

Denver Business Journal - December 17, 2007

<http://denver.bizjournals.com/denver/stories/2007/12/17/smallb4.html>

DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, December 14, 2007

Accountability may be most important attribute

Denver Business Journal - by [Garry Duncan](#)

Are sales leaders born with selling instincts or do they learn the skills that make them successful? The answer is yes -- to both.

No one is born with all the attributes they need in life, and learning is critical to success. The attributes common to top sellers include interpersonal skills, goal orientation, self-management and personal accountability. The last one may be the most important.

Personal accountability isn't something you can give to someone. It has to come from within. In a culture that somehow implies everyone is entitled to a successful career, top commission, equal territories and the good life, personal accountability can take a beating.

Add the stress of multiple demands pulling you in different directions due to information overload. It's easy to see how blame can become a good friend.

Top performers know there's only one person responsible for their success or failure, and they readily accept the consequences of their actions. The art of making excuses is their least-developed skill, and they use failures as lessons to grow and become better sellers.

There are four ways to keep personal accountability strong and working for you: understanding risk, not becoming a casualty, keeping irrational beliefs under control and developing an unwavering commitment to goals.

- Top sellers understand that risk opens them up to failure. It means taking action in the face of fear and is uncomfortable. We're not talking about impulsive, off-the-chart risk, but taking reasonable risks to be successful in selling.

Inability to take risk shows up in a lot of ways. If you experience a pattern of procrastination, fear of rejection, need to be right, need to provide a litany of excuses or have a high need for approval, you're avoiding risk so much that it's affecting your success.

Chronic complaining is one of the biggest symptoms of risk avoidance. People complain because they believe something else is better or there's a better way to do something. Logically, if something or some way is better, why not take action to do it or get it? The answer is because complaining is easy, but taking action is risky. Risk takes time and energy, and offers the possibility of failure.

Evaluate risk by considering best- and worst-case scenarios. If you can't live with the worst case,

don't take the risk. What is the worst-case scenario of making a new contact or asking for a decision?

- Being accountable for your actions means not being a casualty. Casualties are victims of events outside their control. Recognizing victim statements is easy because they usually start with, "If only ... " or "Because of ... "

Redefine external events by changing internal language to "what" and "how" questions such as, "What can I do ... ?" or "How can I accomplish ... ?" Using these questions, you redefine the problem, moving you from a position of being powerless to taking control of your power and using it to succeed.

- Identify your irrational beliefs and control them before they control you. Irrational beliefs are attitudes, values and opinions we believe -- without evidence -- to be true about a situation. They can be external or internal, meaning they could be something we believe about ourselves or about a product, market, company or industry.

They prevent us from taking risk and accepting change to move forward. Believing it's not permissible to make a mistake or that there's only one way to do something or that something new will not work are examples of common irrational beliefs. Make sure there's evidence to support these types of beliefs. Your beliefs are critically important to recognize because they affect your actions, emotions and thinking.

- Commitment requires taking action in the face of fear, being vulnerable, risking failure and possibly feeling self-doubt. It means having an unwavering commitment to specific goals, and staying committed and tenacious in the face of adversity, regardless of previous success or failure.

Some great examples in history:

Abraham Lincoln is famous for his unwavering commitment to hold the Union together. Winston Churchill is known for his commitment to win World War II while facing defeat almost daily.

The dichotomy is that one of the greatest benefits of selling is the freedom to manage ourselves, and the reason it's so hard to have unwavering commitment to goals is because they take away freedom and hold us accountable.

Hold yourself accountable and make the commitment to those goals.

Jimmy Johnson, coach of the Dallas Cowboys Super Bowl champions for two years, said, "Do you want to be safe and good, or do you want to take a chance and be great?"

Top sellers understand risk, aren't casualties, discard self-limiting beliefs and commit to their goals. In short, your best ally is always staying personally accountable for your own success and failures.

Garry Duncan, principal of Denver-based Leadership Connections, a sales training company, can be reached at 303-462-1277 or garry@leadershipconnections.com.

All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.