am a sales professional who has dared to defend our profession with both human resource personnel and hiring managers. I have rebuffed those people who felt that 'anyone can do this'. I am proud to say that "I am a sales person."

My career in sales started as a 12-year old with my first newspaper route. I know what you are thinking: "that isn't a sales job." Well I beg to differ. It most certainly is. Yes, a paper route in and among itself is part of the marketing channel; it is the distribution of a product. However, growing that route and maintaining the clients with a personal touch gave me one of the largest routes in my region in a short period of time. Can that be done without salesmanship?

Starting with a customer base of around 40 or so addresses, I increased this to over 200 in less than a year. I did this by talking to people, determining their needs and then delivering (no pun intended). I did this simply by finding out the primary reason people didn't get the morning paper (the Detroit Free Press), it was because by the time they got home to read it, it was perceived as old news, and they would rather get the afternoon paper (The Detroit News). Of course in today's world, newspapers are dying out at record speeds because of this same issue – their competition (Internet, 24 Hour News Channels) get the news to their targets faster, but I digress.

I began my information gathering with simple question; I asked them if they had time in the morning to even read the paper before work? In most cases the answers were yes, so I probed; What if I can guarantee delivery before you leave for work giving you enough time to read it? You might think, well that is easy, people leave for work around 7 or 8 right? Not in my neighborhood. I grew up in a very blue collar area, with people leaving their homes well before 6, and in my father's case 4:15! (By the way, I didn't care about his answers; he received the paper for free)

Anyway, I surveyed the route, and discussed paper delivery times with my dispatcher. I paid an additional fee to have my papers dropped at my home (instead of the dispatch center) before 4:15 AM every day (even on Sunday). I then created a delivery route that ensured everyone their papers before they left for work each and every day. My guarantee was that if I was ever late they received the paper free for the week (even on snow days). In the five years I ran that route, not one person ever asked me for a free paper that week (except of course my parents).

In addition to my personal guarantees, I spent hours every Saturday on my route collecting the weekly subscription fees. I didn't let the people mail the $1.10 in to the Free Press, I wanted to do it personally. I spoke to the customers, apologized for having some wet papers during the week, made it up to them by giving them an extra TV Guide *(those were worth their weight in gold in my day),* and was just friendly. My tips were enormous, sometimes exceeding $50 in a week. For Christmas, I always broke the $500 goal that I set. You're thinking, that doesn't sound like a lot of money, right? Well check out the cost of living index from 1973 to 1978 … This was HUGE for a 12, 13, and 14 year old! I have run into some of these old customers years afterwards, and they always said I was the best paper boy they ever had. I did it for the PROFIT, but was committed to being the best at it.

From my entrepreneurial paper route business, I moved on to begin my long career in sales. During my college days, I started in the retail business. From selling clothes to the ultimate "automotive retail" … yes I was a car salesman, but I didn't have a plaid jacket, or smoke cigars.

Frankly speaking, I excelled. I received awards like "Sales Person of the Month" numerous times, was promoted to Sales Manager by the time I was 23, and running the entire dealership by 25. I considered myself a success. However, after only a few years, I no longer considered this a challenge. Having people come to me in order to sell them something left too much control in the customer's hands. I wanted more freedom & control in my prospecting and day-to-day activities!

Because of this, I then moved to outside sales, into the world of business to business. Since 1987 I have spent all of my time in the industrial world, selling parts and/or components to other manufacturers. I represented companies that manufactured Velcro (hook and loop) fasteners, Liquid Crystal Displays, Light Bulbs, and Plastics. I've been a success and considered the top sales person at every one of those employers or principals. I did this without any of the customers, products, or territories being in common. My experience in fasteners, as far as product, has had nothing to do with my day-to-day requirements in selling plastic and rubber parts. I have worked with decision makers in the purchasing departments, often they came from the design or operations areas, and others that were managed by the engineering group. None of those job functions or contacts were related.

I have succeeded in the automotive, consumer; toys and games, furniture, sporting goods, and medical industries. I worked my way successfully through the mini recessions of the 90's, the Internet bubble at the turn of the century, and yes, even thru the "Great Recession" that we are just now moving out of.

So, when people ask me, 'what makes you good at sales' or 'why have you been such a success', I started to really think about the skills, assets, and necessities of a true professional sales person. I realized it really wasn't what I knew about a specific product, or customer, or region. I knew that the process of sales, the skills and principles I have make me successful. Thus, I began to think about things I've done, classes I took, books I've read, and podcasts I've listened to that help me in my everyday endeavors. This book is my answer(s) to those questions. It is the little things that add up, and snippets here and there that will make you the best you can be.

It's not a certain point in time, or a big sale, that has made me a success. It is a combination of every experience I have had, and memory that I have made.

It is the definition, of a true sales professional:

- *Is a **PEAK PERFORMER** who has the abilities and understands the importance to **PLAN** and **PREPARE***
- *Understands and acknowledges their **RESPONSIBILITIES** to their organization and customers, can **RETAIN** their business, while maintaining **RESPECT** with their clients, companies, and most importantly themselves*
- *Takes **OWNERSHIP** and are **ORGANIZED***
- *Maintains a **FOCUS** on their duties and goals*
- *Has a character built on **INTEGRITY** and they have personal **INITIATIVE***

- *Has the ability and* ***TRUST*** *to work in a* ***TEAM*** *environment*
- *Provide all this to their internal and external customers with the utmost* ***SINCERITY***

I know that if you keep these things in mind on a daily basis, make this your mission statement, and build your skills and assets with these items in mind, you will become a great salesperson. I truly believe that we all have the basic abilities to become salespeople, but we really need to develop ourselves with the thought of being great in mind. Tiger Woods is not a natural golfer, he is only as good as the years of practice and discipline have allowed him to be. Yes, he is a great athlete and has some skills that he was born with, but practice and skills development has made him the great golfer that he is.

As you read this, you'll see that is not a continuous read. You don't have to read Chapter 2 to understand Chapter 6. It is more of a playbook that you can go to and review. If you have looked at the definition, you would have seen the bold words, the first letters spell out **PROFITS** … thus the name of the book *(I needed something that sounded like a business book didn't I?)*

It may be coincidental to have PROFITS in the title, but I don't believe in coincidences. My first commission job paid me on profit, and since then profits have always been on the top of my mind when I think as sales person or as a sales manager. Pushing myself for more sales, generate higher margin, and therefore more profits, has lead me to my own internal pursuits of perfection. So when asking myself the question; how I have been as successful as I have in the various industries and products that I have sold, I created my mission statement or definition, and the underlying thread was the ultimate PROFITS motive.

As professional sales representatives, there are numerous methods that we employ for improvement or to gain an edge on our competition from SPIN® to Strategic Selling, Steven Covey, and Zig Ziglar. We go to seminars for motivational techniques and listen to books on tape as we drive to our next appointment for the newest way to remember our clients' names. The key to all of this, in becoming a professional, is that we are persistent in our quest to be the best. We believe in continuous improvement.

This book is not the newest way to do it better; it is just more tools you can put in your basket. It is up to you to choose which tools you can utilize while you are on the path of continuous improvement. The key in the entire book is the word professional. You must treat this as a profession, one you should train at just like a world class athlete.

A profession is;

An occupation in which one has a professed expertise in a particular area *(and by the way, I love Wikipedia®)*

How dedicated are you to this profession? What have you done today, this week, this month or year to improve yourself and be the best among your piers? Do you consider yourself an expert in the PRODUCT you represent?

Or in the PROFESSION you are in? These are the main underlying theories of how people are hired? I will hire a PROFESSIONAL sales person over an expert in a specific product any day of the week and twice on Sundays! It is easier to train in product knowledge than to develop the personal mission statement that is necessary to be a great professional.

Let's look at this in another way;

All products are replaced by new technology – A professional sales person uses his skills to create the demand for that new technology.

If you have read this far, you can see that this book is one of continuous improvement. If you bought the book in the first place, you already understand the importance of this responsibility we have. However it is always nice to have someone substantiate reasons (justify the expense) of why you are trying to improve. To improve just to improve is really not a good answer, but lets' look at a practical reason.

The world has changed dramatically in the past few years. From 2008 to 2010, 8.5 Million jobs were lost in the United States. Our financial institutions collapsed, General Motors and Chrysler claimed bankruptcy, and the economy shrank in near depression amounts. All along, employers were making the decisions about who to cut out of the organization, including your sales department, and they will continue to monitor this closely in the future.

Companies are going to run very lean for a long time, so please understand that just because you made it through this far, doesn't guarantee you anything tomorrow. From this point on, your employers and you, the business owners, are going to make value judgments. One of the considerations will be if this employee is engaged in personal and continuous improvement. With the re-organizations that have gone on, it is going to be glaringly obvious who the peak performers are, and where the under-achievers are hiding. If you are worried, then maybe you should be. You should begin your period of self-assessment and put yourself on a road to continuous improvement now.

A perfect example of 'value' considerations during this past economic setback can be found in Europe. For those of you that don't know, there is a tendency for Europeans to act in more of a Socialistic method in their job creation, and workforce management. Unions are very strong, and will remain so. During this setback, Unions were allowing management to cut out the fat, the employees with less value, not based on years of experience, but on value or merit.

No longer will the tide simply raise all boats – employees have found out that there is a high and low tide. It is going to be imperative that your sales department is performing, and running on all cylinders. Getting orders has always been on top of the weekly sales meeting agenda, but in the past I believe it was there only as a formality, in most cases business just kept growing.

The future will increase the urgency and expectations are going to change dramatically. Get ready to be drilled and grilled from previously passive sales managers. Or better yet, questioned by the new manager brought in to increase sales and profitability. If you are a manager reading this book, you should be evaluating your staff on these skills as well as their revenues, profits, and closing ratios. Sales people that have these inherent capabilities are probably already your top performers.

This book is not the answer. If you can walk through this definition and feel you meet the criteria, then be assured you are a professional sales person. The quest for continuous improvement, staying sharp, and being the best you can be is all up to you. You can't expect your organization to make training available for your profession. You need to take ownership of this effort, and prepare your path to success.

So, read through this and hopefully you feel you got your money's worth. I can't give you a guarantee like I did when I was 12; it is all up to you to deliver when you have the information.

CHAPTER 1

Peak Performer

A Sales Professional is …

- *Is a **PEAK PERFORMER** who has the abilities and understands the importance to **PLAN** and **PREPARE***

First on the list of attributes is PEAK PERFORMERS. This is first, because everything you read from this point on must be checked against these qualities, and the underlying principle of balance.

A peak performer is not someone that is the simply the best at something. History has shown us numerous examples of people that are considered the best in their profession yet fail in their personal lives.

A peak performer is someone that is performing the best he can in all aspects of his life. They are living in balance. There are entire books on becoming a peak performer, so I urge you to read up on this. What I have taken away from my past training is that we all have certain areas; professional, financial, personal relationships, social relationships, spiritual, emotional and so on. We need to keep each one of these in mind as we move forward, and a peak performer lives in balance.

Do you know of someone that lost someone close to them, and to compensate for that loss of personal relationship they dive into their career? They begin working extra hours, trying to replace this relationship with another area.

Or someone else that lost their career, and after a long time of searching they find religion or begin to cheat on their spouse? Again, out of balance situations sometimes produce highly productive individuals, but without balance they cannot continue at that pace for a long time. These type of people end up a prime candidate for becoming burnt out.

Maintaining this balance of peak performance keeps our engine in tune for the long haul. Remember our profession and careers are not something that can be achieved, they are a journey. You need to be prepared for an endurance test, not a drag race. Live your life like the hare or the turtle, it's your choice.

There are six (6) areas that I like to concentrate on when considering balance in my life. We can refer to these as categories, or compartments, but these are 6 unique areas of our lives that need to be concentrated on and juggled.

We can obviously argue as to where the sub-categories go, but all in all, here is a short summary of what I try to keep my focus on.

As you can see, there are a lot of things that need to be in mind as we make decisions about our lives, where and whom to work for. How these decisions take from other areas of our life, regardless of how well prepared we are.

Sections of your life that you need to consider in becoming a Peak Performer!

Social Areas

- Family
- Friendships
- Community
- Organizations

Spiritual

- Faith (not religion)
- Inner Self

Professional

- Career
- Happiness at Work
- Achievements
- Recognition

Financial

- Dependence vs. Independence
- Comfort Levels
- Retirement Savings vs. College Savings Accounts
- Live for today?

Emotional

- At Peace with one self

- Happiness
- Family

Physical

- Healthy Body – Healthy Mind
- Exercise

These areas & sections are sure open for debate, but I think you can get the idea. Yes, at times we need to spend an unbalanced amount of time at work to finish a project and because of that we miss some of our kid's soccer games. Or a death in the family brings you down, and you are not firing on all cylinders … It is all in the overall balance. If you are continuously short-changing family to satisfy your social appetite, you are not acting as a Peak Performer.

Prepare & Planning

These are very similar and will be discussed next for a reason. Without them we don't know where we are going or how we are getting there.

Afterall,

"If you don't know where you are going, you will probably end up somewhere else. ~ Lawrence J. Peter

I will introduce these sections with my favorite saying. I would love to be able to give credit to someone. I call it the 5 P's, others call it the 6 P's, there are numerous people that have used this quote, so let's not worry about credit, lets' just talk about the content and what it really means …

"Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance"

I use this saying so often in discussions with my operations management teams over the ears, that you would think I'm getting paid to say it. The statement has it all … plan and you will perform … the worst case is you will avoid poor performance which is the quickest thing to get you replaced as a supplier!

Prepare

The first necessity I see for any and all professional sales people is to be prepared. Yes, that old *Boy Scout motto* is really crucial in your eventual rise to professionalism. From having a plan for your overall territory to a daily plan of what you are going to do, preparation is the foundation that will make you a sturdy successful rep.

Here is a story I blogged in regards to preparing and planning;

I was at our local High School Football Game. It was their Homecoming, and all in all a very good game up until the 4th Quarter. The visiting team had just scored a TD with 2 Minutes left to play, which tied the game at 14-14. Our team had just that much time to score to win the game. In football that is an eternity, if the time is managed well.

With 0:32 to go, it was third and goal from the 22 (big *penalty set us back), no timeouts but a great chance to move the ball into FG position somehow. I'm not going to pick apart the play calling here, the team ran the ball down to the 5 yard line. PERFECT ... but it was 4th down, the clock was running, and nobody was moving.*

The team had no idea what to do next. They had no plan, and weren't prepared for this outcome. The quarterback just stood there helplessly looking at the coach, who was scrambling on the side lines looking for his FG team.

Before that 3rd down play even started, the coach should have had instructions sent to the team. If this happens then do this, if that happens, then do that ... ***but doing nothing is NEVER an option*** *... Especially for salespeople. Plan, Prepare, go over the potential responses to questions over an and over so you can seamlessly run the play that needs to be run next.*

In the end, our team won 27-26 in Double Overtime, which for the newspapers it was a great ending, but for the thousands of fans in the stadium with shorter nails from biting them, it could have been smoother and easier.

Plan, prepare, do a meeting prep so you know what you want to say to a customer with each and every response they could give you. It saves time, and you won't bite your nails as often ...

To Prepare: Is to "make ready" according to Wikipedia®, but I also like the alternative definition of preparation, where we see it as a *"substance or a remedy."* So when we put these two definitions together, to be prepared ***is to have a remedy ready or available***.

For preparing, I am going to focus on pre-call preparation because it is so vitally important in the overall sales process. I will mention other preparation ideas later, however this specific part of our profession is ultimately where the money is; meetings with the customer. It doesn't matter what the industry product, service, or gadget that is being marketed. The face-to-face or video-conference is where the rubber meets the road in our industry. This is the "sales call" and we need to be prepared.

Sales calls cost so much money these days, and our customers are so busy, that we don't get too many opportunities to set time aside with them. So, you have to make this time well worth it for you, your customer and the companies you represent.

By preparing we include research on our prospects company or the prospect themselves, to writing out every question that you need to get answered, all the possible answers that will come back and your own notes on how to overcome those objections. You need to be diligent in this for every key appointment you have. It is too costly for you, or your company, to make appointments and come away with only half of the information or you 'wish you would have asked this when then said that'. Once you begin to do this for key appointments, you will then carry it over to all your appointments. And yes, before you ask, I do the same thing today for all my established appointments. It is much like a script that you are writing, but It is a dynamic one that can go in many directions. However, if you know which directions the meetings could end up going; it is in our control to get them going in "your direction."

In pre-call preparation, the first thing you need to identify is the reason for the appointment in the first place.

What is the goal of this meeting, what do you plan on getting out of it?

What level of commitment are you striving for?

If you are just stopping by the account to say hi, and possibly see if there are any opportunities just waiting on the desk for you to come by, then you are truly wasting yours and your customer's time … and most importantly your company's money and resources.

It is time to be conscious of every move, every dollar spent, because as noted in the introduction, we are entering a different world. Our customers are more demanding, there are fewer resources at both our own companies as well as our customers, so idle chit chat and courtesy calls may not be as welcome as they have been in the past.

These factors must go into your thinking as you prepare yourself.

To prepare is to think … again, you need to know where you are going or what you are "going after" for this meeting. Whether this is just a first meeting and you are presenting your company's products and services, or this is the 'closing meeting', where you are going in for the kill, you must identify as many items as possible prior to the meeting to be prepared.

Your selling process is a process, so moving from Step 1 thru Step 10, you need to have engagements and commitments with the customer, so these face-to-face meetings, or video conferences, or telephone calls, must be made with a purpose of getting somewhere. That is the goal, so prepare this call, meeting, contact, in order to get from one step to another.

Let's use a real estate agent for this example, and how one might make pre-call plan for this type of sales.

So, you are the Realtor, and there is a couple that we've been working with. They have given you a pretty good indication of what they like, dislike, are trying to avoid and achieve in their new home that you are searching for. Regardless of market conditions, the customer has needs and wants, and you think you have identified and prioritized them accordingly. You have gone through a pretty good discovery period with them, and have narrowed it down to this one home in a specific neighborhood that you are confident they will be happy with.

All set right? You should just take them over to the house, let them fall in love with it and write the order. So, what are their objections going to be when you get there, are you going to wing it and say something like "don't worry; paint, wallpaper and carpet colors can be easily changed", or just make it up as you go because your broker has given you some training in handling objections, so you can get through this. You are just so sure that they are going to be happy about it, you want to run over there and close the deal …

Let's talk about slowing down a little and preparing for this showing. Start asking yourself questions, put yourself in their position, ultimately if this is the first day out with the customer you know that a potential objections could be; "well we really haven't seen anything else to compare it to" As a professional salesperson, you should know this is going to be an objections from a buyer. It is normal that they want to compare this choice that will be the single largest investment they ever make with another option or two.

How do you handle this objection? PREPARE

An option or type of 'preparation' could be to find similar homes that they 'may like', but are being shown for you to compare them to your primary option. Of course there are theories in real estate as to how many options you want to show (the more you show, the more they may think there are out there), which order do you show them?

Do you show them the Cadillac first and the Chevy last? Or the other way around? That is technique and tactics, not necessarily preparation. The key here is that you are most assuredly going to have objections to putting in an offer; you are not going to avoid them.

To meet an objection head on with options, or predetermined responses is "preparation." Having more than one home to show is a great way to overcome the comparison objection.

Preparation for an appointment like this could include a preview walk through by you. If you were showing this house, or selection of houses, on Wednesday, then spend time on Monday and Tuesday walking through these homes, driving thru the neighborhoods, and securing answers to whatever questions or concerns they may have like; "We will have to find a school for junior" or "I wonder where the closest grocery stores are" …

For business to business sales, your preparation for an appointment is as important as in real estate sales. Pre-call preparation could include a role playing or "walk through" with a colleague. Send the presentation you've prepared to another sales rep and ask them for their opinions. Put the proposal in front of your own purchasing agent at your company and ask him if it is interesting, and answers common objections. And of course, speak to your manager … he/she should have your back on these items, and is there to assist. If they are more administrative, or do not fit into a 'sales type' then find a mentor or coach somewhere. There has to be someone that you can lean on whose opinion you value.

Preparation, *"to make ready and offer a remedy"* … List your questions, know what their optional responses could be, and have your answers at the ready. Sound professional in your delivery of these, do not be hesitant and you will gain respect with your customers and prospects.

Preparation will also shorten the sales cycle, which puts us closer to our ultimate goal of realizing PROFITS.

How does preparation shorten the time from prospecting to ordering? If we can eliminate the time spent finding out answers by having most or all of these responses readied beforehand, you will remove a measurable amount of time off our sales cycle.

Preparation also includes knowing your buyer, understanding the decision making process, know who the key individuals are within your target, and ensure that they are getting the message you are conveying. During your initial meetings with your customer, during the discovery phase (I use that because it determines whether or not you want to work with this prospect), you need to dig the answers out and prepare your roadmap to the successful sales. There are excellent training sessions available in SPIN and Strategic Selling, which help qualify and quantify your prospects.

Preparing also means understanding your organizations limitations, capabilities, and capacities. How many times have you heard, or said, that "its easier to sell my prospect than it is to sell my company on the same ideas."

Before you begin sticking your neck out on commitments for your company, you need to have internal selling sessions with operations, engineering, marketing, sales support and administration.

Selling in today's economy and in the future is going to be more and more cross-functional, even in the simplest of industries. Your organizations are going to need to buy into your new business opportunities, and they are prioritizing where they invest time, energy, money and capital resources.

Think of this also, your competition is not necessarily the company down the street; it is your fellow sales reps that are fighting for the same resources. In the past, management was investing in "all new opportunities." As the investment pool dried up, decision making criteria are also changing. Good opportunities are rated, and only the best opportunities will be invested in because we are working with limited resources.

In summary, prepare, prepare, prepare.

- Understand internal and external objections,
- be prepared with logical and intelligent responses,
- and shorten your sales cycle so you can win more business in the shortest amounts of time.

I would love to be able to give you a list of the top 20 questions you should have ready, or the top 10 objections that you'll hear, but this is section is here to highlight the need for preparation.

Every industry has various steps of the sales process. Everyone calls it something else, but the core things happen in any sales process, (prospecting through closing) whether it is a 30-min pitch or a 2 year sales cycle, you will inevitably be in one of the main areas. It's up to your sales manager or your marketing team to help you prepare for the tactical Q&A needed, but you need to be aware that preparation throughout the entire process is of ultimate importance.

The longer the general cycle, the more time you have to prepare. This sounds contradictory to the shortening of the sales cycle statement that I made, but let me make this clear. The process time might always be 2-years, but we need to be doing as much with as many clients as possible during that 2-year period. If we are spending an hour with our client every week today because we aren't prepared, and could take 15-minutes or more out of that time allocation because we already have the answers, then do it – spend that time with another prospect, or prospecting.

Preparation will lead to higher productivity as a sales person, and productivity increases lead to higher PROFITS!

I liken the preparation process to a trial lawyer. A good trial lawyer has a legal pad full of questions, possible answers, IF-THEN statements that take him to the "ultimate Perry Mason moment", where the killer jumps out of his seat and says "how did you know it was me" … I am flattered by people that have told me I would have made a heck of a lawyer after I'm done negotiating with them. We, as professional sales people, need to be that prepared. And like a lawyer that knows the nuances of the law to win over a jury or manipulate a witness, we as professional sales people should be prepared in our own product, service, gizmo or gadget.

Get studying, prepare yourself properly, and you will avoid poor performance … leading you to increased **PROFITS** !

Planning

So, how does planning differ from preparation? Let's use a football analogy for this, there is preparation of a football team, and then there is a game plan. Preparation is getting ready for the tendencies of your opponent (know the upcoming objections), and then planning is the act of taking advantage of those tendency's.

Planning also is goal and objective setting, giving you enough time to get from one appointment to another, managing your to-do list, and all the other techniques necessary to be productive. Planning can be in the form of a Franklin Planner, ACT!, your own companies Enterprise Wide System, or a myriad of other methods.

What we need to do is be consistent in our planning, spend the appropriate time laying out what you're going to do. Planning can be thought of more as a 10,000 foot view of the 'sales process'. From allowing enough time to do cold calls on through the close.

My main recommendation is that you need to create a routine. For example, each morning I clear my overseas email from 5am to 7am for a few reasons.

- One, I want to get into my office and concentrate on the current time zones problems.
- Two, the customers or clients in Europe and Asia will receive my return mail in their morning or early evening and can still react if necessary.

I plan that time, I do the same thing at least 6 days per week so I have my day to do what I do .. I'm planning for this. I've also given guarantees that anyone who contacts me via phone or mail can be guaranteed a response within 24-hours.

With today's texting, tweeting, cell phones and emails, our customers are accustomed to getting immediate responses to their inquiries. I heard someone say that people are willing to wait for a response, in about the same amount of time it took them to get the question to you. In other words, immediately is what they want and need.

We have all these tools to make us more productive, but if you don't plan on how to use them to your advantage then you will have a problem in customer satisfaction. As professionals we need to keep that in mind. We need to know both how to plan, and what to plan for.

A Chinese Proverb that I like says;

"When planning for a year, plant corn, when planning for a decade plant trees" …

It is important (as the definition says) to know why you need to plan, prepare and all the while be a Peak Performer.

CHAPTER 2

A Sales Person

- *Understands and acknowledges their* ***RESPONSIBILITIES*** *to their organization and customers, can* ***RETAIN*** *their business, while maintaining* ***RESPECT*** *with their clients, companies, and most importantly themselves*

Responsibility

Those who are unwilling to invest in success haven't earned it … Author Unknown

Take responsibility for everything that happens within your assigned territory, be it good or bad. You need to be responsible for the retention, growth and acquisition of accounts. You should never point fingers or pawn a task off because you don't want to do it. You are responsible from cradle to grave of the account, region, product or service that you are representing.

Does your job description say what you are "not" responsible for? I doubt it, so in the case of a professional sales person, where you are the interface between your company and your client, both the voice of your manager and your buyer, you are responsible for it all! Wow, that's pretty heavy isn't it?

Think of this also … Your organization relies on your sales to fund … well everything. From R&D to that new operator needed to run that press they just installed. Oh, and as for that operator, he or she may have a spouse and 3 children at home that rely on you maintaining and growing your business.

Is it really up to the owner of the company or the board of management to increase business? No, it is you … simple as that. So, the next time you think about blowing off a Friday because you think you've been productive thus far, think of it this way. If every sales person did this – every Friday, eventually it will catch up to us. Either our pipeline will eventually be 20% smaller (1 day in 5), or we will be 20% less productive, or that operator with the wife and 3 kids might have to work 20% less, or we might have to lay-off 20% of all the operators … Yeah, It is up to you to keep the people employed, grow the business, and make sure you are not the excuse!

Another way to think of it, say as a commissioned sales person. Let's say that operator that we pay for decides that he has met or exceeded his quota through Thursday of every week and takes Friday off. Sooner or later your orders won't be getting produced and shipped out. That means YOUR commission checks will get smaller … Be responsible and acknowledge that nothing happens until someone sells something!

Again, pretty heavy stuff when you think about it, but nothing in this world happens until someone sells something. Be it an idea, a product, a project or whatever, things don’t get really rolling until the deal is closed. Someone may have designed the best mouse-trap in the world. However, until someone sells it to Sears or Wal-Mart, not one person will make a dime, no one will be employed, machines won’t be purchased to manufacture this mouse-trap until YOU DO YOUR JOB!

For you managers out there reading this, keep in mind that your team wants to be responsible and accountable for things. Don’t make them accountable for something that they can’t do anything about, or that they don’t have responsibility for.

I had a CEO once tell me that I was responsible for the profit in the region he had me managing. I said great, this is what I want to do ..

- Drive 3 seconds out of the cycle time with this process
- Remove this scrap material and use if for regrind
- Reduce the packaging materials on this product

My plan showed a theoretical increase of profits of 15% if operations would implement these ideas. Of course the CEO told me to stay out of the operation, that wasn’t my responsibility, and the Operations Manager had his own targets.

I didn’t let it die. *“If the operations manager doesn’t have the same priorities that I have, and my projects costs keep increasing, how can I be responsible for the profit? “*

He immediately responds with … *“raise the prices to* *increase profit"* he replied and then added his infamous *"show me the money"* quote to sell more "value" to our customers. That story is a book by itself, one that had the greatest influence of taking a company's account list and just tossing it away.

The lesson here is; give your sales people the responsibilities and hold them accountable for *what they can actually drive and influence*. It is like giving a speeding ticket to a passenger, if you hold them accountable for something they can do nothing about.

As for your sales people saying *"yeah, don't hold me accountable"* … Hold your horses. You need to take an internal leadership role here and in some cases, you aren't going to win the arguments with thick-headed CEO's that talk in sound bites. Take ownership and initiative (later chapters), and hold yourself accountable. Make a difference, lobby that operations manager to help you drive the costs down, or discuss with marketing a way to increase your retention rates, all holding profits steady and increasing.

Don't use this as an excuse. Remember, leadership is not a position; it can come from any part of the organization, and can happen at any time. It can also change regularly depending on what is going on at the company, in the market, with the customers.

You may be a leader on Monday and a team member on Tuesday. It doesn't change the facts that we are all driving for the same goal; which is to increase our business and increase the PROFITS!

Retention

Without going through your account list right now, can you tell me how many repeating and/or returning customers you have every year?

Are you monitoring this as a key metric?

What is your retention goal year over year?

If you aren't, or don't know how, the math is pretty simple. With your account list from last year, that represents 100% of all of your customers that actually spent money, ordered, had some of activity with your organization that you get paid for. At the end of the next year, how many of them returned and did business? Divide the Previous Year Account Base by The Current Year account base, and this gives you a retention percentage.

In a <u>business to business</u> atmosphere, the target retention rate should be greater than 97%. With year over year sales growth on same account sales going up at a minimum of the cost of living (inflation of lets' say 3%), meeting this target maintains your sales level from the previous year. Anything less forces you to spend time replacing accounts even before you grow.

This is a simple theory, but very often overlooked in B to B sales. Now, in my example here, I say that your customer base is only going to grow at "your cost of living increases" or small price increases that you may or may not be implementing. In reality, your customers have sales goals themselves, and if they are selling more, they should be buying more of your product or service. The more that your base is solidified, the higher their individual sales goals, the more you grow without the pressures of re-building your territory.

There are a few industries where the returning customer doesn't really exist, but a vast majority of your long-term business growth is going to come because you have paid attention to what you have.

How we keep in contact with these contacts is the difficulty in developing a retention strategy. I have read theories where 12-14 'touches' per year for a business to business customer is needed in order to maintain and grow that account. Those touches can be in the forms of brochures, email blasts, catalogs, postcards, or God forbid a phone call from a real human being. This being a book about *salesmanship,* my advice is to try and develop a contact plan that has human interaction with your customers. Be it a simple phone call every quarter to review last orders, develop a short term forecast, ask direct questions about their impressions of your service and quality … if you contact them, it has to be for a reason. You have to manufacture those reasons to fit your product or service.

In order to develop a contact plan, you have to find the most effective forms of communication in your business. For this exercise, let's use the following as your 'available touches' throughout a year;

- Personal visiting
- Phone call

- Postcards
- Catalogs

The next thing you, your sales manager, and/or your marketing department need to do is try to classify your customers. This is a task in and among itself, and can be done by type of customer, sales level, profitability, or a myriad of other ways. For this exercise, we are just going to say Class A, B, C and D (class "A" being a higher impact account than "B", and so on) …

Now, refer to the chart below for an example of a retention plan.

Class	Accounts	Visit	Call	Card	Catalog	Total
A	**25**	4	4	6	1	15
B	**30**	2	4	6	1	13
C	**45**	1	4	6	?	11
D	**20**	0	2	6	?	8

With a plan like this, you can "PLAN" and "PREPARE" for your territory on a regular basis. Your manager or marketing department can also determine the cost of maintaining a customer with plans like these. This might be a too simple, but the thought of retention and what is needed by you and your supporting organization needs to be done.

Classifying customers is similar to the way Jack Welch, former CEO of GE, classified employees. There are a lot of questions that need to be asked such as;

- *Does a Class C account have the potential to move up?*
- *Is the cost of a personal visit worthy of a Class D account?*
- *Is the cost of retaining this account justified based on their sales turnover, profits, margins and other quantifiable metrics.*

Not enough time is spent in the sales profession on retention strategies. We continue to push our organizations into developing new customers, new applications, and new channels. A lot of the time is spent & invested simply replacing lost customers. We need to be concentrating on retaining that customer base, so the new customers that we do attract are adding to the pile, not just replacing lost business.

We've all heard that it costs more to acquire a new customer than it does to retain an old one. We also have heard that 10 atta-boys are killed by one "awe-shucks." Your success in building a business for yourself is in retaining customers. We will also be discussing this area under the "Integrity" Section (Chapter 5). But It is key to think and "plan" on maintaining your customers for a lot of positive reasons.

I blogged about responsibility, and empowerment a while ago, and that is appropriate here …

You've been on-hold or went through your maze of *menu options to FINALLY get in touch with a real person that can help you with your account. This could be your cable company, or the supply house that sells you your light bulbs. You're calling because you have an issue, good or bad, it's an issue and you want an answer. A nice voice comes on the line, listens to your problem and tells you to hold again so you can be transferred to someone who can help.*

Okay, I'll accept this transfer, and the 3 or 4 minutes of additional holding, going through the entire story again but this is where it stops - THAT person needs to answer your issue. Whether it is a positive or negative response to your question is not the problem. It seems 9 out of 10 times, that person listens only to say they need to speak to another supervisor.

Empower the people that either own the relationship with your customer, or provide the decision making training and grant the authority to these people. In a previous life, I ran a customer service department that took over 700 calls a day. These calls were orders, packaging issues, quote requests, or miscellaneous technical questions. The team I had working for me was well trained in all of these aspects, but when I first came on board, they had been told to pass on any phone call that forced them to deviate from a 'script' or set "if-then" statements that had been enforced on them. I would end up getting those calls and make the decisions for them. But I got the answers from them, asking them "what would you do?" ... and most often they had the answers that I wanted to give.

Over a short period of time, we let them have more leeway in these decisions, going "off-book." We had numerous coaching opportunities throughout the day and week to re-align our thinking, and to see if there were any trends. But the underlying rule was, ***if the customer has called in they won't ever have to speak to more than 2 people to get an answer****, plain and simple. We also underscored the training by eliminating any threats of repercussions for making a bad decision. Just do not cause any more customer aggravation.*

This issue came to life over the weekend with me, when I ran into a customer service "robot" who was going thru the motions. I won't get into the details, but it was a simple $5.00 service charge that I was debating and the robot not only stated she wouldn't do anything about it, but that if I wanted anything done I would have to call back and talk to the supervisor after her lunch break ... So, you can probably figure out how I responded, but what came to mind was an old saying:

10 "atta-boys" are over ruled by 1 "awe shucks" And, one customer can affect 10 by word of mouth ...

But in reality, one person can affect thousands with a simple status update on Facebook, LinkedIn, or a Tweet.

I've coined this phrase: *"Satisfaction isn't always guaranteed, but frustration can almost always be avoided"*

So, sales people and managers remember this when you are setting your goals, and determining what to do. You have to have responsibilities in order to affect change.

And for you managers, its' okay to empower your team, especially if they err on the side of caution.

During the Katrina Hurricane relief effort, Admiral Thad Allen of the US Coast Guard had an all hands meeting. In the meeting, his main point to get to his team was;

"*During this relief effort, treat these people that are in distress like you would your own family*" he said this because one of two things will happen;

1. *You will show them the support that they need so desperately*
2. *If you make a mistake you are going to err in their favor, and that isn't wrong*

This is paraphrased, and can be heard in an interview with Harvard Business Review, Ideacast, dated 14-October-2010, titled "Leading through a Major Crisis."

The key here was to err on the side of customer satisfaction. The citizens of the Gulf were going through a horrific experience. The Admiral wanted his team to know that there was empathy for them, and that his team was truly there to help. Avoid frustrating your customers, and the best way to do this is to empower the people on your team to quickly answer questions, and have empathy for the situation.

It does not mean that the customer is always right. It just means that you do not stress to a customer that they are wrong.

Respect

Self-respect cannot be hunted. It cannot be purchased. It is never for sale. It cannot be fabricated out of public relations.

It comes to us when we are alone, in quiet moments, in quiet places, when we suddenly realize that, knowing the good, we have done it; knowing the beautiful, we have served it; knowing the truth we have spoken it.

~ Whitney Griswold

Do you respect yourself?

Do you respect your position?

Do you respect your company and your clients?

When someone asks you what you do for a living, are you proud to say "I am a Sales Person for …"?

I was taught this early on in my career.

Here I am, a really green sales guy with his samples in his case, freshly printed business cards, knocking on doors, making cold calls. I turn up at a foam fabricator in Grand Rapids, Michigan because I heard that they use a lot of the product I am representing at the time. I've successfully talked my way through the receptionist *(yes, they had those back then),* and out comes a guy in blue jeans, a flannel shirt, and has his long hair tied up in a ponytail to meet me.

I say to this guy *"I'm confused, because the receptionist said that the Vice President of Sales would come out to meet me"* and I'm thinking, here comes this hippy!

He hands me his card and on it is the company name, his name and his title: "Peddler" … I snicker, and give him my card, which has my company's name, address and my title; "Application Consultant", and he snickers and says; *"oh, I thought I was meeting a salesman"* and he starts to walk away! He stopped, stuck out his hand and introduced himself to me … I didn't sell him anything that day, but it was a very positive meeting and relationship in the long-run.

We went on to start talking, and he became kind of an informal mentor to me over my first few years on the road. The core of what he taught me is; self respect, know who you are, and be the best you can be without relying on others.

I don't know where I heard this before, but don't try to be a wolf in a sheep's clothing, **let the world know you are a wolf!**

Making up fancy titles may temporarily create an illusion for your clients, and their positive perception might increase a bit, but when they realize you are "just another sales guy" they will now throw a barrier of mistrust on this relationship.

Open up with them right away, *"I am a sales person for … XYZ Company"* … set the tone of this meeting that you not only respect yourself, but your position. You build your relationship on trust, and it begins with this first impression, so why build it on a lie?

It doesn't stop at self-respect, but you need to be proud of the fact that your company has entrusted you to be their messenger! Thinking of it in military terms, you are the forward scout for your operations group, and the chief negotiator that will sign the treaty with the enemy (customer).

During my time at the hook and loop (Velcro) company, I had won the Sales Person of the Year Award a couple of times. One of these awards was an all-expense paid trip to Jamaica for two, at a very nice resort for an entire week. I couldn't wait for the 7-days of lying in the sun, drinking umbrella drinks by the pool, and just relaxing.

On the trip, my wife and I met up with a couple that we hung around with. They were only there for a 3-night stay, and during one of our long drink influenced conversations, he became really confused *(not sure if it was real confusion, or 'infusion' of the amount of alcohol)*.

"What is it you do for a living?" he asks, mumbling through his rum and coke

I proudly respond .. *"I am a salesman for a hook and loop manufacturer"*

"Wait a second, do you mean you sell Velcro for a living, and you're here for a whole week?" he comments, *"and here I am a business owner bustin' my butt 7-days a week,*

and all I can afford is a 3-night package" he's frustrated as he exhales *"something is wrong with that picture."*

Being the proud sales person, and one that sticks up for his profession I don't let it sit just yet and I say, *"You know Fred, if it wasn't for us sales guys, you couldn't even afford this 3-night package"* and for the kicker, I add "*By the way, where did you send your top sales guy for the year?*"

Be proud, stand up for your profession, if it wasn't for us the world as we know it would not function. Commerce would not take place, and demand not created. It cannot be said enough that 'nothing happens until someone sells something'. If you don't respect your profession you cannot demand or command respect from it.

There is a reason that sales people usually top the charts of highest paid professions, it's because we create wealth. Yes, we not only make the world turn, but wealth is created at companies, owners, shareholders and stake holders. We "enhance" the company's financial status by winning business, retaining customers, influencing our marketing and operation departments, and being professional.

Respecting yourself and your profession is one part of a successful sales person, and that is the easy part.

Here comes the hard part, respect your client! You may learn that you can't respect the individual person in the decision making role, but you have to respect their position, the company, their needs and wants. You have to "seek first to understand" as Steven Covey would tell you. Take that deeper though, and learn to respect why you have been called to this meeting in the first place.

As we deal with our customers we must realize that they are in the business of making something too, and selling something to someone else. Without respect for that product or service of our customer, we begin to operate and develop this relationship in arrogance. If you can't respect someone's position, company, product or whatever it is, you are essentially disrespecting them.

Remember, your client has a job to do, just like you also. You may not end up friends, but you should not end up enemies. Earlier I stated that satisfaction may not be guaranteed, but frustration can be avoided. That is up to you in this end of the relationship building. You need to earn respect, but automatically "give" respect to your counterpart without having them earn it.

When meeting a new CEO at one of my principals, he informed me bluntly that I had to "earn" his respect in this new relationship. I had already represented the company for over 7-years, and was their top producing region year over year during this time. He steps into the position, and tells me that everyone starts at the bottom with him, and what you had done in the past means nothing.

It is always nice to know where you stand with someone, so of course I accept this as his opinion, *(only because I have to)*. Of course I will not let the conversation end, or give him that as 'the' last word.

I inform him that my theory on management and team building is to work in the opposite way. When I first meet someone, I give 100% respect for someone immediately. During the ensuing relationship they either maintain it, or lose it piece by piece.

What I didn't say out loud, was that he had just lost a BIG CHUNK because of his arrogance. His position as CEO does not elevate the respect we award, nor should it deflate the respect we are owed. Remember, we all put our pants on the same way in the morning, position does not mean leadership.

I go into every relationship the same way though. I give the maximum amount of respect. Give the person the; benefit of the doubt, don't judge a book by its cover, don't be prejudiced, or biased … all those things that we were taught in kindergarten.

However, I do assume that I am starting from zero, and have to earn the oppositions respect. It is not our contacts fault that he is new. So what this is a new buyer, or engineer, you still have to prove yourself to that person and gain "their" respect as a supplier / vendor / sales person.

This doesn't mean kissing someone's rear end. It means that you need to build your case, present your benefits as a supplier, inform him of things that were successful between your companies, and promise that we will do everything to continue the same track record. It is unfair of us to assume that we already have this new contacts respect. He could be open minded like us, or close minded like that CEO I mentioned earlier. Let's assume the worst and hope for the best in new people when it comes to granting and earning respect.

Think about it though, what can it hurt? If you have to re-build your foundation once in a while, you have a great opportunity to highlight all the good things that have happened. When you lay out your case fact by fact, of course highlighting positives and shadowing the negatives, you have a chance to actually improve the overall perception of your customer.

Also remember that as you are making this case with a 'new' contact, so is your competition. You need to maybe restate the obvious, but it is necessary. Not because it is tactically necessary, but holistically you need to remember that Respect is key in relationship building.

Lastly, it is extremely important for you to respect the company that you are working for. You are "representing them", you are the voice of your company to the client, and their face. You can't respect yourself, if you are representing a company that you don't respect. If so, you are going against my last principle for a professional, sincerity.

Understand your company's processes, problems, and potentials. Have empathy for their pursuits, and respect their mission statement. Whether you are a direct employee or a representative, you will be the most successful working and representing those companies where you share common values and principles.

Respect also is something that you need to both give and earn with your peers. Whether you need to work with fellow sales people or not, it is important to give them the respect that "you" want from them.

You can give respect to your company in lots of ways. Even while criticizing them, if you want them truly to be better. Sometimes as a sales person, we get too close to our customers problems or concerns, and push our companies unreasonably. It is okay to lobby internally for your customers, but we have to respect the people that are actually going to do what we need done internally.

Respect that they are the experts in building this product, or developing this software. They need to feel that you are on their side, and that is the respect that they are looking for.

During this latest re-organization of our global economy, a lot of things happened. In one of my principals, they reduced their work force by over 50%, which leaves them just enough people to run the factories. They closed locations that were in some opinions, bad business decisions, but good political decisions. Our customers were very upset, as well as the sales staff. We tried to fight and fight, but in the end we have to respect the decisions that were made, and make the best of the situation.

A good way to show respect within your company, is to support whole-heartedly their policies after they are implemented. There is nothing wrong with a solid debate, but there is something wrong with a sore loser. Don't be that guy, once the battle is over, make sure you are there to help wherever necessary. You earn points that way.

It is like one of the greatest traditions in all of sports, which is at the end of the Stanley Cup Finals, the two teams line up and shake each other's hands. It could have been a 7-game hard-hitting, brutal series, but sportsmanship at the end shows the respect that each team has for the other.

So, respect yourself, the clients, your company, and the internal people equally. No one is more important than any other, and It is okay for them all to know that too …

Bonus R … Reaction vs. Response!

There are other "R"'s to think about, and although they don't fit into the definition. As a professional "person" of any discipline you need to be aware of "A Reaction" versus "A Response."

How people treat you is their karma; how you react is yours. ~ Wayne Dyer

Steven Covey used the common principle of "any action creates a reaction" to define this best. He is pretty specific in his training and states that 10% of what happens we can't do anything about, but 90% we can, and that his how we respond to an action or input.

The time lapse between any action and input is the difference between an irrational reaction to a measured response. I've added the words irrational and measured to his definition, because there are several degrees of each of these.

Each instance will be met with the proper amount of time. Sometimes a 'measured' response might provide the perception that your answers are either unprofessional or you are just going through the motions and there is no belief.

A good way to describe the measured response that took too long … was during the 2010 BP Oil Spill in the Gulf of Mexico. The issue was critical, it was becoming a national disaster, and day after day went by before we had any response from the White House, and when it did come out, it seemed very insincere, too political, no passion, and just not harsh enough.

The country, and most specifically the Gulf residents, wanted to know what the government was going to do in this crisis. They needed someone to take charge and accept the challenge. This criticism came from both sides of the isle, so it wasn't just the Right bashing the Left. There seemed to be a leadership void, and it was very noticeable.

It was very clear after the polls came out, that this response or lack thereof was really not accepted by the public. As this issue dragged on, our President took more questions and interviews on the situation. During one interview with NBC he stated that he wasn't interviewing people in the Gulf region as an academic exercise, he wanted to know *"whose ass to kick"* and stated this very clearly on TV … trying to show passion. However, what he ended up looking like was a very uncomfortable person swearing on television.

Obviously, he needed to do something, and he needed it to fit into his personality. Trying to be a tough guy is not what this President was, he is more academic. But, the lack of any response was not acceptable either. Both ends of the spectrum, and I'm not trying to be political, just trying to show the dichotomy that we need to be aware of.

Here's another way to look at this, taking politics out of it. Let's look at a possible chain of events …

Your customer calls you and informs you that *"your product on line 1 is being replaced by a competitive product."* Before he can continue, you interrupt …

"What?" you scream! *"you can't do that!* and for good measure you say *"if you do that, go ahead and replace all my products with the competition*"

The customer then puts the wheels in motion. He not only takes that one product out of your sales, but over the next few months he replaces all of your products. You move from Salesperson of the Year to next in line to get laid off, unless you get your stuff together. You have lost business and possibly your job.

Now, allowing sometime between the input and the response, this is what could have happened,

"Your product on line 1 is being replaced by a competitive product." Your customer informs you. This time you don't interrupt. *"we felt that since Line 1 is moving from full production to service parts, we were going to use some of*

the old excess inventory that you had offered us to finish up production. You said that the product was competitively priced with this and we thought that we would do you a favor."

That chain of events looks better, and now you are a hero for getting rid of that old stock. Then you find out that the new product line for your customer that will replace that Line 1 product uses your newest technology – cha-ching! Here you are now, Sales Person of the Year and Decade … simply allowing time to occur, and a measured response to come out. A gross exaggeration – absolutely, but there is always a chain of events. Each chain is influenced by an action and reaction. Make sure you think about what happens AFTER you respond. What if … is a big question that is often not asked.

You are now smiling and thinking, *"yeah but I never react in the manner that would lose business."* This is an obvious story, with obvious answers. We have been taught as professional sales people that there are open-ended questions, and answers to every objection. But you have to agree, there are times that you have over-reacted, or not reacted appropriately. What happens afterwards is sometimes not correctable. How many times have you looked back at a situation and said, *"I could've or should have done or said this."*

You need to understand, that time lapse is important. This is the time that you either regain or lose control of a certain situation. You need to respond intelligently, or in the 2nd part of this example, with silence so the customer can finish his story. We need to be intuitive with these situations, and over time it becomes second nature for a professional.

Giving us a few moments to gather any additional data is what we need to effectively handle these situations. Once we have these additional "inputs" we can come up with a measured response.

Keep in mind we do need to respond to inputs of any kind. And I use the word respond very deliberately, reaction if often disguised as passionate, but most often immediate reactions are ill-advised and very often off the mark. Don't make any decisions when you are angry, or promises when you are happy. Stay rational, and try to keep your emotions in check.

As any news is given to you, the professional, you need to try and be objective and somewhat detached. This way you can analyze the inputs and respond accordingly.

Getting a huge contract from a customer that you were actually desperate for, doesn't warrant you jumping up and down in front of them and giving them high 5's. It may actually make them think that they left money on the table, or that you were too desperate for this deal. Remember, they are professional also, and we need to keep that in mind – RESPECT- was just discussed, so this is key to maintain this at all times, good or bad. Be a good winner and loser.

Combining the respect and your response for a moment, remember that your customer is doing their job.

You need to assume that they are acting in the best interest for their customer. Remember also, if you win or lose with integrity, it will help you later on with this customer / prospect.

CHAPTER 3

Ownership and is Organized

A Sales Professional

- *Takes* ***OWNERSHIP*** *and is* ***ORGANIZED***

Ownership is similar to responsibility, but ...

"Responsibility is an expectation, ownership is an attitude." – Mike Kole

I looked through Wikipedia and Wictionary for a good definition of ownership, but can't really find one. All I see is the legal description of 'owning' assets, personal property, that type of stuff. This 'ownership' I am talking about is the attitude you have when you are in a situation.

Act like you are the owner in every situation of being a sales rep. "Own" the relationship with the Client, "Own" the project that you are working one, "Own" the cost and quality of the product, and act like every decision effects your PROFITS!

Start with owner of the customer relationship. That doesn't give you the right to hoard information, you need to be the "internal voice of the customer" when you are within your organization. Remember, that as a sales rep, you are looking for a win-win between your company and your customers. I'm using the word YOUR … to emphasize the ownership.

If you understand your client's needs, and empathize with these, you will better represent them to your organization. That doesn't mean give your products away for low costs, but it does force you to push your organization for the best possible alternative for your client.

In your role as "owner of the company" you represent, you must take all of the responsibility items into your consideration when you are acting as the advocate in front of the customer. Yes, your customer really wants that Cadillac option for the Chevy price. But that is also why your company offers the Buick, so you can get something in the middle.

Empathy vs. Sympathy is key in acting as an owner. You need to realize that your customers want to buy your parts as cheaply as possible, and are trying to create a profitable relationship for their company. If they aren't acting with your interests in mind (which some buyers actually don't), then you need to be aware of what their interests are, what is driving their decisions? Remember also, that this ownership turns into the Voice of the Customer, so you not only have to understand all these issues, but be able to relay them to your internal customers.

If you are marketing an IT System that improves productivity by X%, that might be great for the company buying it, but the person actually making the decision may have additional motivations. Lead time could be critical in his bonus structure, or long-term payment plans with low interest expenses could be driving him. Know your customer, own that relationship, empathize with him/ them so

I worked for a Managing Director of a company for a while that I respected very much. He described ownership of a situation by using observation of certain events as his judge. During certain times, good or bad, and there is a group of people in a meeting sitting round that ceremonial big oval table, you can observe who the real owners are. They are often not the people that have caused the problem, or the ones tasked to fix the issue, It is the people around that table that command "table presence."

Inherently, you know what I'm talking about. That presence is obvious. When any other person in the group is addressing a portion of the issue, they do their best to scan the room to get everyone involved, but invariably they make eye contact with one person for an inordinate amount of time. That person is the one that has that table presence and rightfully or not, owns that problem.

Here is the challenge as a sales professional, you WANT that to be you. You need that to be you in those crisis and closing meetings. That eye contact from a decision maker MUST meet yours, and when it does you have earned it.

At that moment in time, you have become the de-facto leader of this issue, and it is now your problem to coordinate. I didn't say solve on purpose, others much smarter than any of us simple sales guys will usually fix these situations, but the customer looks to YOU.

It is like Jack Nicholson in *"A Few Good Men"* as he sits on the stand and Tom Cruise is questioning him *"you want me on that wall, you need me on that wall"* he states. Well, if you are a true sales person, you want to be on that wall too. We need you on that wall and take ownership of a situation.

Organization

What do I need to say about this other than be organized?

There is no magic pill you can take, no software that you will find, or planners that you will carry that will do it for you. It is up to YOU, to be organized, think about organization, and act in the way that will keep you organized.

Organized does not necessarily mean every piece of paperwork has to be filed, and your desk has to be perfectly clean. It means you know where things are, you know where to find these things, and you aren't just kidding yourself.

Yes, It is nice to have a clean desk and everything in its place. But we also know that happens one or two times a year. The rest of the time, we are in the middle of things that take precedent over being neat.

Again, neat doesn't equal organized either … Your system needs to be consistent. I use a Franklin Planner for my day-to-day notes and indexing. I have been using it for over 15 years, and more or less have run the same system since. I have modified it to take advantage of technology, and I've found that if I've written something down AND typed it out, I retain a lot more of the information. So, I do that, at the end of every day I re-type my illegible notes and electronically file them.

When I want to reference these notes in the future, I usually go to my planner and review, but in those notes I also name the file I saved it under and directory (folder) so I can easily pull up the electronic copy also.

You are thinking to yourself – this guy is anal! No one has that much time on their hands to do this. You know where I got the idea? I got it from the medical profession.

They are in with patients and take cryptic notes in the files. At the end of a certain period, they dictate everything to a Dictaphone, and those are later typed up by a medical transcriptionist.

Why should you be less attentive to your customers than a doctor is to his patients? We all know that doctors don't do it for customer service; they do it so they can be better doctors.

As a professional sales person, you are doing it for both reasons. You need these notes to prepare for your next meetings with your customers. Remember the first Chapter of this book is about preparing and pre-call preparation! If you are better organized, you will be able to recall more in the future, and better prepare for the next level of appointments.

What would you think if your Doctor came in while you are in for a follow up and asked you what the last appointment was about?

You are the expert in the customer-vendor relationship. You are the one who keeps and coordinates the information. Many of our profession are called account managers, and this is an instance where it makes sense. You need to manage all the information, whether it is last year's demand numbers, or future engineering projects, or a list of all the logistics and quality issues that you need to take care of. You are the expert and OWNER (there I go again) of this information.

So, when I talk about organization, It is the ability and speed for you to find information that is key. You never know when a note you took in a meeting would be key information.

I remember a class in college that I took, where I go 99 out of 100 questions right on an exam. I had studied for the test like I had never before, and I knew all the information.

When I got the test back to find I got one wrong, I was obsessed to find out what it was that I missed. I looked at the question, and wasn't sure when I had ever even learned the information. I couldn't find it anywhere in my notes.

I must have missed it in a lecture, I thought to myself.

I talked to a few others in the class and they couldn't help me. I finally made an appointment with the Professor.

He was straight forward with his answer; he said it was in the reading material on page 116. I took my book out, and looked at it and still couldn't find the answer. I was stumped as I looked at him hopelessly … He takes my book, flips it around, and points to the footnotes on the bottom of the page … "here is the reference, I had told you in the review that the answer was referenced on page 116" … At that point, I realized that taking notes and looking at the whole picture were going to be necessary for me to get 100%. Good note taking will pay off in the future!

Not only do we need to keep copious notes, but we also can't disregard any bits of data that might later be information. It would be great to have 100% recall, but we aren't all gifted like that. We need to create a system that captures the information. We need to continuously review this info to see if any of the dots connect, or if it tells more of a story than we were originally thinking.

How do you become organized? It is not something you can just 'start' and snap your fingers. You need to determine your work flow, "your process" and how it coincides with your companies sales process.

When do you need to recall information? Is it just for the next meeting? Or are you required to write call reports and activity reports on every meeting?

Do you need to file a monthly or quarterly report, or produce a market study with this information?

I recommend starting with activity based notes, and filing the information under a category that makes sense. It might be a product line that you are selling, or it could be all the information by the customer. It is up to you, but your system should match your actions. If you have to change your system or the process that you are comfortable in, then I can assure you that it will not work in the long run. You need the new system to fit within your comfort zone.

Remember this, as a professional salesperson; you are the feet on the street. You're out there to gather information and send it back to corporate in a way that makes sense. Today this one piece of info may not make any sense at all, but in 2-weeks when you hear a related fact, or something happens again and again, you need to recall this information and put two and two together.

You are doing marketing research with every activity. Sometimes the research turns up nothing, other times it turns up Gold. You need to be able to point to the gold mine when you do realize you have it. That's what being organized is all about, when you have that aha moment later on, you will recognized the benefit.

I have had quite of few of those aha moments in my past. One of these moments was when I heard a number at a sales meeting. That number was 83 Million, which I wrote down. Alongside that, I put the notes "pressure sensitive to high density polyethylene." I did not know what that meant, yet nor was I going to find out for quite some time.

At a trade show a few weeks or months later, I was standing in my booth when this character comes up and asks a bunch of questions about cutting pieces, and pressure sensitive materials. He goes on to say that he was going to need millions of these pieces, up to 83 million in fact!

I hurriedly opened my planner (that was my only filing system back then, before the laptop) and paged through the notes that I had made from the sales meeting. I asked the prospect if there was any chance he was going to be sticking this too High Density Polyethylene and he was shocked! How did I know, what have I heard … well, a few years later, this ended up being my single largest account because I could put two and two together. I became a market expert with this guy immediately, and we have worked together on and off for over 20 years since on various projects. He keeps his ears to the ground as well as I do and once in a while we put our two and two together.

Keep organized, and know where to look for your information. Keep a simple filing or note taking system, and make it work within your process. It will help you in the long run!

CHAPTER **4**

FOCUS

A Sales Professional

- *Maintains a* **FOCUS** *on their duties and goals*

"Life is short, It is God's way of encouraging a bit of **focus."** *~Robert Brault*

Focus … The ultimate in any profession. From focusing on the task at hand, to the global viewpoint and annual goal setting, you need to be able to concentrate on the right things during the right times.

Focus, described in optics is… *"a point toward which light rays are made to converge"*, is a point we need to think of. When all interests are satisfied; customers, companies and your pocketbook, that is where all the points converge and it is the ultimate in success. It is our job as sales people, our mission, to make these points converge over and over again.

What is your personal mission statement?

Does it include your company's goals? Do you mention your customers?

Are you working within it? Or are you re-writing it on a regular basis?

Ask yourself this question throughout the day,

Is what you are doing right now part of your plan? If not, you aren't focused, and therefore unproductive. You are failing yourself as a professional by not supporting your own plan and focusing on the things that YOU thought were so important that you put them in your mission statement?

Think of another way to look at it. You're out prospecting a major customer that you want to bring home to the company. You believe it fits right in their wheelhouse. They have been making these types of products and making money on them for years, and now you've done it. You've found the Holy Grail, and you bring the project to your CEO.

"Oh, we didn't tell you? We don't want to make those anymore, but thanks for the opportunity"

How would you feel if you've wasted your time, energy, and your contacts time to bring this home only to find out nobody wants it? If you company changed their focus and mission statement without informing anyone it doesn't do them any good. Why would it be different for you?

Well, if you're not focused, you're doing the same thing to yourself. Why are you re-inventing yourself this time? Are you bored? Or is it just not working?

To begin your focus, you should have a mission statement that supports your company's goals and objectives.

This mission statement needs to be thought of as long-term, but re-evaluated annually to ensure that there is still cohesion with your companies.

The mission statement should have your own goals and objectives within it. Clear and concise statements that aren't easily interpreted with every situation. KISS method here works the best; keep it simple stupid!

I, a consummate professional sales person, will spend my time in the following areas;

- Continuous improvement as a sales professional
- Improving the relationship with my customers and gather a better understanding of their business
- Earning more business in XYZ segment, to support a 10% growth target
- Maintaining business with current customers to retain a minimum of 97.5% of my active customers
- Provide support within my organization as needed
- And so on …

Write it down, look at it daily if you have to, but focus on something and make it your ambition. Remember, It is our jobs to make sure that these points of light all converge … that's how we'll define success.

Here is a very quick story about being focused and sharing your vision;

Two men were struggling to get a large crate through the door. They struggled and struggled, but the crate would not budge.

Finally, one man said to the other, "We will never get this crate in"

Replied his partner, "I thought we were trying to get it out."

Not only write your goals and missions down, but don't be afraid to share these visions with your colleagues, supervisors, and management. First of all, you need to be aligned. If you are focused, acting like a professional, and aligned with the organizations goals, you will get support when needed.

Also, if you are off-book, and not working within your own stated goals, what does it hurt to have your colleagues remind you? Remember, the whole thing is about being focused, and more productive.

This recently happened to me. I tentatively accepted a short term assignment with a potential new client. It would have required a three day visit to their factories in Europe, and it was difficult to put this into our schedules. When we finally figured out the best timing, I did my best to inform some of my other principals that I was going to be out of touch for a couple of days. We went on to briefly discuss what I was going to do, and one of my current clients pointed something out to me;

"Mike, your mission statement says that you are concentrating only in the industrial and automotive manufacturing sectors. This company you are visiting has nothing to do with that, why are you going?" he quickly added, *"not that I am telling you how to operate, just wondering what the tie in to your other marketing effort is"*

Wow … a very fair question and excellent observation… so I started asking the 'who-what-where-why' questions … why was I going? What was I going to accomplish other than making a quick buck? Did any of this have cohesion to what I was doing? Did it fit in my mission statement, my short-term or long-term goals?

I cancelled the meeting. It wasn't fair to "ME" or my short or long-term business to accept this assignment. I did miss out on a trip to Europe, but that was the only short-term loss (as well as the miles I wasn't going to add to my account).

Also, don't be afraid to share this vision / focus with your customers. They need to be aware of the things you are concentrating on so they can understand where they can expect support. Regardless of what you are selling, services, products, engineering solutions, or whatever, you don't want your company or your customers to think you are wasting your time on them.

You also will pre-warn your customers that you won't or can't work on certain things because it is outside of your scope. If you receive a request for information, that doesn't fall into yours or your company's plans, explain it to the customer immediately. If needed find them someone that can help them. It's better to lose an order you don't want to fulfill this way, and you'll gain much needed credibility.

We all do favors for our customers. It is expected in the whole relationship building scheme. What we need to understand and they also, is that at some point a favor becomes a burden and there is no value in it.

Remember also, that we are all stretched to our ends because companies are cutting back more and more, and people are doing more with less. We need to stay focused on the tasks at hand, or we will easily drown in our own workload.

Bonus F – Facilitator

Think of yourself as a facilitator. You bring buyers (customers) and sellers (your factories / service providers) together. You match the customer's needs with the company's capabilities. You set up meetings so each company's engineers can work the technical issues out, or that the customers marketing department can gauge a reaction (response) to your proposals.

You facilitate, *you make things easier for others*. It doesn't matter how hard your job is hard, you need the entire buying and selling process to be painless for your internal and external customers.

Here's another way to think about it. When we enjoy something, like a good dinner, or a nice city, an excellent golf course, we 'choose' to do it again. This is your opportunity to make things easy and enjoyable for your internal and external customers, so they 'choose' to do it again.

In one of my sales experiences, I helped initiate a new design for my end user customer. This new design was a win-win for them, they reduced labor, cost of assembly, number of parts and the overall cost of doing business went down. Not only that, they increased performance and improved quality of the part.

At the same time, the manufacturer that I was representing found that the parts they were now manufacturing were better designed for his facility and moved through the overall process flawlessly. The selling price of the assembly was good enough to keep the customer happy, and extremely profitable to manufacture on the principals end.

Within a year or so of introduction of these products, the end-user customer began begging to convert old parts to this new style, and the plant manager of my principal was asking the same.

The process was enjoyable, it was a LOT of hard work bringing these two skeptical parties together to agree on the general principles, but in the end it was a bunch of win-wins. My sales team helped facilitate the overall happiness of both internal and external customers. Let others enjoy the fruits of your labor. It is what makes us the facilitators that we are.

CHAPTER 5

Initiative

A Sales Professional

- Has a character built on **INTEGRITY** and they have personal **INITIATIVE**

"A poor sales man goes to bed wondering what he's going to do in the morning. A good sales man wonders how he will get it all done." – Mike Kole

"The road to success is dotted with many tempting parking places" … Author Unknown

Initiative goes a long-way. This also will help you build better relations with your customers and companies. Bo Schembechler, former coach of the University of Michigan Wolverines Football Team was once reported as saying;

"I asked myself the same question every day, 'what can I do today, that will help me beat Ohio State'?"

Bo asked himself that question in January, and in April, every day the same question. He had one goal and that was to win the Big 10 Championship, and to do so he had to beat Ohio State. It was his initiative, and he put that thought out every day, so that in the end it would make a difference. This type of action could be placed in the Chapter that covers focus, but you need to make the investment and leading action into bettering yourself, relationships, product knowledge, skills, or whatever.

What can you do today to make yourself better sales professional? One is reading this book, so you're okay for now, but what are you going to do tomorrow or the next day? Yes, I ask myself that at the beginning of every planning period (day, week, month). And that doesn't make me a work-a-holic, it makes me a professional.

Teachers go to additional classes on techniques, Doctors read the New England Journal of Medicine, and Electricians get new training to keep their certification.

What do you do?

Make sure you are doing as much as possible to;

- improve your negotiation skills
- build trust with your customers
- create relationships,
- improve your product knowledge

You're not always trying to sell something today; sometimes you are setting the table for a deal 3 months for now. It is important to perform, but sometimes It is more important to practice. With proper practice, we become more productive in the future.

Initiative is defined in many ways,

1. *an introductory act or step; leading action:*
2. *readiness and ability in initiating action; enterprise*
3. *one's personal, responsible decision*

Looking at these definitions, it doesn't always mean that you are acting, but It is also the readiness and responsibility of decision making. How do you spend your time, is initiative if it is improving your chances for future sales.

It is all a cost/benefit analysis. If the future benefits of an action taken today far exceeds the cost, then you should initiate that action.

I have a colleague in Europe that gave me another example of this. He told me he was going to be in the Frankfurt, Germany area to see customers in the morning the following week. In the afternoon, he was going to visit an exhibition. The exhibition was in an industry for 'industrial cleaning equipment'.

"why in God's name are you going to that show Eric?" I asked him. *"that has nothing to do with our plastic products and custom services that we offer"*

"Yes, I know Mike", he tells me, *"but, our main business is in metal replacement, and what is one of the main reasons we replace these metal parts with plastic?"* he retorted *"it is because of cleanliness of those machined parts. So I'm going to see what parts that they are showing as their challenges, and it will give me an idea of what I should be targeting in the future"* well, well, well … I guess he

showed me! But this is the type of initiative that we need to be considerate of as we stumble and bumble through our day-to-day activities.

What else can I do, or should I be doing? It's a question we have to ask ourselves daily to make sure we are on task. Instead of getting home 2-hours earlier, he takes the afternoon and spends time doing something that may help him in the future. That is initiative …

Integrity

"Doing the right thing when nobody is looking" – Author Unknown

"Character is much easier kept than recovered." ~ Thomas Paine

In the introduction, I mentioned that I have represented many products and companies to various industries with no real cross over. In general, this is true. However, I have had one overlap in customers that might be able to explain what I believe Integrity means to the sales process, and the sales professional.

A few years ago, I was at a medical company for a first major presentation of my company and its products. The rep agency that was working for me, put together a great audience of engineers, R&D, purchasing, and quality personnel. We had an auditorium and around 50 people attending this upcoming presentation. We worked on the presentation, prepared for all the QandA and of course all of the objections.

We went through the presentation with no real issues, some good qualifying questions were asked, and we did a great job as a team answering them. Then, from the middle of the group, a hand goes up and the question rolls out – or objection …

"Why should we believe you, you're just another salesman" … he asks

So, I've absorbed what the customer has asked, and took a breath because I felt myself getting a little heated and was ready to defend myself. My standard response to this type of objection is,

"We never will know until you give us a try and let us prove how capable we are. Every company is going to run into problems during a relationship, be it quality, logistics, or something. Its not the problem you measure, it is how you handle it in a timely and efficient manner" …

But, before I could respond, I guy in the back of the room stands up, and says,

"Mike, if you don't mind, I'll answer this question for you. You may not remember me, but you were my rep back ten years ago representing a different product. You made basically the same statements then as you are now.

Things like, the company was based on quality and customer centered" and the clincher *"and I'm here to tell my colleagues that if It is you that is saying it, then I'll be the first one of this group to recommend you.*

You not only said those things back then, but you proved *it over and over again. In fact you may have even saved my behind a couple times"* he finished.

The meeting of course was a success; our product was implemented in the next developmental product, and believe it is still being used today. It was a multi-million dollar sale, considering the lifetime value of the product. When it was all said and done, the lead buyer told me that the reason we were selected was due to the positive response we received at the presentation. When their team reviewed our product and the competitions it was a virtual tie until there was a personal connection.

My personal integrity is all I have when I leave, and it is mine. The companies we represent can produce off-quality parts and miss delivery dates, we can't. We are what we say, what we do, and how we treat people. Gone is the day of the plaid jacketed used car salesman saying whatever you need to hear to make a sale? The world is getting smaller and our personal integrity can be checked on Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace and numerous other forums.

I truly believe in the 6-degrees of separation (you are only 6-connections away from anyone in the world). And, in sales you need to be conscious of this. Even considering how you speak about customers in places like airport lounges, or on your cell in line at Starbucks®. Another story comes to mind, to highlight this.

It is kind of important to know that I am from the Detroit, Michigan area, and this story has been relayed to me by my parents.

They decided to go to Hawaii for their 20th anniversary. To put this into perspective we are talking in 1978 … So, they are 6-hours in time difference and something like 6,000 miles away from home. This is the vacation of their dreams, in paradise out in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. They have been to the Big Island, and seen all the things to see and climbed Diamondhead. Now, It is off to see the outer islands.

As the story goes, they are on a small charter boat with 6 other couples doing some type of island hopping. Since they had gone there alone as a second honeymoon of sorts, they didn't know anyone on the boat.

While they were out on the deck looking at the beautiful sunset, the couple next to them were talking. From what my Mother tells me, just loud enough that she didn't have to "try" to listen. So, as my Mom sipped her drink, she listened to this couple just tear apart some other poor couple. They were cheaters in cards, lousy parents, and a lot of other things.

Then my Mother heard the names of the people they were talking about, and thought, "wow what a coincidence", I know a couple with those names also. Oh, and another coincidence, the kids these people are talking about also have the same names as my friends children.

So, as the other couple finished their drinks, they turned around and bumped into my mother (I'm sure she didn't cause the incident). And my Mom introduces herself. As anyone does when you are far from home, you tell them where you are from, so my mother adds, "we are from Warren, Michigan"

… and you guessed it, another coincidence they were from Warren, Michigan also … Very small world.

If you know someone going to Hawaii, what do you want them to say about you 6,000 miles away? Do you want people to whisper things about you?

There are two parts of this story. One, you don't want to be the person that they are talking about. The second thing is, that It is a small world out there, and be careful of what you are saying, someone close to you may be from Warren, Michigan also.

It is our integrity, our own personal asset that no one but us can control. We are the ones responsible for putting a certain value on that integrity with the way we act, react and respond to various situations. Do you want your customers talking about the way you handled something well? Or the way you handled something not so well.

I had a customer tell me something simple once; *"Mike, you know that your company is going to screw up sometime in the future, and I won't judge you on the screw up, but how you react and respond to it"*

"Try not to become a man of success but rather try to become a man of value." ~ Albert Einstein

If this isn't a good enough reason for you to keep your integrity in mind when you act, think of how quickly people can spread bad news now-a-days. With this new world of Tweets, LinkedIn, Blogs, and the Internet, word travels faster today than ever before in our history. The old saying that customer will tell ten others about a poor performance is more like a hundred now.

Did you know that the average Facebook user has 130 friends, one status update about a bad experience is immediately in 130 people inbox. Do you want that to be you?

There are companies now managing these social networks with “C-Level” people instead of simple customer service auto-responders so that they can control the message. The underlying reason is to maintain their integrity and credibility. An unsatisfied customer can destroy a reputation with a few strokes of a keyboard.

As a professional sales person, you may represent dozens of companies in the future. Today you could be selling maintenance equipment; tomorrow you could be selling software. With the skills that you have developed you might be successful doing a lot of things, but without integrity you are doomed.

We have seen how many people go to jail for insider-trading, or creating Ponzi schemes, and Enron fiascos. Recently, we all read the reports how companies paid bonuses to people that influenced our financial systems to near meltdowns. How can someone be part of a system that helped cause one of the greatest loss of wealth in history, and then get a retention bonus in order for them to take it apart correctly? When you are put in a precarious situation, you need to know that it is precarious. You need to use your common sense, and forget about the quick buck (or hundred million of them) that you might earn as a bonus, and do the right thing.

Even the US Military allows enlisted men to disobey orders where they are immoral. This point was driven home in the movie *"A Few Good Men"* as there were two soldiers on trial for murdering another. The death was purely accidental, and they are found not guilty in the end. However, they are still discharged from the Marine Corp for "conduct unbecoming." They should have disobeyed the order of a Code Red (hazing). They should not have picked on a weaker soldier; in fact they should have helped that solder out. He was part of their unit or team. They should have had the character to say now to their commanding officer.

In the movie Wall Street, Gordon Gecko says that "Greed is good" and we know how that all turned out for him. In the end it catches up to you, and at some point in time you have to realize that your name, your integrity, is all you have.

One hundred years from now, what you sold probably won't make a difference in the world, but how you sold it could.

Do you want to be that guy? That's how I define integrity, back to the opening line of this chapter.

"Do what is right, when no one is looking"

CHAPTER 6

A Sales Professional

- *Has the ability and **TRUST** to work in a **TEAM** environment*

Teamwork

A snowflake is one of God's most fragile creations,but look what they can do when they stick together! ~ Author Unknown

You are part of a team, sometimes you're the captain, others the water boy. You need to realize that at every point in the sales process you are relying on others to move the ball forward within your organization, or in the customer's organization.

Your number one playing partner in most cases is the buyer working for your customer. You two may be in an adversarial type relationship, but the best way to succeed and act in a professional manner, is to realize that you're on the same team. And both looking for a win-win situation.

When working with your prospect, in most cases there is a person who owns the relationship with Your company, just like you owning the relationship with his or hers. It is up to you to find that person and collaborate with them so that you both know what you are looking for. Sometimes It is a buyer, or a project manager, or that companies sales representative. Someone has a big stake in this relationship, and it means something to them. That person is also an integral part of the customer's team, and has "influence."

Inside your organization, you need to figure out who the key players are on your team. I can attest that it is often NOT the CEO or Sales Manager, they are just in leadership positions, but the teams are all working cohesively in the organization.

Most often, as a sales professional, we are the coach or manager of the team. It is up to us to lobby for the 'best resources' on our team so that we can put together the right packages for the customer.

Again, no matter what you sell, there is many more than one person on the team. In my experience as a General Manager for a lighting distributor, I often included the operations and logistics group in our marketing planning meetings. We needed to know that they were behind our plans, and many times their ideas on improvements to our offerings were incorporated. Furthermore, we needed to know how operations would be impacted by these plans, and they needed to beef up their support prior to a new mailing, or catalogue. The entire team was involved in any program that had any cross-functional implications.

For you managers and HR people that are reading this book. I can't stress enough that teamwork, understanding the team concept, being on a team in the past is an asset or skill that his highly desired. People that have been on a team in the past, and I don't care if It is a rowing or basketball team, understand that it doesn't happen all by themselves.

Trust

Faith is believing in things when common sense tells you not to. ~ George Seaton

When I was in High School, I played football for the Center Line Panthers. After my junior year, the head coach of over 25 years retired. The program that he built over that 25-years was very thorough and everyone from the 7th grade teams through the Seniors had been taught the same plays, cadence, practice drills. We had a cohesive team, and we knew what was going to happen in any given situation (unfortunately so did any of our opponents, but I digress).

As a senior, I needed to learn a new coach, program, system, and just about everything. Scared and excited were the two basic emotions that ran through the team during the first conditioning workouts in August. We met our new coach, and took home our playbooks. He didn't change a lot of things this first year, but introduced quite a few new things. He told us we were still going to run the same base offense, with just a few wrinkles.

There were lots of complaints on the team about these wrinkles. We heard a lot of the belly-aching over change but the coach was pretty receptive to it. He asked us to just ‘trust him’ on these new wrinkles, and things would work out. His philosophy was simple, even for back then. He wanted to control the clock, with very short bursts of plays, nothing thrown too far down field, and well the old saying “three-yards and a cloud of dust” were exciting to him.

During our final week of practice, we were getting ready for our opening game. We spent the week running the game plan over and over so we could get consistent. As a team, we were ready but there were certain plays that were being called that would not gain lots of yards just by design, and the game plan called for them to be called in order.

As an offense, we pulled the coach aside and asked him to review the sequence of these plays. “Why would we want to call 3 plays in a row that were designed for ‘3-yard hits’” we asked him “this would not give us the 10-yards needed for any first down”

The coach immediately answered with an excitement in his eyes, and says “boys, you get me 3-yards, each and every play, 3- plays in a row, and you prove you can do it, I’m going to go for it on 4th down” so we went back to the huddle and practiced those plays for the week. “Get me those 3-yards, and I don’t even have to think about it” we heard again, and again.

The season opener, and the Center Line Panthers win the toss (about the only thing they had won in a few years), and elect to receive the kick. A good run back, gets us out to the 30-yard line and the offence (me included, I was the Tight End) run out on the field in our new uniforms with this new system we want to show all of our fans. There must be over 300 in the stands. Yeah, I know – pitiful compared to today's standards, but so were the Panthers back then.

First call, 136-Slant … This is a simple off-tackle play designed to get us a few yards. In this play, the full-back takes a handoff and runs between the Right Tackle and Tight End. We want to open up the game with a few good hits, and get our adrenaline in balance so we can move on. We are even introducing a couple of our new wrinkles on this play, we had practiced them for nearly 6-weeks and we trusted ourselves.

One of the wrinkles is a simple man-in-motion, which shocked the other team for a brief minute; they didn't know what to do. We heard their confusion coming from the Linebackers, and we confidently snapped the ball and the fullback dove right into this confusing mess … as the whistle blew we hear over the loud speaker, 2nd and 7 …

On the next play a new wrinkle, we changed up the cadence and ran ball out of the Shotgun formation. We call a quarterback draw, and this is a simple play just to show the other team that we can run out of this formation also. Again confusion, we are winning the mind game early on in this game, I personally face-planted the Defensive End over me, and as I pushed myself off the ground and join the team in the huddle, I hear "3rd and 4" loudly over the loudspeaker.

As we're in the huddle we are building confidence and our excitement is going up. Two plays in a row, both positive and we are controlling that clock. As the play comes in from the sidelines (no wireless headgear back then, we used the right guard to run the plays in), It is a similar running play, designed to go right around my end. We break the huddle and go up to the line, to look who we have to move and remove to gain our 1st first down of the season …

"Hike" the ball is snapped, and the halfback comes around my end. With the assistance of the pulling guard, we have cleared the right hand side of the field. There is nothing but green and brown from the baseball field cut into the area we were in, in front of our running back. As he made his cut to go north and south, he started to lose his balance in the dirt part of the field. His feet kind of just went out from under him, and down he went. As the whistle blows, and literally as the dust settled, the ball is spotted, we hear "4th and 1" … he got 3 more yards, 3rd play in a row.

The offense huddles back up, waiting for the play to be run in, but the only thing that comes into this huddle is the punter and the QB has to leave the game. No 4th down play was called, and we were now the confused team …

After we successfully punted away the ball, the offense gathered up around the coach on the sideline and demanded to know why we didn't go for it on 4th down … The coach, not only going back on his words from practice this hole week also added, "I just couldn't trust it on our own 30" … He couldn't trust it, but all we really heard was that he couldn't trust "us."

As the game went on, the other team figured out all of our new schemes, sets, and wrinkles, and gave us a good old-fashioned butt kicking. We lost something like 20-0, but the score was irrelevant. We lost 'trust' in our coach, from the very first series of downs that he was responsible for. He went back on this word. He didn't have trust in his team. And his team didn't have trust in him.

I won't blame the 0 – 9 record on the coach; we were actually a BAD football team. We stayed in the games, but with virtually no depth and most of the players going both offense and defense, we ran out of steam in the 4th quarter of every game. When I look back on that season of 30-years ago, I don't think of the losses, I think of that series of downs that set the tone for the entire year.

The coach may have learned his lesson, because he coached that high school team for over 25 years. I didn't follow his records closely after I left, but I did see my old coach once many years later \. I was at a Detroit Lions game with my son, and during the halftime show, they were honoring certain High School head coaches for being 'coaches of the week' that year. There he stood. Like I said, he must have learned a few things along the way to be honored like this, and I pointed him out to my son from the stands.

Trust directly relates to your integrity … don't do anything that will create a situation of mistrust with your customers, or companies that you represent. Do everything you can to create more trust.

You want your customers to openly discuss their problems with you, so you can help them get solved. If you are found to be sharing that same information with competitors, you're asking for trouble. Forget the legal issues; we are talking about being branded as untrustworthy.

Do you want to work with companies that you don't trust?

Do you want to sell things to customers you don't trust?

Remember, you have a choice in everything you do. As a professional sales person, you can direct your efforts to working with only companies that you want to deal with, and want to deal with you. Yes, we all have our "bad" customers, but when they don't want to be part of the team, and you can't trust them *(they share your info for example with your competitors)*.

I had a customer that I had been calling on for quite some time. We had an 'okay' relationship, but during a project launch of a new product by us, our manufacturing plant received them in a customer visit. During our presentation of our process, and a factory tour, one of their quality engineers gave us a blow-by-blow description of our competitor's process. He did this in order for us to improve our process and get better products shipped to him.

Now, you can say that this is helpful, but what they told us was a huge competitive advantage of our competitors. It opened our eyes to new and different ways to produce these same goods. From that moment on, we also banned that specific customer from coming into our plant to review our processes.

Why? We didn't trust him. If he would openly spill his guts to us about a competitor, what was he telling them about us? Could we pin some of the leaps that they had made in other processes to what was learned by this engineer?

Trust goes both ways. We need to keep our confidences, and trust that our customers will do the same. In the above example, we never had the same relationship with that company again, due to that engineer opening his mouth. In future conversations they have brought up questions about our processes, and tried to make plans to visit our operations. Unfortunately, It is better to keep the door closed to their opportunities, then possibly losing all of our business because of them.

As the definition also states, the sales person must have 'trust' in his team also. One of the key things in working in any type of team environment, you must understand that others are doing their job, and that they will do their job. As a running back on a football team, you must trust that the left tackle is going to pull down the line and take out that linebacker, or the linebacker will take out you. As the left tackle, you have to trust that the running back is waiting for you to make this block. And it all works together.

As a sales professional, you have a team of people behind you that must be doing their jobs. Yes, it is technically 'your' account, but it is also your operations managers, the logistics personnel, quality engineers or whoever else has something to do with the order that is being processed. If you are in any kind of sales there is some system behind you that helps you, and fulfills the orders. The marketing departments supply you the leads, the fulfillment department ships the orders, and the accounting personnel invoice and collect on your accounts.

I like these two quotes in regards to Teamwork …

Teamwork divides the task and multiplies the success. ~Author Unknown

No one can whistle a symphony. It takes a whole orchestra to play it. ~H.E. Luccock

We have all heard the saying, *"there is no I in team"*, but there is a me. By the way, "I" shows up in "responsibility" three times, so 'it' must be important there. Me, well I want the team to include ME, and I want to include them.

You are essentially the quarterback of the football team, or the point guard in the basketball game, but this is NOT a tennis or golf match. You are not standing alone in the middle of a stadium taking on the other side all by yourself. If you are, you will be annihilated. Use your team members, and call the plays that make your team look good.

Treat this team like you are the coach, or captain. Highlight their good points, give them the credit they are due. You're getting the commission checks; let others get the recognition for a job well done. The sale is more than just that closing meeting, It is a never ending process, and each 'sale' is a game that is more or less endless. You need this team over and over again, and although we need our customers, we really can't supply anyone without that team behind us.

Trust that the pass will be on-time, and you will make the goal … Your teammates will help you out, make sure you are there for them too.

Continuing to use my sports analogies, because I think sports teaches us a lot of great traits.

I'm not a huge basketball fan, but there is a play in that game that really highlights the trust and team, It is called the "ally-oop." As the ball is moved down the court, there could be a certain play call, but at a certain point in its development the point guard makes eye contact with the power forward. There are 10-men on the court, 8 of them are doing one thing, but these two have a different plan. The point guard passes to a pre-determined spot, and it looks like the ball is either going to bang off the glass, or sail into the stands. But, out of nowhere the power forward is above the rim, snagging this laser pass, and drilling it into the basket for two …

What makes this play successful? Yes, It is a pin-point pass, and a forward that can leap, catch, and dunk at the same time. But, It is also the other three members of the team who are going through their motions of running a play that isn't going to be used. Their part of this, is the deception, that makes the other team focus on them. They are as much a part of this little success as the two in the highlight film later on that evening, on ESPN.

CHAPTER 7

Sincerity

A Sales Professional

- *Provides all this to their internal and external customers with the utmost* ***SINCERITY***

Do you know it? Or do you believe it?

If you tell the customer what you truly believe, that this application will provide this benefit, it comes over as natural. Natural expressions are not forced; they are by definition - natural. They are real, honest, so being sincere is being real. A 'good sales professional' is real.

I can say this in a lot of different ways, but you have to be believable, and in order to do that you have to truly believe in who you are representing, or the product that you are selling. When you go to a movie and watch an actor / actress, you try to believe that they are that character. You know that they aren't but you can tell how 'sincere' they took this role on by their level of preparation.

So many actors and actresses just read their lines, and are not believable. But, there are several that really get to know their characters. They go to the actual places where the story is written to try and get in touch with them, understand the motivations, and really try to 'be' that person.

What are you doing to be sincere in your efforts? When you say that we are 'hard-working' company, that 'does all we can' to meet customer expectations, are you just saying this? Or have you actually lived it, understand it, and have the true knowledge about what goes on behind the scenes.

I said earlier in this book that I have had several positions. In one instance I was contracted to be an interim sales manager to help develop some of the marketing and sales processes. The company really wanted me to understand what was behind the scenes, so we agreed that I would work in every department of the company over a period of four to six weeks, before I even took over the Sales Management duties. I worked in shipping and receiving, I ran a molding machine; I worked in material handling, in the copper winding department. I made phone calls to vendors to tell them we wouldn't be paying them on time and at the same time, made nasty collections calls to customers that weren't paying us.

I knew what the entire process was, so when we put together the marketing and sales process later on, it was much easier to explain to the teams what we were really up to. I had an intimate knowledge, and therefore "could" truly be sincere about the level of effort that went into that production.

Let me ask you the question again.

What are you doing to be sincere about your statements?

What are the assertions you give the customers?

Earlier I was relaying a story where I state *"we could guarantee these results"* … Not only did I know that product very well, but I understood the testing methods behind it and the statistics behind the statement. I could 'sincerely assert' this claim.

How are you supposed to be 'sincere' about your product or services you sell?

Do you walk you factory floor?

Do you meet with product development or R&D regularly to find out not only what they are working on, but how they are doing it?

You don't have to be an engineer and know how every "i" is dotted or "t" is crossed. You have to have curiosity, and you have to WANT to know the information, especially if you plan on relaying this information confidently. In this area, I'm talking about sincerity of understanding the product or service that you sell. But this also goes for the after-sale service that will be required to maintain this customer. You need to be sincere with your prospects as you pitch them and tell them how wonderful your service department is.

When you buy a car from most auto-dealerships now, it comes with a complete tour and introduction of all the people that you may come in contact with in the future. As a sales person, you walk this new buyer into the service area and introduce them to your write-up guys, and the service manager. You are relaying to them that you are confident that these people will be there for you during any issue, whether It is routine maintenance, a warranty claim or if something just isn't right about that new car you bought. If you aren't getting that tour from your salesperson, he is one of two things; not confident about you having success with this group in the future, or just plain stupid.

To maintain your sincerity, doesn't mean you have to stay with the same company for your entire career. We all know that we are going to change jobs and/or careers several times throughout our work-life. Here is a tough one though, my personal feelings is that I could not go to work for a competitor. If so, how can I go back into a same customer and flip sides, saying "everything I told you before is not really true, you need to do this instead."

Many of you will disagree with me, and there are a lot of ways to justify this if it happens to you. Things you learn about the competitor or you can justify it with a new product line that they have introduced. This is up to you, but it goes to the essence in my opinion of being sincere.

In one of my training sessions, a person thought he had me when he said that Lee Iacocca had changed teams (moving from Ford to Chrysler). And if most of you recall, he was more than a CEO, he was the Chief Sales Person for Chrysler back in 1980, saving the company from going out of business.

Sure he switched teams, but he did so after he couldn't get his team to do the things that were necessary to launch certain new products at Ford. This is the guy that designed the Mustang, but he couldn't get Ford interested in launching a “car and van put together.” The Dodge Caravan had been on the Ford drawing boards for years, until he stole those designers and had them come to work for him at Chrysler. Ford was too conservative at the time to take a chance on something so radical.

Okay, he changed teams, but you might want to remember his main claim or sales pitch, “we don’t want to be the biggest, just the best” … How more sincere can you get? He isn’t saying that he is now working for the best; just that he wants to be.

You can gain points of sincerity with your clients by sometimes telling them It is not in your company’s best interest to do certain things. Point them to people that can help them, even if it is for the competition. What is wrong with helping your customer get the best of something? If your company can truly boast about being this or that, why worry about the competition stealing what you do best?

You want your customers to ‘expect’ the truth from you. They want to see and feel the sincerity, the ownership, the trust you have in your team. They want you to act responsibly, with integrity as you relay that information to them. You have shown them on many occasions through this process that you were organized, and had prepared every step of the process the right way. So, when you are in the midst of the closing process, just before you sign that contract, you can proudly look in your customers eyes, and grab his hand out of respect and with sincerity …

Sincerity wraps it all up, doesn’t it?

Isn’t that why we sign our letters this way?

This ends the PROFITS section, I hope you can take away from this, points that will make you more successful as a person and a sales professional.

Sincerely,

Michael Kole …

Bonus "S" - Simple …

Use the KISS method (Keep It Simple Stupid) in your process, your presentation, everything. If you make your process so complex you will make mistakes, you will miss thing, and you will lose opportunities.

From the Meet and Greet to the Close, you need to be economical in your thoughts, your travels, and your words. I had a friend of mine edit a presentation for me once and he had crossed out nearly 1/3rd of the presentation.

His sticky note on the cover said *"don't say in blah, blah, … what you can say in blah."* I looked at everything he had crossed out, and realized that I had pretty much covered the topic in previous slides.

Just because a customer gives you an hour to present your material, doesn't mean you have to use it all up. Keep it clean, concise and simple. Your customers will remember that as well as have a clear understanding.

I had a sales manager once use the old saying *"if you can't baffle them with brilliance, befuddle them with bull stuff."* I once thought that this was key, try to mesmerize your prospects, or confuse them to a point where they just have to buy your product. After all, the ends does justify the means, am I right? You might think that this is good if you are in an industry that is one-call close. Or if you are selling things to people that you'll never sell to again. In these types of sales, you may make a lot of money, but you won't be in the business to business industry too long with that type of sales effort.

Here's the "simple" advice … If you are expecting repeat sales, and a long-lasting relationship, skip the BS and keep it simple.

In today's world, we are inundated with thousands of messages a day. Every piece of clothing has a logo, every web site we go to has messages flashing at us. While we are watching a simple sporting event, there is a ticker tape running below with numerous other messages. If we keep our message clear and simple, it will get through all of this other noise. We need to penetrate our customer's awareness, and to do so we can't be long-winded and full of blah, blah. So, say it in blah and move on.

CHAPTER 8

Summary & Additional Bonus Tips

So, we have lots of old words with new meanings to think about and deploy in our day to day lives. I hope you have taken the main lesson from this publication, and that is;

Treat this career as a true profession. Just like a teacher, doctor, or engineer, this is a profession that needs your attention. Concentrate on continuous improvement in your skills, hone your assets, and help modify your behavior so you can be the best.

From Peak Performance through Sincerity, I believe it boils down to a simple underlying theme… *"use common sense and apply the golden rule"* (treat others the way you want to be treated).

Now that you know what inherent values make up a professional sales person, here are some bonus pages to discuss tips that will make you successful, effective and efficient.

I'm not going to discuss the obvious items like; negotiation skills, product knowledge, open ended questions, and all the tactics that make us successful, these are some general tips, especially in today's world.

Tip 1
Get a coach

So, I'm hitting the ball well on the golf course, but not really getting the distance out of it that I used to. I've upgraded my shaft, so now it's graphite, changed the ball to a different dimple pattern, played only on HOT and DRY days so I can get more roll, but still unhappy. I've asked my playing partners dozens of time what I could do, and they tell me different things, like trying a brand new set of clubs.

I then go to my course and ask the guy behind the counter in the "PRO" Shop to take a look at what I was doing. I really don't want to give him $50, but it's been a year and I'm getting shorter and shorter on my drives. I need to do something.

In a simple half hour, he pointed out 3 things that I needed to modify, and within the next thirty minutes at the driving range, I added the 15-20 yards that I had lost the past few years. A simple solution to my aches and pains on the golf course, and it only cost me $50. Let's just say that due to simple changes, I earned that back quite quickly with my buddies over the next few weeks.

Now ask yourself, why do we take so long to seek help in our profession? Another question, if you made a few changes, would you have a quick payback (earn more money)?

A vast majority of us will never even see a sales coach. However, take a look at that same group that share golf in common, and I'm willing to bet that most of them are more apt to invest in golf lessons than Salesmanship training and development. Unless they are making more money playing golf than in their sales career, some of that training and lesson money could have more long-term benefits.

If you feel your game (sales) is slipping, and you're not closing as many deals. If you are coming out of more meetings without answers, or your presentations just aren't hitting homeruns any longer, maybe it's time to see a swing coach. Take a look at what's out there and get some professional advice on what may be holding you back. You may find a tweak that will win you that next deal.

I can't stress this enough, as I have seen a lot of good talented people fail in this profession because they were too arrogant, or too full of themselves to ask for help. You all know the people, you see them strut around and blame things like the economy or companies policies that are causing the commission checks to shrink. We also know that if this person spent half as much time on the road knocking on doors, or picking up the phone, as they were complaining, they would be a lot better off.

Don't get me wrong, ALL salespeople complain. It is in our nature and it is okay. I have always told my principals and managers, *"if I ain't complainin' that means I stopped caring"* But you need to be aware of your shortcomings, and before you complain too much about others, ask yourself if you are the problem.

Can you walk yourself through the whole process of a sale, from the prospecting through finalizing the contract, and say you've mastered every step of it?

Are you the company's best presenter?

And also negotiations?

And customer service?

And follow up?

And task management … ????

You get where I am going. Do a SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunities and threat) analysis on you and your territory. Be objective and do a thorough analysis. You have to be honest with yourself. It is kind of like when you're golfing and you've shanked one in the woods, do you pick it up and take the stroke penalty? Or did you yell out to your buddies – "hey, I caught a break and it must have kicked off this tree" as you drop it closer to the fairway with an open shot.

Remember, just like cheating in golf, if you can't be objective with your analysis, then you are only cheating yourself in the long-run. If you are going to go thru the motions of tearing the process apart and comparing your strengths with others in the organization or external benchmarks, you need to be willing to accept you have weaknesses. When you do, you should then start paying someone for their thoughts.

If you can't be objective, get someone that can be. This coach should be someone outside the company that doesn't have any skin in the game. If you start paying them to help you with certain deficiencies, then you have a fighting chance to improve yourself in the areas that you are weak. When you pay people for advice you are also more likely to accept that advice.

Inherently you know where you have problems. Regardless of how good we are at the entire process, there is something that we need to improve that will give us more advantages. I used golf as an example above, and can't help but bring it up again. The greatest golfers in the world have coaches! Why would Tiger Woods go to a swing coach, when he was arguably the best golfer in the history of golf at the time? Why you ask? So that you can improve … this is all part of the self improvement process, and continuous improvement that makes you a professional. The others that do not think this way are simple sales reps, going through the motion, and do not measure up to a true professional.

A key thing in this example is that Tiger Woods has changed his swing coach at least two or three times while he has won all these tournaments. To have the same coach for too long, can be just as ineffective as not having a coach at all. Coaches are people too, and they have their weaknesses. Every once in a while, change it up and see what another coach might be able to help you with.

Tip 2
After action report, minutes / actions

One of the greatest organizations in world history is the US Military. They are the biggest believers in learning from mistakes. I'm not saying that they don't make mistakes, but when they do, It is almost a guarantee that they will not make the same one again.

Early in 1980 during the Iran Hostage Crisis, there was a rescue attempt that went completely bad.

On April 23, 1980, an abortive Iranian hostage rescue mission took place, conducted under the utmost secrecy. The plan was to storm the American embassy in Tehran, and bring home the hostages.

8 helicopters, 6 C-130 transport planes, and 93 Delta force commandoes secretly invaded Iran. They were to rendezvous at a place in Iran they called Desert One, move out to another point called Desert Two, and then go on to Tehran to rescue the hostages. But Delta force never made it to Desert Two or Tehran. The mission was aborted after three of the eight helicopters failed, on the way to Desert One. The operation was a miserable failure, resulting in an accident that caused the loss of 8 American lives.

When something like this goes on in the US Armed Services, everyone that had something to do with it is immediately debriefed. What when wrong, what did you do, when did you do it? All these questions are asked, and then once the root cause of the problem(s) are found out, the US Armed Services do what they do best, they fall back – fix the problem by implementing new policies and procedures and the TRAIN UP their teams.

Commando's today are still taught about the failure of 1980, because it helps them understand the importance of debriefing, creating the after action report, and finding the root cause of what went right and wrong.

You need to treat your territory and the acquisition of accounts in the same way. After each meeting, teleconference, or interaction with a customer, ask yourself the critical questions. What did I ask, what did they say, write it down! It is the only way you're going to remember it, and the only way you can correct your mistakes.

Take these reports to your coach, and have them evaluate. Let them see if they can determine if there is a pattern. Are you continually doing the same things? Missing the same questions?

Don't think that the only time you do this is after a failure. You need to do this after every interaction of substance. You'll learn about what you did well in addition to the things you may have missed.

It is crucial for your future performance and it also a good record of what happened at an account. In Chapter 1, I speak about pre-call preparation. Without these after action reports, and assessments of how you did in these meetings, how are you going to prepare for the next meeting?

Last thing on this subject … write the report within the first day! Unless you tape record the meeting, you are not going to remember the nuances, the glances, body language, and all the other non-personal communication from the meeting. Those are the important things to mention in these notes, or at least to take into consideration while you write your report. If you're used to writing all of your meeting minutes once a week or God forbid, once a month, then you need to change your habits. If you are not planning and organizing your day to have time, then It is something to think about also.

In your reports, keep them simple also. You want the people that receive them, to actually read them. Put the topics, the basic statements, some small editorial, and make sure you list your action items. As a habit, when I write my action items, I copy and paste those exact things into my task management lists.

- A short summary here, after a meeting;
- Do a complete debriefing of the meeting
- Analyze your short-comings
    - » Note them somewhere so you can work on them later
- Do a look across, meaning review a sampling of your other notes
    - » Are you making the same mistakes?
- If you can't see this, ask you coach to review
- When you are finished and know where there are problems, get coached up – train away these idiosyncrasies

Tip 3
Say what you'll do, then do what you say

Pretty simple eh? What do you respect most about people? It is often that they are reliable, and trustworthy. That you can count on them for living up to their word.

If you tell someone you'll get back to them on Thursday, then you better do it. Even if you don't have the answer they want, or if you just don't have the answer, get back to them and inform them when you will have the information that you promised. Never leave someone waiting for you to meet a deadline that you offered up.

I've had managers, coaches, and most importantly; customers tell me this as a key attribute. If you are in the middle of a project with someone, and you have an action item due at Noon on Thursday, then no matter what, you need to either have the item completed or a simple call with an update. That is all, nice and simple. You'll gain points with your contacts, team members, and customers this way.

Its always nice to know that you can rely on someone, and when they give you their word they will come through. Keep this in mind as you make statements, promises, and commitments.

Tip 4
LinkedIn, Facebook, Social Media …

Lots of things here to think about … Social Media is becoming the way a lot of people communicate and 'socialize'. You need to be aware of this on so many levels, that it needs mentioning.

I won't dare to say that you shouldn't have social relationships with your clients, but if you do, be aware of these mediums. If you have a great customer that you become “Friends” with on Facebook, realize that he is now in your circle. You need to be aware of what you post, pictures you are ‘tagged’ in, and things you comment to others.

We have all heard about stories of employers stalking Facebook pages. In Michigan a teacher was fired for pictures that showed up with her in let’s say precarious situations. Those pictures were actually taken seven years prior, but showed it didn’t matter to the school superintendent. They dismissed her, until the court forced them into re-hiring. Unfortunately for this woman, with all the publicity that the item had, everyone had a chance to ‘review’ these pictures, and it hurt her reputation.

Everything is available to anyone on the planet. As a representative of your company, you need to be aware of this. You are the face of your company to everyone of your customers. You have the ability AND liability of this. We may all have freedom of speech, and things that are protected in the US Constitution, but the Constitution says nothing about perception and what it can do to your reputation.

If your customer starts seeing you post comments about religion or politics, are you going to offend them? Are they going to be reluctant to do business with you in the future because they saw you in pictures that aren’t so flattering?

Will it be comfortable for them?

I previously wrote about being a facilitator in the sales process … That means making things "easier" for others. If your new relationship on MySpace or Facebook becomes uncomfortable, are you a facilitator? Are you an enabler?

That was the warning portion of the Internet and it's tools. Now, let's look at the positives.

Now, on the other hand, social media is a great way to network. It can and will help you find new prospects, get names of people that you need for prospecting, and getting introductions from people you know. It can be the icebreaker you need to get a meeting which will lead you to new business.

I mentioned earlier that I believe in the 6-degrees of separation. The theory that states you are 6 relationships (contacts) away from knowing anyone in the world. Others call it the Kevin Bacon theory (but that's another book in itself). Think about it, people we know, and who they know, and that know people and so on. Pick anyone, someone famous or infamous, and you should be able to point to a contact that you have that can get you to that person.

I once tested this theory out with world leaders, and at the time I was only 3 degrees of separation from Ronald Reagan, which put me 4 degrees away from Mikhail Gorbachev …

So, you want to test me on my theory that I was a simple four stops from Mr. Gorbachev?

Okay, here it was; My cousin (1st Degree) was a local precinct captain for Governor Engler in Michigan (2nd Degree) who as a governor, had often met with Ronald Reagan (3rd Degree) many times … So, if there were no other barriers of entry, and there was no worries about security, time constraints, etcetera, within two or three phone calls I could have had a meeting with Mr. Reagan who would have happily introduced me to his Russian counterpart. Now, the Internet gives us this ability to get connected to anyone. We need to be aware of the possibility, and of course not scared to ask

The entire LinkedIn network is built on this premise. With a couple hundred contacts, connections or whatever they are called, you are within a couple of steps of millions of people. Use these connections, ask people for introductions and references. If you are trying to get in touch with the Director of Engineering for a certain client, look for them in these social media places – find a contact you have in common, it is amazing how small this world is.

To add to this, we need to be aware of who are customers are connected to. Is your main competition connected to your best customer? You might not have a problem until you find out that customer just wrote a glowing recommendation for your enemy.

We only have so much time to make things happen in the selling process; this is a good way to use this various forms of social mediums to help.

Tip 5
Steven Covey, sharpen the saw

Take time for yourself, exercise, get a clear head, relax, enjoy life … get it?

What you are doing today won't make much (if any) difference in the world 100-years from now. So don't take it or yourself too seriously.

Under the Steven Covey philosophy, he uses the four dimensions; physical, spiritual, mental, and social dimensions. This is very similar to the PEAK PERFORMER that I discussed in Chapter 2. But I take it a little further with my own interpretation.

Coach Tom Landry, one of the most famous football coaches of all time, of the Dallas Cowboys stated the following as what he believes are important – and in this order;

God

Family

Football

He knew what the priorities were, and followed them every day. Without the first two, the third was irrelevant.

You need to set your priorities, and yes we want to be the best employee, or sales professional we can be. That's why we bought this wonderful book right? But you have to have time for all the other things that make your life, in its entirety, meaningful.

The Stephen Covey *"Sharpen the Saw"* concept is an underlying principle of being a PEAK PERFORMER. Give your life the balance it deserves, but make sure it is a priority! I love playing golf, but that is not the priority, the priority in that case is physical exercise, time alone with my thoughts, and that type of thing.

Tip 6
I don't know but I will find out

You're in a meeting and you get questioned about something. Either you're not prepared to answer, or you just don't have the specifics to answer … you have to be honest with yourself and your customer and simply say;

"I don't know, but I will find out" then do so.

We can be the best in our industry, but no matter what, we don't know everything. It is okay to be honest with someone and give them this answer. If you get back to them (say what you'll do, then do what you say) … they will be just as happy as if you had given them the answer immediately.

How can this be so difficult to say? How many times have you asked questions to sales people, just to be ignored or they gave you their 'impression' or thoughts. If a question is asked, it automatically becomes important. You can't dismiss the question, you need to address it.

I don't care of the question was stupid, or you didn't think the information was necessary. It obviously is, or the customer wouldn't be asking. Never make up the answer, you may get lucky once in a while, but if you are not sure tell the customer you will get back to them and when.

Tip 7
Embrace Technology

When is the last time you saw a secretarial pool? Groups of people in a room full of either typewriters or world processors only typing up other peoples reports?

How many administrative assistants are there in the business world now-a-days?

Have you actually been met by a receptionist at your clients building? Or did you just pick up the phone in the lobby and just get you in?

Who makes your travel arrangements? Is it a corporate travel person who gives you all the information? Or do you just look it up yourself on Expedia.com?

Don't be afraid of technology, it can and will make us more efficient. Use your Blackberry, iPhone, iPad, and other tools as just that, TOOLS … A carpenter can't push a nail in, they need a hammer – what is your hammer? Don't be held captive to these technologies, but make sure you don't run away from them either.

A lot said in just a few keystrokes on my laptop. And you don't know how many times I hit the backspace key, or used the spell check and thesaurus to get things right (only to have my editor tear me apart later on though). We have technology for a reason, to be more productive, plain and simple. Since most of us use only 10% of our brains, we need to use these tools to be better and faster at what we do for a living.

Let's start with some simple software to help us out. I am not endorsing anything special, just the ideas behind them. As a salesperson, one of our biggest tasks and responsibilities is responding to the customers on time. We generally maintain a task list to do so. We may use the old fashioned paper and pens, but as we get more complex and more projects or prospects working at the same time, this becomes a task in itself.

Microsoft Outlook has a task list program built right into it. I'm sure most of us are using MS Outlook as your email program, which means you are looking at this a good portion of the day already. Look at the task list to help you recall what to do. Keep your notes in these task note areas so you can easily recall why you have this on your list to begin with.

If you want to add some functionality and complexity, things like ACT!, Goldmine or any type of 'contact management' software will help you out. Keeping an accurate database of contacts at your customers, and how they all interplay with one another is very important. If you are involved in sales of any type of product now-a-days you need to sell across various parts of your customers organizations. You need to be able to keep in contact with these key decision makers, and people that are part of the strategic selling process. Contact management software of some sort will help you do this.

Speaking about contact management software, you need to build into your annual planning, a system to verify your data. People move around from company to company, and department to department so often, that you need to continually update this information. I was at a seminar discussing B to B Sales, and this specific topic not too long ago. The speaker asked us all to pull out our business cards and look at them.

"In the last 12-months, how many of you have had at least one change on this card?" he asked, and nearly everyone raised their hands. Over 300 people were in this seminar, and their business cards were changed in the past 12-months. One can assume that over the next 12-months, the same thing will happen. The instructor went on to ask how many had 2, 3 and so on up to 8 changes on the card itself, and he was still getting 10% of the crowd to raise their hands. That means one of the key contact items had change, either; company, their email address could have been modified, titles, phone numbers, addresses … whatever it was, it meant that out of all your contacts, there is a very high likelihood that this information is changing.

Personally, I use this exact reason to call my customers at least once a year. It is part of my own type of personal retention program by making a contact with them. I usually start in January with a list of five customers / contacts per day with the reason I am calling them is to confirm their contact info. I also ask them what is going on, what they are working on, etcetera. I call this "five contacts a day, keeps the competition away."

As for Blackberry's or iPhones, Droids, and all the other handheld devices I have my preferences, but the fact of the matter is that you need one. A phone that gets your mail no matter where you are is important. Even if you do not have time to answer a mail completely you can be aware that a customer is trying to contact you, or you can simply send a note while you run to your next plane that says, *"I am jumping on a plane, I'll respond in a few hours when I get into my hotel"*

Think about what you do a lot of, and ask yourself if the powers that be have invented a technology to help you out. Word Processors are great for writing proposals and creating templates! Templates for your standard correspondence help you in your communications to your customers. You need to be comfortable with the way you write your proposals, and your customers will get used to you sending the same layout every time. They will know where to look for the information they feel is important.

Spend time at your local computer stores and office supply houses. There are tools there that will help you out, use them.

Tip 8
Do it right the first time … Don't Get HK'd !!!

My father is the reason for this. How many times did he lecture me that if I was going to do something (like cut the grass), then I should make sure it was done to the best of my abilities? Of course I'm saying this with a little less 'color' than I recall hearing it, however you get the point.

A great story to illustrate this …

The famous Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had an intern working for him. On one random Thursday morning, Secretary Kissinger asks the intern to write a position paper on a certain topic.

The intern is excited and spends the next three or four hours writing this paper. He's excited, and leaves it on Secretary Kissinger's desk at the end of the day. He is pretty proud of his achievements, so he goes to the bar with a friend of his and has a couple of drinks, boasting that he is now writing positions for the Great Secretary Kissinger.

As the intern drives into work very early that Friday morning, he's excited to hear what the Secretary thought of his paper. He's all smiles as he walks the halls of Foggy Bottom and comes to his desk to see his paper, positioned directly in the center of his desk, with a handwritten note …

"You can do better than this"

HK

A little deflated, the Intern plopped down at the desk, read the paper and realized, objectively, that he could have done better. So, he pushed his workload aside and began to tackle this paper all over again. He tore it apart, re-wrote passages, did more research, and worked pretty much all day on this new revision. He had worked straight thru lunch and finished around 4pm.

He knocks on the Secretary's door to find that he wasn't in, and drops the paper on his desk again proudly. Thinking, he's got to like this.

Since he had worked through lunch, he was pretty hungry and went to the cafeteria to grab a quick bite to eat. He was gone about 45 minutes, and when he came back to his desk, his paper was positioned directly in the center, with another handwritten note …

"you can do better than this"

HK

"Does he realize that I spent the last 7 hours writing this?" the intern thought, but before he started throwing things around, and getting angry, he objectively tackled the problem. He began to re-read the paper, making small red marks on the pages. Seeing quite a few in the 8-page document, he thought to himself, "maybe I need to compare this to 'his' work." So, the intern digs up old files (physical ones remember, things weren't stored on the company server back then). And he finds quite a few random position papers that Secretary Kissinger himself had written over the years. He carried the box back to his desk thinking, this is going to be a very long day.

He read them, and not only realized that there were certain angles that he hadn't considered, but research in so many topics that was missing in his paper. So off to the Library of Congress he went, and spent the entire weekend. Yes, he read, researched, and noted everything that he could on the subject and spent the next three days and nights working on the paper.

At 7:30AM Monday morning, still in the same clothes from Friday, he sat at his desk waiting for the great man to come into the office. As he saw Secretary Kissinger walk into his office, he stood up, straightened the tie around his unshaven neck, and confidently walked into the 'man's' office.

"Excuse me Secretary Kissinger, I'm sorry to barge in like this" ..

"What is on your mind so early?" Kissinger asks

"Sir, the position paper you asked me to write, and then re-write two times, is now complete. Before you read this and turn it back to me saying that I can do better, you need to realize that I spent the entire weekend reading everything published on this subject, researching every contingency and published thought on this position.

I even dug up old position papers that you personally wrote to compare my thoughts and work on what you had done in the past. So please sir, take that into consideration, I can't do any better than this one"

The Secretary smiled and responded, *"Thank you, for that clarification then this one I'll read"*

If you are going to do it, put your effort into it so you don't get HK'd by the boss.

If you are going to put together a proposal for a customer, and go through the time, make sure It is your best work. This story could be part of preparation and planning, but I wanted this section to standout. Your 'work' is often in emails, written proposals, and presentations. That is how you will make an impact at a customer and essentially how you will be remembered. So, if you are going to do it, do it well, give it your all, and be proud of your work.

This type of work is also our mortality, maybe not in the profound way of after we are gone, but in reality. When we aren't there to re-explain to our contacts what we meant, they have these bodies of work to reference. Not only do you want the proposals and written materials to stand out above the competition, but we also want it to be clear, concise, and professionally layout your position on the subjects. It is this that will be referenced, not a phone call from the buyer that says, "hey we are in the sourcing meeting, and can't remember what you said to us in that meeting" …

Do it, and do it well, so they read it every time.

Tip 9
My Famous Roast Beef Story...

It is Thanksgiving, and this family that I'm going to talk about has had a traditional roast beef dinner instead of Turkey since they came over from the old country. This dinner is without argument the best you'll ever have, mouth-watering, melt in the mouth tender, phenomenal side dishes, roast beef dinner ever created.

I'm not sure how this dinner is put together, what the secret recipes are, or what the process is. It is only made by the women of the house.

Sexist? Yes, but who cares, because it is wonderful!

The women, from every generation gather together in the kitchen from around 9 in the morning, and prepare the meal all day long. Legend has it, they have never had a bad meal *(unlike the numerous dry turkey's that I have had in the past).*

In order to be included in the kitchen, a young lady must reach the age of 16 before she can be part of the preparation team. The year this story is written about, Sarah turned 16 three-weeks before Thanksgiving, and will have her chance in the kitchen. She was finally old enough to begin to learn the family secrets. This year there would be 5-Generations of women cooking the famous meal, from the Great-Great Grandmother of 98 all the way down to Sarah … Wow ..

So, off they go into the kitchen and Sarah watches and then begins to ask just a ton of questions.

"Wow, I never knew you put sugar in that, and why are you putting carrots in now?

What is this have to do with that? Why? Why …. And you get the drift. Dozens of questions, to Mom, Grandma and all the rest … all answered pretty much the same way ..

"Sarah, if you want to learn how to do it that's fine, but It is always been done this way, so don't ask why" her Mother finally squawked.

Sarah felt rebuffed, but she had this curiosity that was passionate. She wanted to know why. Maybe some of her questions were unnecessary, but she was bound and determined to find out more.

Sarah kept quiet for a while, and she observed quite a bit. She realized it was going to take her a few more years to get a full understanding of this. Now, it was time to finally put the beef into the oven, and her Grandmother came up to her and said,

"Sarah, you've made it … we are getting ready for the ceremonial cut, and you get to do it" her Grandmother proudly handed her a knife and added, *"just cut 1-inch off each end of the beef and put the rest in the oven"*

"What?" Sarah exclaimed … *"Why would we have spent the last 6-hours in this kitchen preparing this masterpiece, and then cut off 2" of perfectly good meat and throw it away?"*

"Sarah, this is part of the secret, it has always been done this way", her great grandmother voiced.

"but I want to know Great Grandma, why are we doing this?" Sarah exclaimed!

"Sarah, we are really tired of your constant questions, if we want to eat on time, you need to do this now and put it in the oven" her mother chimed in …

"Sarah, please you've tired us all out" her Grandmother added …

"No, I can't … I need to find out" … Sarah thought to herself.

Sarah looked around the room, and her Great-Great Grandmother wasn't there. Sarah remembered that she was out in the living room watching the Lions beat up on the Packers … The game was firmly in hand and she found her in the recliner, napping away.

"Great-Great Grandma" she whispered into her ear … *"I'm sorry to wake you but …"*

"Oh, Sarah, I'm sorry I fell asleep, is everything going okay in the kitchen?"

"yes, it is, GG, but I have one more question", Sarah was nearly in tears as she continued, *"I've done everything they have told me all day, and they won't tell me why, but I need to know just one thing"* Sarah paused to compose herself, didn't want to get rebuffed again, *"GG, they are asking me to cut 1" of meat off each end of the beef and toss it away, as some type of secret. Why are we cutting away 2" of perfectly good meat after all this hard work?"* she added *"I'm tired of hearing that it has always been done this way, you must give me the secret" …*

The old woman sat back in the recliner, thought hard for a moment, scratched her chin … and then sat straight up, with that "*aha*" moment ….she held her two shaking little hands about 6" apart, and says,

"Sarah, when I was your age, the pan was only this big" …

Don't be afraid to question the status quo. Don't accept that it has always been done this way. Ask questions until you are satisfied with the answers. And when you are, things will happen.

I end this book with this story, because to be a professional sales person, we need what Sarah has shown all day. All the while she went through the motions, tasks, and tortures of cooking this great meal, she has persistence and asks questions. She had learned what was behind all of this.

Albert Einstein said *"I have no special talents. I am only passionately curious."*

If you are as curious as either Sarah or Albert, you will be successful in your quest to be the best.