

Personal Control Is Key To Success in Sales

If you feel your effectiveness slipping, now's the time to get back on the track.

By JEFFREY P. DAVIDSON

Much more so than in most other professions, personal control is a key element towards a successful sales career. In selling, control of one's time, energy and resources spell the difference between a haphazard, limited effectiveness, and a professional, high caliber approach.

Personal control goes hand in hand with personal awareness. There are three types of sales persons in regards to the personal control and awareness functions. The three types are: the no-control, no-awareness salesperson; the no-control, with-awareness salesperson; and the in-control and aware salesperson. Let's examine the characteristics of these three types.

No-Control, No-Awareness

The salesperson with no control and no awareness meanders through each day, week and month as if the mere passage of time were an accomplishment in itself. He doesn't plan the day in advance — be it a few minutes the evening before or a few minutes early in the morning, yet he expects to have a productive day. This type of salesperson, when working a route, falsely believes that he knows the territory so well that planning or development of an itinerary is a waste of time. The essential maps, pads, coins for the pay phone and other sales accoutrements are often neglected or randomly tended to with the predictable end result — lost time on the road.

The no-control, no-awareness salesperson frequently lets the effectiveness of his presentation slip. Rehearsals, brushing up, outside reading, are all relegated to the "haven't got time for that" status. This type of salesperson remembers to have the car fixed after something goes wrong. Or to enhance his wardrobe long after the need was apparent to others. If he had an inside sales position, one might find files in disarray, reporting and monitoring logs hastily updated (as opposed to being carefully completed as the situation unfolds and used for future reference).

The no-control, no-awareness salesperson is playing a loser's game, perhaps kidding himself for an extended period or banking on a "long shot": the big sale that will salvage the weak month or year. This person is also the first to regard good sales people as lucky or having a good territory or having the good "connections." What this salesperson doesn't realize is that, by and large, a sales career is a one-to-one proposition. You do get back what you put in, and if you don't put in much, don't expect much.

No Control with Awareness

The second category of salesperson is someone who has no control but is aware of his problem. These are people who have let personal standards slip over the years, or perhaps never adequately developed them, realizing all the while that there is more that they should be doing in terms of maintaining personal control. The no-control with-awareness salesperson often rationalizes his reasons for skipping steps that would yield an adequate measure of personal control. This person is most susceptible to positive influence — be it from fellow salespersons or from an effective sales seminar or conference. Moreover, the no-control with awareness salesperson who recognizes the situation might wish to plan a regular program of attendance at outside seminars, specialized courses or programs so that his approach to selling always remains fresh and viable. If one's budget is a problem, often a good discussion with and observation of a sales person in control and with-awareness is all that the no-control with awareness salesperson needs to get on or back on track. Scott Gerber, a southern California-based salesman for The Wine Spectrum, finds that reading good books on salesmanship helped to recharge his batteries and renew his efforts to maintain a high level of personal control. William Leader, a self-employed portrait salesman from Springfield, Mass., engages in long, involved discussions

with fellow salespersons during leisure time to gain a new perspective on maintaining better personal control and effective sales presentations.

Let's look, then, at the last category: the salesperson in control and with awareness.

In Control and with Awareness

The salesperson who is in control and aware knows each day and each week what he will be doing and where. This person takes the time to review sales routes, fully stock the office or car, rehearse presentations, and approach selling in a controlled and effective manner. This salesperson knows that by taking the time to maintain personal control, he is in essence maximizing the effect of presentations and overall use of time.

The effective salesperson is always eager to learn or read about a successful sales strategy. Also, he recognizes that the time invested in keeping the car tuned up, the files in shape, and the wardrobe spiffy, pays dividends in many ways. The salesperson in control and with awareness welcomes luck but doesn't count on it. He knows that a well-executed, sustained sales effort is still the best road to high earnings. This person long ago determined the ratio of sales to sales calls and thus is intimately familiar with how many calls need to be made on average to achieve a desired end. The salesperson in control with awareness relies upon previous notes and reporting logs as valuable sources of market information as well as for income tax and expense reimbursement purposes.

Does it take extra time and effort to become a salesperson in control and with awareness? There is no question that it does. Moreover, the initial time required to achieve control may, to the previously undisciplined, seem inordinate. But is the payoff worth it? Yes, it is. Find a salesperson in control and with awareness and ask them.

Oh yeah, and after you've asked, be ready to take a lot of notes! □