

The Heart of Selling

I've had the good fortune to work alongside many dedicated, creative and skillful sales professionals. Most of what I know and any success I have enjoyed has resulted from my associations with these men and women. It is with the deepest respect and gratitude that I dedicate this writing to them all. My hope is that what is shared here will help you in a couple of ways. First, we want to alert you to some of the common pitfalls that usually go unnoticed until serious, life-changing consequences occur. Secondly, we hope to inspire you to be uncompromising when it comes to getting all that life and your career have to offer

In previous articles we have endeavored to communicate the deeper principles underlying the selling process. When we understand the basic forces at work motivating each of the parties' activities and the role we play in bringing about a desired result, we are more apt to practice "**The Art Of Selling**" with skill, patience, compassion and precision. For many, this is enough. Nothing else is really required for the professional salesperson to achieve their goals with a sense of meaning, purpose and success. What else need be said? And yet, there is more.

If you have been selling for a while, surely you have experienced many highs and many lows. No matter how much knowledge, skill and experience you attain, there is no escaping the disappointments inherent in your chosen profession. Let's face it, you win some and you lose some. In between all of the successful closings, happy customers, year-end bonuses and professional recognition are many hours filled with failure, tedious tasks, self-doubt, and downright crap! What makes an otherwise sane man or woman face this daily rollercoaster ride?

For at least some portion of our career we are focused on very specific self-oriented, personal goals. We would like a certain income to support a particular lifestyle. Perhaps we seek a higher position of power and influence. Another level of fulfillment comes from the recognition of your professional achievement by your peers. All are attainable in some measure. All may provide a deep feeling of satisfaction. And yet all are fleeting and ultimately temporary in nature. It is like shooting at a moving target. Each new level of attainment exposes us to ever more lofty ambitions. There simply is not enough money, power or accolades to give us a lasting inner experience of peace and fulfillment.

Another way we gauge our success in sales is to compare our performance to others. This is a practice encouraged by most sales organizations. A word of warning: don't make the mistake of letting this be the only yardstick by which **you** measure **yourself**. Boot Hill is full of talented young gunslingers that convinced themselves they were the fastest guns in Dodge. If this is a game your organization plays, then I encourage you to "play" it. Don't take it personally. Whether you finish first or last will make little difference one, five, or ten years from now. I have a hard time remembering who won the Super Bowl last year! One goal of this article is to offer what may be a more meaningful standard of success measurement in sales.

Don't get me wrong. Sales incentives are fine. When well structured, they add focus, encouragement and a way to evaluate your own performance in an activity that is intrinsically

amorphous, chaotic and replete with unproductive dead ends. At some point in time every salesperson craves a simple activity with a beginning, an end and a sure-fire means for getting from one to the other. Ultimately, however, if you really are cut out for a sales career, you thrive on the challenge. You will endure humiliation, self-doubt and failure just to be a part of the game. When you succeed, it feels like you've scaled Mt. Everest by yourself and you can't wait to do it all over again. It's no wonder some of us get caught up in the game and tend to overlook other life priorities.

Early in my sales career I had the good fortune to attend an informal discussion with a retired salesman/sales manager. For the purposes of this article, I will call him Bob. Bob's professional life had been adorned by many successes. His legacy had given birth to the highly respected sales organization I had joined. When asked what he would have changed if he had it to do all over again, Bob replied: "I would walk more." What? Walk more? What could he possibly mean? Bob went on to explain to us that he and his wife enjoyed their daily walk in nature. The walk, he told us, added a depth and richness to his life that he had not known during the time he was focused on his career. Postponing that walk until retirement had been the biggest regret of Bob's life.

You Matter!

If you've spent any time around sales people you've probably noticed they're not short on healthy egos. They're often competitive by nature and they want to serve notice that they are forces to be reckoned with. This is a good thing. They're going to need a large reserve of this "steam" to power themselves when the going gets tough.

It almost seems incongruous that these same self-assured people can take the slightest implication of criticism or lack of approval very personally. This desire to please is one of the primary qualities that motivates sales people to perform at high levels of effectiveness, even when no one is looking.

Unfortunately, these powerful drives common to many sales careers tend to drown out the quieter, subtler aspects of ourselves. It is quite possible to come to believe our more subtle desires are unimportant or even non-existent. I have heard sales people actually boast that they are proud of how many days they spend on the road away from their families or how much money they save by allowing themselves only the most basic accommodations or meals. Certainly we all want to be recognized for our dedication and financial management. But if you think about it, how can we expect others to value us and respect us if we treat ourselves like an unwanted stepchild?

Every aspect of you and your life has value. Your body and your health are precious. Your friends and family are irreplaceable gifts. Spirituality, recreation, mental and emotional wellbeing, regular exercise, community involvement, laughter, helping others, being loved – which of these do you want to live without?

Our employers are often assigned the blame for many of the ills that we inflict upon ourselves. But no employer truly benefits in the long term by our ignoring the rest of our (non-professional) life. And what exactly are the consequences of our oversight? At first the

symptoms may appear as a lack of appreciation from our management or coworkers. We find ourselves complaining more and fighting imaginary battles in our head. Perhaps we are drawn to activities that can temporarily mitigate the growing level of unrest that we feel. Left untreated, these tendencies take root and lead to further isolation. The health of our bodies, our minds and our relationships is undermined.

We can try to ignore or underestimate the importance of the “rest of our lives”, but we can never make it disappear. Unmet needs simply fester and grow until they explode to the surface. Tragic outcomes in the lives of too many sales professionals can be directly traced to what we will call “Me Myopia.” It’s a condition that results when you view yourself as something you would see when looking through a telescope backwards. You, yourself, appear small and distant and can, therefore, be made to conform to any and all requirements of your job. This disease favors no age group, race, or gender. No one is immune. It’s difficult to detect in its early stages. In fact, its symptoms are often mistaken for strength, dedication, commitment, and plain old hard work. Don’t let today’s “hard-working, dedicated employee,” become tomorrow’s substance abuser, heart attack victim, or divorcee.

The question you have to ask yourself is, “Could I still achieve the same or greater results in my work with a more balanced approach?” In some cases this means learning how to become more productive, not less. Time plus activity do not necessarily add up to higher sales. In my experience, it’s much harder to break free of time-consuming, entrenched habits, than it is to actually sell more. When it comes to excelling at your sales career, think less in terms of time and effort and more in terms of desired outcomes and how to achieve them.

Next, take a fresh, unbiased look at your present life. If you were a researcher of human behavior who was sent to observe your present life; how would you sum up your findings? What conclusions would you come to about your subject’s (your) priorities and values? What aspects of life are being minimized, put off, or simply ignored? If earning a living were not an issue, what activities and time commitments might become more present in your day?

Now, of course, you do need to earn a living. And building a career often entails temporarily sacrificing other desires and priorities. The trick is to avoid setting up unnecessary “either/or” scenarios that become your rationale for living half a life. How can you begin now to incorporate the people and activities you value into each day? Be creative. Be a pioneer! Few employers ever object to a non-conforming lifestyle as long as their business goals are being met or exceeded.

Live It!

Your life is unfolding in the present moment. There isn’t any way to live it in the future. They say youth is wasted on the young. But “today” is shortchanged by almost all of us. And we have only ourselves to hold accountable. Earlier we indicated there might be a more appropriate yardstick for evaluating your life. And so there is. Only it isn’t a yardstick that I can give you. Like “Bob’s” realization that he regretted not walking more, your true yardstick can only be found within yourself. The “heart” of selling can’t be revealed in this article because it is your heart waiting only to reveal itself to you.