

Good Habits are Hard to Break

Occasionally, I have the opportunity to reflect when preparing some material for a newsletter or a presentation. This morning presented such an opportunity as I was flying out to the East Coast for a group of presentations on time effectiveness for sales professionals and business leaders. While standing in the endless lines, sitting in the airline terminal waiting for the plane to board, and again waiting until we reached cruising altitude, I made some notes of everything that I had done thus far in the day.

Today, not unlike many others, I had a flight that left just past noon for business back east beginning tomorrow. As an additional piece of information, I had just returned from a four day trip at noon yesterday. So the “turnaround” was quick. All of this means that I had a bunch of things to do in a short period of time. This is what my morning looked like:

5:00am--Up Early—Get the Worm!

Rarely an option, this particular habit can and does create at least 120 minutes of additional productivity (or down time) for any professional. I call the time between 5:00am and 7:00am *my golden 120!*

5:20am-6:00am—Exercise (3 mile run today)

Tough to *get into* and easy to *fall out of*, this habit of 40-60 minutes of exercise in the morning provides the fuel for a very productive day! I never can *find the time* to do this so I have to schedule it. I have also found that if it doesn't get done first thing, it rarely makes its way into the schedule.

6:10am-6:40am---Review the MUST-Dos for the day/week

Every day begins with a cup of coffee and a review of what HAS TO be done! There are often many things on the to-do list but only a few on the NO EXCEPTION list. Often these things are driven by upcoming engagements, client expectations (set by me), pending travel schedule, or scheduled programs.

Today I had a few things that needed to occur before getting on that plane:

- Read homework assignments and prepare training materials for 2 upcoming multi-day presentations. (Both in Denver)
- Speak to 2 clients (one in FL—one in OH) regarding desired results and content for 2 upcoming full-day workshops. Write subsequent material outlines for each.
- Complete and email proposal for a series of Value-Add regional workshops for a recent “keynote” client.
- Respond to several (24) “coach client” emails.
- Book tee-time for two Top 100 Golf Courses for next week in South Carolina.

6:40am-7:00am—Current Events

It is my belief that every day should be partly dedicated to familiarizing yourself with the world around you. A 20 minute scan of the headlines of the day (without getting caught up on the recent American Idol gossip or what is going on with Brad Pitt, Britney Spears,

or Oprah) can be very important to your ability to converse and add value. I prefer to do this online at MSN.com to keep it all succinct and focused.

7:00am-8:30am—Family Time (My most important 90 minutes today.)

Because I have an office in my home, it is very easy to disappear for the entire day behind my glass French doors and disregard the reason why I do all of this; my family. Anything that is worth your attention needs to get on the schedule. That's why I shut off the business and re-engage when the house is coming to life with the kids and my wife.

My teenager (my God, how did she get that old) is usually getting ready to head out the door so spending a few minutes with her to discuss her week and talk about her life is important. I figure I only have a handful of years left to do this so I cannot miss too many while I am home. She needs to know that Dad loves her and cares about her ever-changing life.

My younger daughter is just getting up at that point due to a school start time of 9:00am. (Must be nice) We get the occasional chance to have a smoothie together at the local Jamba Juice before school. This is a great time to simply *listen* to all of the things going on in her world and to show her that I care. I love these "dates."

Through all of this, I get to get my young son up and going for the day. There is something truly grounding about spending a bit of focused time wrestling and laughing with him in the morning. He helps me get my bags packed for the trip and we talk about him taking care of the girls and the dog while I am gone. I wonder if he looks forward to this time as much as I do.

Why spend this much "real-estate" on my newsletter on my morning ritual with my kids? Two reasons: First of all, it's my newsletter and I tend to write what interests me and second, the message here is that, regardless of the depth of my schedule, I need to make sure that I keep my priorities in check. I get up early for ME time. After 7:00am, my time belongs to everyone else. You do get this don't you? My family is the most important customer that I have. Making sure that they know this is my number one priority!

8:30am-10:30am—Client Calls and Return Emails

Having a clear purpose for each of the calls that I need to make helps each one stay focused and "on point." It is very easy to get caught up in additional dialogue and small talk (golf) on many calls. Going into each one with a clear agenda and stating such at the outset of the call can save you 15-20 minutes per call. Therefore, a 3-minute exercise before each call identifying and bullet pointing the purpose for the call and the main issues needing coverage is imperative.

Keeping each email as focused and succinct as possible without showing indifference can sometimes be a challenge. However, given the option between reading a three page email or a three sentence email, I'll choose the latter—wouldn't you? I suggest liberal use of bullets and numbering in your email reserving the right for the recipient to go deeper with you via telephone on the points that matter most.

Every contact today seems to require an additional follow-up contact doesn't it? A phone call typically should be followed up by a recap email. An email sometimes needs to have

a phone conversation or personal visit attached soon afterwards. My suggestion on this is to immediately schedule or *attack* the follow-up initiative. If a confirmation or recap email must be sent, do it as soon as you hang up. If you promised to send something, immediately do it or delegate it. If you need to talk to follow up an email, immediately call or schedule a visit.

10:30-12:00 Noon---Build the Business

Every day needs to include some action that looks forward and loads the top of your sales pipeline. For me, just like any sales professional or business leader, these things take on many forms. Here are few examples from my morning today:

- Coaching—Each of my coaches got a 10 minute call from me today which focused on 3 things: 1-A “check in” on current state of their book of business and personal lives, 2-a “look over the shoulder” at the initiatives that they have engaged in over the past week, (I like to act as an alarm clock for promised action items) and 3-a look ahead to initiatives for the upcoming week. I will have a tendency to add to these.

In these calls, I like to ask their opinions and listen to feedback. I consistently work to develop a communication habit in each of them that provides me information, situations, challenges, issues, and opportunities from each in a succinct manner. I figure that if I have to ask for it or direct it, I shouldn't be paying to get it from them!

- Offer a referral. One of the best ways to build a business is to help as many people around you build theirs. I learned a long time ago to keep on the referrer's hat as much as you can. Because I meet so many people and have more opportunity than the average cat to be a matchmaker, I work hard to do so---by design. Today, I offered two prospective clients a referral for potential business. In a world where vendors and sales reps are consistently on the prowl for what they can GET, I prefer to be on the prowl for what I can GIVE. (The GET part usually tends to follow!)
- ASK for Business! We are all in the selling profession. I find that those who *help their customers do business with them---help them buy---*typically are the ones with the healthiest business. I have an event coming up in several weeks that I have designed and built specifically for Sales Managers. One of the biggest issues that I hear from manufacturers is that they wish the rep agencies, with whom they contract, would do a better job in their coaching and managing. I contacted several of the manufacturers with whom I have done business, over the past two years, and offered a “sponsorship” program that would allow their rep agency managers to attend a workshop at a pre-determined discount arranged by the manufacturer. This allows them to look like proactive winners, allows the rep agencies access to a program that they would not have known about, increases the management effectiveness of the attendees, and in theory, increases sales and profits for both. Oh yeah, it allows me access to a new group, outside of my network, and helps me to sell a few seats as well.

Every day, salespeople need to figure out new and effective ways to help prospects and customers do business with them. Just as important, they need to continually offer up these ideas and ASK for the business.

- Touch ‘Em-Selling is a contact sport! Every day, there are things going on in your client’s businesses that can and do affect you. In every encounter that you have with a customer, there lies the seed for the purpose of tomorrow’s call. These people are not always the ones that write the checks but often can play a role in furthering or killing your future opportunity. A few of these examples were in play for me today. In one, a member of the sales management force of a current client of mine recently was having some issues with competitors aggressively recruiting her salespeople. Although we had a 20 minute conversation/coaching session regarding this issue a few weeks ago, I felt it was appropriate to follow up to see how things were playing out. In this case, I did not make the call myself. I had the coach on that account make the call. Why? If it was important enough to discuss three weeks ago, it should be important enough to follow up on today. I am quite sure that the client has had to deal with it extensively over the past few weeks. Zig Ziglar once said, “They don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care!”

In a second example, I simply followed up with a past client’s sales manager to find out how the final interview went with a new company that was pursuing him. Although he was not a decision maker at the previous company, he will eventually be one at this new firm. Makes sense to stay in touch?

I also sent out three copies of an article on recruiting top talent to two separate prospective clients and one existing client.

I also contacted a business colleague in Alabama and sent him information on an upcoming Smart Selling workshop. In the email, I expressed my desire to have 75-100 people at the event. Being well connected in the region, I suggested that, if he were to assist me in accomplishing that goal, I would treat him to join me after the workshop for a few days of golf in one of three destinations that I offered. (All destinations within driving distance of his city with golf courses in the Top 100 that I desire to play in order to stay on track with a 10 year goal to play them all.)
- Take ACTION on one good idea! One thing is for certain: there is no shortage of good ideas out there. In my business, that rings very true. Unfortunately, many ideas never leave that stage and if they do, it rarely gets beyond the concept stage in a conversation. I find that, with me, unless I take some sort of immediate action (usually delegated to my ROCKSTAR assistant) the idea never gets off the ground. As an example today, I was thinking about my product offerings. While doing so, I was downloading a digital book into my iPod for some “learning on the run” (I often listen to these while running). I was struck with the ease of use that some technology provides. Apple has truly changed the way that we think about this kind of “stuff” with the advent of iTunes and the iPod. I happen to offer several programs in audio format. The technology that I employ to do this initially is the telephone. I have run several teleseminar events that are now available on audio CD and I record a program called Coach Calls twice monthly that is also accessible via the telephone. All Coach Calls are also archived on my website at www.CoachCalls.com for access by all Coach Call subscribers. As a product offering, I thought it would be cool to offer an iPod LOADED with over 75 Coach Calls (about 20-25 minutes each) and over 25 Teleseminar programs

(about 60-75 minutes) for the zealot workshop attendee! If anyone could take that much of me, the iPod itself would become an invaluable tool for the selling success of it's owner. Talk about training at the push of a button! I have my assistant digging into this project so don't be surprised if there is an email in your box soon introducing the Coach in a Pod! (PPOD in a Pod)

So, let's recap shall we? In a matter of one 8-hour period (sounds like a work day doesn't it?) I engaged in some of the habits that we all should as sales professionals:

- Get up early---it gives you a leg up on the competition
- Exercise---Fuel yourself for the day
- Work on MUST DO stuff first, not last!
- Get current/get relevant/read---if all you bring to the table is your product, all they want to know is price.
- Make time for the family EVERY DAY---Your Most Important Customers!
- Have a purpose for every call before you make it.
- Take follow-up action *immediately!*
- Always think about what's in front of you—build the business!
- Schedule time every day to Coach your partners in success.
- Referrals—look to give at least one a day---matchmakers are never lonely.
- Find creative ways every day to ask for the business—help them buy!!
- Touch at least 5 people every day with value and care.
- Take action on one idea every month—you'll be amazed what you can do!

That's a good starting list. I did not actually sit down at the beginning of the day today and put each of these activities into a calendar under the headings that you just read. In fact, most of these initiatives occurred as part of a daily ritual that I like to call work. They happened because they are the habits of a sales professional. If each of the above steps don't appear *natural* to you, that's OK! They were not natural, years ago, to me or to the thousands of sales professionals and business leaders out there who dive into these things (and more) every day. They are all learned habits. Pick two or three of these and integrate them into your day and watch what happens.

As a final note, I have briefly observed several dozen people today on the two flights I have been on. I have also had two conversations with people who asked why I appeared to be so busy. After explaining that I had a regular newsletter that needed publishing, I realized that I simply had another habit. Even though I spent a combination of about 8-9 hours today in airports or in the air, today is a work day....and, to quote the title of a recent book I read by Larry Winget, "It's Called WORK for a Reason!"