

Quick Sales Tips

Sales Training Iguanas

In early January, when a national deep freeze extended even to the Florida Keys, iguanas fell into their natural hibernation-like torpor, and some compassionate Floridians, unaccustomed to seeing iguanas that appeared nearly dead, took them indoors to warm them up, which is a mistake. The owner of the veterinary clinic in Marathon said one “sweet lady” called him about the five-footer she had dragged inside. “When it woke up,” said the vet, “she couldn’t understand why it seemed to be coming after her. When they warm up, they go back to being a wild animal.” [Keynoter (Key West), 1-7-08]

If you facilitate or oversee sales coaching and education, here’s a question for you...

What are you dragging into your training house that doesn’t belong there?

Too much of traditional sales training is based on strategies that are no longer as effective as they were in the 70s and 80s.

You know this is true, too. Prospects have heard all of our closes and when we offer up some of these common comments, it comes across as pre-planned, perhaps even manipulative. Many of them today are much smarter than we are.

We also know a great deal more about buyers than we knew in the old “blast ‘em with features and benefits” days (i.e., “I’m praying one thing on this laundry list of benefits will strike a chord and cause that guy to buy”).

In fact, with sales teams I’ve managed or been hired to train, I even teach them how to eat lunch. Think about it. Do you want reps crashing around 2pm every day, tanking productivity and diminishing morale in the office or out in the field?

A holistic approach might also include giving some budgeting skills to reps whose income might fluctuate as erratically as John Travolta’s acting career.

So drag those old, five foot lizard-like ideas out of the house. Replace them with smart new strategies that increase the quality of your training and the quality of your sales team.

Do it quick before your sales continue to hibernate. Call me directly for help or ideas, I’d be happy to talk about this with other corporate sales training pros.

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Outlaws, Sheriffs and Selling

The sheriff said to the outlaw, "I'll give you a fair chance. We'll step off ten paces and you fire at the count of three." The men pace off, the sheriff shouts, "One, two" – and then he turns and fires. The dying outlaw says, "I thought you said to fire on three."

The sheriff said, "That was your number. Mine was two."

Hey, when you're selling, did you ever notice that your buyer's timing is never quite in sync with you? Not on the same page? Not working with the same number?

As sales pros we prefer urgency and a quick decision. As buyers we're often fairly cautious, slow, even methodical before making our choice.

So shame on us, when we sell, that we are surprised by buyers who won't give us a clue how soon they're deciding what to decide.

Like any objection, we should be prepared to pre-empt a buyer's propensity to delay decisions.

At the very least, we can request the time-frame whereby the prospect's company needs to conclude its evaluation of products and services.

So you'll find that you have the skills to create urgency (more on how to do that, on a later date) or not.

If not, at least get that buyer to share when they'll be done talking and ready to take action.

This way, you find out what his or her number is and you adjust your sales approach accordingly.

Now that we've addressed this repeating problem you should never let it happen again. If you do, that's weak selling. And in the eyes of your manager, criminal behavior.

February 14th for Sales Reps

You might have read this story before, but it bears repeating, the sales tip is new and you could use the laughs...

I'm newly married and Valentine's Day is creeping up. What do I do? Well, everything I stand for in selling is about standing out from everyone else.

So I thought everyone gets roses, I'll be different and get something truly unique. My Princess Bride will be overjoyed at my creativity.

But what would I do? Then it hit me. Remember Venus - Goddess of Love from mythology? I'll do something related to Venus.

So I got her a plant - a Venus Flytrap.

You know, they're the little plants that slam shut on insects when they crawl into them. Digestive juices begin to dissolve the little bugs which end up as plant food.

Then I felt bad at the store buying them, they were so inexpensive.

But I felt better by getting her two.

Gotta be honest, it didn't go over very well.

But I realized later what I was doing was perfect from a salesperson's perspective. It just wasn't the wisest thing to do with my wife.

Our job is to distinguish ourselves from everyone else who sells. So I resisted roses because I wanted to stand out in my gift-giving.

Well I now know that I've already "sold" my bride on me. She "bought" the day she said yes to "Will you marry me?" And she proved there was no buyer's remorse when she said "I do."

But you do still have to separate yourself from other sales reps. How are you doing that? Get creative and have fun. And please let me know what you come up with.

Homer Simpson & Selling

"Weaseling out of things is important to learn. It's what separates us from animals... except the weasel." - Sales Guru Homer Simpson

This post will be using guilt to motivate you to action. So be prepared to hear your mother's voice as you read along.

Is there that ONE THING you should be doing to improve performance, and you're not doing it?

It might be making X number of contacts each day, and you're falling short.

It might be getting help handling those objections that eat away at closed business.

It might even be that you're chasing too many poor prospects and need a method for exterminating these bad buyers.

Stop weaseling out of work. Don't be a stinking sales varmit! Pick a specific time to get your task completed and imagine how awesome you'll feel when it's behind you.

And ahead of you is income, more sales, and a future that's brighter than it was before you were playing the part of the professional selling weasel.

Your mom's voice has faded away, now get to work.

Mark Twain for Sales Reps

Never put off until tomorrow what you can do the day after tomorrow. -Mark Twain

This is a pro procrastination message.

Here's when I encourage putting off those calls and activities...

You know those poor prospects that just showed up in your contact manager to re-connect? Put 'em off to tomorrow. Or later. Or forever.

You have so much legitimate business, there is no reason to chase these jokers.

So unless you have a small, well-defined territory that you need to saturate over time, just procrastinate on poor prospects.

And get going after the good ones.

You can tell your manager that sales expert Mark Twain said so.

Flipping a Sailboat & Selling

On my honeymoon my wife and I were learning to sail and she wouldn't back off when she was about to run our mast parallel to the ocean. This means the boat is about to flip on its side or worse.

I didn't want to get wet (even though I grew up on the ocean).

I didn't want to get wet (even though I'm a great swimmer).

I didn't want to get wet (everyone was watching).

So I yelled at her for the first time ever (practicing for when we'd have kids).

She stopped us dead in the water, looked me in the eye and said, “are you going to let me fail or not?”

It’s what I get for marrying a trainer.

How does failure feel to you?

Has it happened enough that you’re okay with it? Or...

Are you afraid when you see it sailing over the horizon?

Are you nervous that when you turtle up in front of a prospect (and can’t close) that you’ll be embarrassed in front of your peers?

There are plenty of aphorisms you can use to deal with failure.

- There is no failure, only feedback.
- Fail forward.
- Remember, no man is a failure who has friends (It’s a Wonderful Life).
- Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly.
- I cannot give you the formula for success, but I can give you the formula for failure: which is: Try to please everybody.
- Experience is simply the name we give our mistakes.
- Do not waste yourself in rejection, nor bark against the bad, but chant the beauty of the good.
- Many of life’s failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.
- Good people are good because they’ve come to wisdom through failure. We get very little wisdom from success, you know.

Thanks here to Edison, Saroyan, Wilde, Kennedy and others.

Failure gives us the opportunity to know where to improve, to know what not to do, to know we’re steps closer to true and consistent success.

So embrace failure, move on quickly and please...

Don’t make the same mistake twice.

Because if you're going to swim with the sharks without being eaten alive (Harvey Mackay), you don't want to tempt fate.

Little Joey & Sales Managers

Joey was a beautiful baby. He was a healthy, strong little guy. Only one thing wrong - he never spoke, not a word.

At two, three, four and five Joey was silent. His parents cajoled him (they couldn't think of a better word). Doctors examined his tongue and larynx. Child psychologists prodded his psyche.

Joey would smile silently and do his schoolwork, play with friends and happily engage anyone who approached him. He simply never employed any words.

At seven years old, the world had given up on Joe.

One morning he sat at breakfast and, when mom handed him his plate, Joey said. "This toast is burnt."

Mom and dad were shocked into silence. Finally the boy's mother exclaimed, "Joey, those are your first words! After all these years, why didn't you say anything until now?"

The little boy replied, "Because until now, everything's been okay."

Sales managers - how do you tag or label reps who aren't performing up to par?

Do you recognize the difference between a bad learner and a slow learner?

Because one is worth the investment. The other is worth a quick walk to the door.

Here's a truth in training: Everyone learns at a different pace. We'd like the new kid on the block to show up and make the all star team in his or her rookie season. But you have to admit, that's a rare occurrence.

So how do we set proper expectations for new sales hires?

If you decide - before you hire - what activities indicate a rookie rep's ability to strive toward success, you'll know when someone is slowly (or quickly) growing into the role.

And don't forget to speak up and let everyone know what you expect, and how long you'll wait for them to "arrive" in their role. Setting standards, and numbers to attain gets the group to understand what is tolerable for each member of the team.

Like little Joey showed us, silence and surprises are not good for your sales family.

Fouling the Competition...

I played basketball in college and one night we were competing with a team which had a very dirty player. This guy would run down the floor, glance to see if the officials were looking his way, and if he could, elbow one of my teammates in the face.

So in the first half, when that opponent went in for a layup, our center just flattened the guy. The whistle blew, and as that dirty player lay dazed on the floor, our big man leaned over and said, "I have four more fouls... and they're all for you."

Sales pro, how strongly do you feel about defeating the competition? Perhaps you're friendly face-to-face. But are you determined to take their money, before they get yours?

I've found that great, truly great athletes hate losing MORE than they enjoy winning. Do you have similar feelings when you go head to head with a competitor?

So what gets you going? Is it something inside? Do you draw off internal reserves to attack and fight your marketplace? Or do you need to see, externally, others successfully feeding their families off your commissions?

What will it take before you increase your activities and your skill acquisition to hit world class selling status? See every pro knows he or she can improve, even when they're great at what they do.

So whether you're already motivated inside or are pushed by an external event, like losing a nice-sized sale to someone else, you want to get going and foul the competition. The question is how hard will you hit 'em? You'd better be good, because they won't stay down for long.

Selling & Stuffed Animals

Want to get a good laugh out of your kids?

Tell them you are going to win a staring contest - with one of their stuffed animals.

I lay in bed, eyes locked on the small, but fierce-looking pug. He was a Webkinz, meaning he also had the power of the Internet backing his tail.

The world began spinning as I fought to keep my eyelids from flickering. The dryness was the worst part of the contest, as my eyes began to feel as if they'd been rubbed wide open in the fur of the little beast.

Children cheered, but my concentration was so intense, I didn't hear if they were for me, or him.

In an instant it was over, and my kids began to laugh at my loss. "Dad, you can never win against a stuffed animal. He has no eyelids."

You can never win.

That's a nasty thought. Here's a nastier one — what activities during your day are absolute losers? Which things do you engage in, when you sell, that have **ABSOLUTELY NO CHANCE OF RESULTING IN A WIN?**

Are you chasing bad prospects? Perhaps you're doing paperwork during time when you can be accessing potential clients? Or are you using old techniques that now rub buyers the wrong way?

Remove from your day, activities that result in a "You can never win."

Do this, and in the blink of an eye, you become a better sales rep.

Capgras Syndrome and Suffering Sales Managers

Capgras Syndrome is a bizarre, but real condition where people act as if they are in a parallel universe and the people they know are "doubles" or "impostors."

They might even believe that inanimate objects - chairs, desks, computers are replacements, exact duplicates, of their real property.

Whoa! How bizarre is that? It's more common, I believe, in the sales population than anywhere.

I've known sales managers who exhibit Capgras Syndrome. They have great performers working for them. Then suddenly sales go slack and they wonder if the reps on their team are actually doubles, impostors, the evil twins of their productive people.

The office environment also doesn't even feel the same when the air goes out of company sales.

So who are you today? Are you that consistent, steady selling performer or do you fluctuate wildly, leaving your manager wondering who showed up to work this morning?

A good daily work plan and managing your energy during that day are key to steady growth. Do this and you won't freak out your sales manager into believing he's suffering from any condition other than that of serious success.

Leave parallel universes to psychologists and sci-fi movies.

2 for 1

(don't tell my wife I'm writing on this)

Can you believe how lucky a guy can get?

I'm looking under the kitchen sink where I've strategically placed a mouse trap.

It's upside down which means I got one. I pick it up and two mice are dead on arrival, heads pinned beneath the trap, noses wedged into a glomp of peanut butter which they will never taste.

What are the chances that, in the instant the trap explodes, two of my wife's enemies will be caught? I've never had it happen and I've been catching mice since before my ant vs. the magnifying glass days.

Here's the sales thought - sometimes you just get lucky. Sometimes you close a sale unexpectedly. Sometimes, out of the blue, a sale falls into your lap.

For all the skills and strategies and activity you build into your selling life, there is that element of chance that grants you a wish, a taste of peanut butter. That same element of chance can snatch away a sure sale when a low-ball offer sinks you or someone changes their mind or a hot prospect dies.

So just rejoice in your good fortune, when it smiles on you. Think of all the hard work you've put into your career and how many times you wanted a happy ending. It happened today and you caught yourself a real live new customer. Today you deserve it.

Seeing Red

It's dinner time with the family and Bekah, 6, is hiding a piece of paper under the table. She has a surprise for Mom & Dad.

"Tada!" She announces and waves her spelling test in our faces. 10 words, 8 wrong.

The paper had so much red on it, you'd have thought they slaughtered a chicken in class.

Wendy and I stare at the splashes of red marker, black print and pencil as Bekah bursts out laughing.

"I really messed up this one, Mom and Dad."

"You're not upset? Wendy asks. And our little first grader says no.

So as a parent you're thinking "is this an okay response?" I am actually kind of proud that she's not devastated by a low score. It reflects a strong self image.

And as a sales rep or coach or manager you might be thinking, "is this response worth replicating? Can I model my attitude and self-talk after a six-year old's bad experience?"

You know what I'm going to say.

Yes! Your mental health in selling is directly related to how you respond to trouble and how quickly you respond in a manner which reflects a great self image.

Take it from Bekah, a hearty laugh at trouble can drain the black out of it. Out of the mouths of babes...

So when you're seeing red, think blue skies ahead and green grass around the next prospect and gold in the bank.

Poorly-paid Insects

An entomologist at Cornell University (US) has worked out that the annual value of insect services in the US is around US\$57 billion. Insect services include crop pollination and land cleaning. Ref: New Scientist (UK)

This means that outside the knowledge of over 300 million Americans, insects are doing work for us, and not getting paid. And they're doing it without our permission.

So aside from the fact that some scientist at an Ivy League school probably got paid a few hundred thousand of our tax dollars to do this speculative research, there's a lesson here for salespeople.

It's related to a theme you'll see continue to pop up here - on being grateful for what we have.

The lesson's in a question:

Who is helping in the background?

Today is about going beyond the obvious. It's not about the sales assistant or marketing team or anyone you're closely aligned with in your selling day.

Let's make it about the other people with whom you have limited contact who support you. Internally, it might be accounting/finance and HR people. Externally, it might be suppliers or the actual manufacturers of the products you sell.

Why not sit down in a team meeting or at a networking group or by yourself. And identify who is in the background, contributing to your success.

Then thank them.

Look at it this way, the roses you can afford to send to those insects were somehow nurtured and grown by them before you even got there.

Easter Basket

(please, please do not tell my wife about this post)

It's summertime and the kids often play in the basement where it's cool. A favorite game of theirs is to dig out some Easter baskets with the fake straw, drop in their beany babies and act out stories.

So my princess bride, Wendy is down there cleaning up after the kids. I have accompanied her to watch. She reaches into an Easter basket to grab a small stuffed animal. As her hands close on the beany baby, she freezes, peers closely and begins screaming.

She screams her way up the stairs, one hand holding the basket, the other held out and away from her.

I'm moderately intrigued by this display and follow her up. I've never heard Wendy scream before. She's won state tennis championships in high school and one of the reasons we get along so well is that her tough, athlete's mentality is perfect to deal with me and my need or desire to play basketball every day of the week.

At the kitchen sink she is furiously washing her hands while doing those fast birth breathing exercises which come in handy except when you forget to do them during the actual birth.

There was no beany baby in the basket.

It was a dead mouse. Been dead a while actually.

It was covered in maggots.

Would you have screamed, too?

What part of your sales life is dying?

All the components of great selling are needed for longevity in sales.

What needs help or healing?

Lead generation, opening statements, followup, voicemail skills, closing?

Take the time to look at all the elements of your selling life. Find an area on which you need to build strength and begin the healing process.

Nobody buys from a maggot-covered rep.

Forgetting the Tooth Fairy

Abbie, one of the twins, finally lost her first tooth. At bedtime she was so excited to know that her head rested atop an income source. That tooth fairy was going to lay some money on her, come morning. Now anyone who's been a parent knows that there are some things you just can't get training for. For example, no parenting book I've ever read covers handling the tooth fairy. So Wendy and I go to bed and, being spectacular parents (the kind you'd see in a zoo for parents or the ones aliens would come down and select as samples) we forget about Abbie's tooth.

And are awakened by a crying kid. "The tooth fairy forgot me."

We're horrified and I mumble something about the 2006 census revealing an influx of six-year olds who are losing their teeth in the spring. "Honey, we're positive the tooth fairy will be here tonight."

Later that day we bump into Lori, a friend with kids the same age. We confess that we're such horrible parents, and if they now landed in our backyard, aliens would probably ignore us.

Laurie says, "I got you beat. When Chase, our son, lost his first tooth, we forgot to put money under the pillow. He came into our room bawling and I told him to go to the bathroom and clean up while I checked myself. As he sniffled his way in to wash up, I dove into my purse - and could only find a twenty dollar bill. Oh well, it went right under his pillow. Chase was deliriously happy. But all the parents at school now hate my guts."

Sales pros, what or who have you forgotten in your sales life?

Is it a former mentor or manager who gave you a start in the business?

Is it the simple act of showing gratitude to clients who feed your family or support staff who keep you effective?

Remember today who you've forgotten and show them how much you appreciate them.

Koala Bears & Great Questions...

I'm in Brisbane, Australia where we've just won the Gold Medal for basketball in the World Masters Games. The Games are basically Olympic sports for athletes 35 years and older. I still play on the US team.

So it's our day off before heading home and I (the 2 guard) am with my point guard, Chuck. We're visiting Lone Pine, the biggest Koala bear sanctuary in the world.

A woman is giving a presentation on the plight of the koala. Poor, beautiful (and stinky!) animal was almost hunted to extinction until 1910. The last month hunting was allowed, 600,000 pelts were taken. A picture pops on the screen and the crowd gasps as this old tin-type photo shows two guys with rifles and a huge mound of bearskins, maybe 30 feet high behind them.

"Help save these animals," the woman pleads. "They are now in danger again, losing their food source to real estate development."

She finishes this emotional tug on our hearts with, "Does anyone have any questions?"

My hand shoots up and dozens of heads turn to me as I ask,

"WHAT DOES THEIR MEAT TASTE LIKE?"

Half the crowd explodes with laughter, as half gasp in horror. The woman stutters a response about not knowing and you don't eat them...

So one of my life missions is accomplished - make people laugh. And there's a wonderful selling lesson here, too.

GREAT questions distinguish great sales pros from medicore.

Do you ask questions that make buyers stop and think? Questions that show them the inevitable consequences of their decision-making? Questions that speak thoughts they haven't yet landed on?

Try on some of these, for example;

What if you didn't buy a solution for another six months, would it make a difference?

What have you tried before and why didn't it work?

Have you ever quantified the impact of this concern to the company?

Ask GREAT questions and you can guarantee your sales career, unlike the Koala, will never get near the brink of extinction.