

Choice, Commitment and Confidence

By
Frank Salisbury

We choose to go to the moon in this decade, and do the other things, not because they are easy but because they are hard. J.F.Kennedy

Choice

Life is all about choices. Salespeople choose to be successful or to fail. We have the choice to be successful, but many people wouldn't recognise it as choice even if it ran them down in the street. The problem is when faced with the choice to be successful or not most people choose not to. How do I know? Well if we accept that all human beings have choice, and they choose to be successful, why are more people not as successful as they want to be?

This is where I hear people say, *'ah yes, but you see I don't actually have any choice over the direction of my life. I'd like to be more successful, but I've got this mortgage hanging around my neck, and my credit card's up to the limit. I'd do something about being successful but it might have to wait awhile, you see I've got responsibilities. My children are going through school and the cat died yesterday.'*

For most people the easiest thing to do when faced with choice is to do nothing.

Some time ago I was watching a recording of a Jean Michel Jarre concert in Houston, Texas. It was very impressive. It was an open air concert, and they reckon, and I can well believe it, that there were a million people there watching, live. Incredible! The concert wasn't just music, but a vast laser show. He and the rest of the band were on top of one of the skyscrapers while lasers were throwing pictures over a number of other skyscrapers. It was absolutely amazing, and it must have taken a lifetime to plan.

Some of the pictures thrown up were of old newsreels of past events relating in particular to Houston. The whole purpose of the event was to celebrate the forming of the state of Texas. One of those newsreels stopped me in my tracks. It was John F Kennedy.

Now we all have heroes. From all sorts of walks of life and occupations. Mine are people like George Best and Jimmy Connors in the world of sport; Rocks stars like - Eric Clapton and Bob Dylan; and great comedians like Tommy Cooper. Alongside these and you might think strange company one of my greatest political heroes was John F Kennedy. I suppose they are all part of what you might call the sixties culture.

They say that everybody who was around at the time of Kennedy's assassination can remember exactly where they were and what they were doing at that time. I suppose like many others I was very shocked by the assassination, and that is what made me take particular notice when I saw a clip of him speaking:

What he said was:

"We choose to go to the moon in this decade, and do the other things, not because they are easy but because they are hard."

It made me think about why we do the things we do. In our lives and at work. Here was a statement that seemed to sum up a lot of my own beliefs on motivation.

We choose to do things in a particular way because they are difficult, not easy. That fits in perfectly with all major theories of motivation that the real satisfaction comes from having done something that was difficult, and not from doing things that are easy.

Those people who are achievers seem to do things in the most complicated ways rarely taking the easy route. Just because someone climbed Everest did not stop others risking their lives to find a more difficult route to the top.

What about those people who compete in triathlons? Swimming, cycling, and running are on their own difficult enough to excel at, but these athletes do them all on the same day in the same race.

Some people give up secure jobs, doing the same thing for themselves, struggling for many years in the process. The easiest way to survive would be to keep working for the same employer, so why do it? What is it about the people who enjoy success in life that they seem to choose the most difficult path?

There is another quotation that also makes a lot of sense. It's from Samuel Smiles in his book *Self Help*¹ which I referred to before. Some 130 years ago he said: -

"Its not ease, but difficulty that makes men"

For great people, those with vision, with confidence, with dreams and ambitions, the choice is always to do what is difficult. It is usually the right thing to do, in that nothing that is worthwhile ever comes easy.

Kennedy spoke of choosing to go to the moon - instead of doing what? The easiest thing to do is to do nothing. In fact in many situations and companies today doing nothing is seen as a viable choice. We can do a) b) c) or d) which is to do nothing. It is not surprising that having put down 'to do nothing' as a choice on the agenda, that nothing is quite often chosen.

That's all right provided that you fully understand that it is still a choice and that there are consequences attached to all choices. Unfortunately doing nothing is the great malaise of the twentieth century and may result in the total slow down of human achievement in the 21st.

The field of human endeavour is littered with the history of the consequences of people choosing to do nothing and ending up paying a far greater price than they would have, had they chose to do something. Dictators come to power because people choose to do nothing - saying and justifying to themselves that nothing could be done. Disasters often occur because people did nothing to prevent them - usually explaining it away as an act of God. The problem is that doing nothing requires less energy.

The choice is ours and it is important to understand that there is a choice and that we have it. You have a choice to be successful or not. It may not have been a conscious choice staying where you are. Failure to achieve a goal may not have meant you consciously choosing not to - but you did make a choice nonetheless.

¹ *Self Help*. Samuel Smiles. Penguin. 1986

Having a choice is what makes us human. Life, especially in the 20th century has sold us the idea that we do not have choices or that at least there's no reason why we should exercise our choice.

Western civilisation is full of rules, regulations and instructions that from early childhood appear to teach us that it is better to do as you are told than to choose not to. Choice becomes something which is negative and choosing to do something different from what we are told to do or conditioned to do seems sometimes to be subversive.

If everybody who had ever been had chosen to do nothing then we'd still be living in caves.

We are conditioned to believe that we have little choice or indeed need little choice. In the welfare states of the western economy Big Brother makes all the decisions, provided we follow the rules.

I have to get up in the morning, I have to go to work, and I do as I am told. I cross the road on green I stop when red shows, I don't park on double yellow lines. If you analysed all the things you do in a day which are as a result of someone else making decisions and choices on your behalf you would begin to realise how easy it is to slip into a way of life that divorces you from the decision making processes. This divorce from the need to make decisions also has a detrimental effect on your ability to make choices. It is so easy to slip into habits. Habits which are formed not consciously through choice but through conditioning. That's why so many people later in life look back and ask themselves "*Just what have I achieved?*"

For many it is a painful process and best left under wraps. For some, a small minority, it unsettles them and they decide to do something about it. A small number of people they make the decision to take charge of their lives. To choose the course of their lives and to accept responsibility for the direction.

That does not mean that you have to be rebellious. It does not mean that you stand everything on its head and say "*OK from here on in no more doing as I am told, no more following instructions*" For one thing it could land you into a lot of trouble. When a red light shows I know I have the choice to stop or to go. You might say there is no choice. Red means stop. If you go you could cause an accident. You could be arrested. It would be a stupid thing to do, and I agree. But that's not the point. Understanding that you have a choice means that you also accept the consequences of that choice.

If the red light shows I choose to obey it. It is not the red light that makes me stop it is my choice. That's an important lesson. It is not the red light that stops me it is me - me and the choice I make.

In the morning I choose to get up and work. I make a conscious choice because I want to. I work because I want to achieve, because I enjoy it, because it is a challenge.

Millions of people get up and go to work because they believe they have to, because they believe that they have no choice. The difference between the quality of work and the sense of achievement experienced by the person who decides that they want to work and the person who believes they have to work can be dramatic. The initial result will be the same. Both are at work. One is there however because he wants to be, and the other because he believes he has to be.

Take for example the first day of your holiday. How different do you feel on the first

day of your holiday compared to the first day back at work? When you wake up on the first day of your holiday how tired do you feel? If you had a cold on the first day of your holiday would it stop you getting up?

Does it never strike you how most people are never ill on their holidays. If we all took our yearly holidays in the same month, the NHS could close down and doctors would be able to catch up on the paperwork.

It has nothing to do with anything except the mind. When we are on holiday we choose not to be ill. We exercise our right of choice and decision making. How many weddings fail to go ahead because the bride and groom are ill? How many school concerts are cancelled because the children appearing in the performance are ill? Yes it happens, but once in a blue moon.

The mind is an incredible machine. It can overcome any adversity, it can help us to achieve success beyond our wildest dreams if only we tap into it - if only we accept that we choose what to do with our lives - we choose whether to be successful or not.

Our past and the environment in which we were brought up has an awful lot to do with where we are now. The formative years of our lives from the ages of two to nine probably set out the pattern of the rest of our lives if we let it - if we let it.

Once you accept that you are responsible for the rest of your life then there is no turning back. You can choose to ignore the fact, but you must also accept the consequences of that choice.

It has to be said however that a realisation that you choose to do the things you do is a tremendous step forward in self-esteem and self-image. It is nevertheless difficult to come to terms with. Realising that you choose the course of your life and the events that happen in it also means accepting that you are the one that chooses whether to be where you are now and ultimately you will choose where you will end up.

I read a quote by Dietrich Bonhoeffer not so long ago which said: -

"It is the characteristic excellence of the strong man that he can bring momentous issues to the fore and make decisions about them. The weak are always forced to decide between alternatives they have not chosen themselves".

Just think about that for a moment - the weak are forced to decide between alternatives they have not chosen themselves. For many people life is Hobson's choice - they appear to have none.

C. Northcote Parkinson the author of Parkinson's Law² said that: -

"The man who is denied the opportunity of taking decisions of importance begins to regard as important the decisions he is allowed to take. He becomes fussy about filing, keen on seeing that pencils are sharpened, eager to ensure that the windows are open (or shut) and apt to use two or three different coloured inks".

What sort of choices have you been making lately? Are they important? Have they been difficult, or have you been prepared for others to make the difficult choices about the shape of your life? It's certainly easier that way. Making a choice about the colour of your clothes to wear to work is certainly easier than choosing whether or not to go. Its

² Parkinson's Law. C. Northcote Parkinson. John Murray. London. 1958.
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a lot harder accepting that that very choice in itself could change the way in which you approach the work that you do.

Eric Berne in his book *Games People Play*³ said: -

"Human life is mainly a process of filling in time until the arrival of death, or Santa Claus, with very little choice, if any, of what kind of business one is going to transact during the long wait."

Well I don't know about you, but I feel life should involve a lot more than waiting around for Santa Claus. Make a decision and choose to go to the moon - not because it is easy, but because it is hard - it will be a lot more fun - and you might learn something about yourself on the journey.

Commitment

Many years ago I was listening to a cassette about commitment. For the life of me I can't remember who it was, but I do remember the title - it was called *'Could you do it if your life depended on it?'*

What the speaker was saying was that anyone of us could do anything if our lives depended on it. If it really got down to a matter of life and death, then we could make ourselves do anything. There are many stories of incredible feats of strength or bravery which have ensued as a result of someone's life being at risk. It's amazing what you could force yourself to do if your life depended on it.

The sort of commitment I want discuss is not that drastic but the results can be as dramatic.

In my time in selling I've seen people succeed and I've seen people fail. From time to time I've done both myself. I made a decision some time ago that I wanted to know more about selling. I wanted to find out what made certain salespeople fail, and others succeed. I can't say that I have all the answers but what I do know is that successful salespeople are confident. Not that brash confidence that tends to be associated with selling, but an inner confidence that shines out. I believe that much of that confidence stems from having goals and being committed to achieving them.

Now that sounds very simple - *"Having goals, and being committed to achieving them"* - but it isn't. The reason that it is not so simple is that too many salespeople think that they have goals, and don't understand commitment.

I've heard it said that to be successful in selling you need:-

- Knowledge
- Attitude
- Skills
- Habits

KASH for short. And I'll buy some of that.

What about those with a natural talent though? I don't know anybody that was born a salesperson. In fact the vast majority of people in sales probably don't want to be there. Given the first opportunity most salespeople want to get out of selling. Many make the mistake of thinking that promotion to a sales management position is the first step in

³ Games people play. Eric Berne. Penguin. 1967
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getting out of sales and that's the problem. A lot of people get into management not because they are committed to being a sales manager, but because they are not committed to selling, and that's a fundamental mistake people make. The only way that anyone can be a success at anything, whether they have an eye for the next job or not, is to be totally committed to the current job.

I remember when I was first promoted to an area sales management position. I was twenty three years old and thought I had made it. I told myself that I deserved the promotion. That this was my reward. For the first two years following promotion the euphoria of being a sales manager seemed to carry me through and the team did alright. We kept out of trouble and so far as I was concerned sales management was a lot easier than most people made it out to be. In the third year, things got worse. My top performers left, I lost a couple of important accounts to the competition, and the bottom dropped out of the market. I went through two further years of nightmare putting it right until finally I ended up with the top team in the country. I can't say I enjoyed the bad three year spell, but it did teach me a lot. My problem was that I wasn't committed to success, I thought I already had it. I misunderstood what commitment was all about. I thought having put myself out once, that that was enough. Those people with commitment know that you need to put yourself out all the time. People who are committed never relax, they never switch off. They don't assume that talent alone will get you success.

Even with talent there is a price to be paid, and the price will not be paid if you don't have commitment. The price will be determined by how far you have to go out of your comfort zone. Being committed to success might mean some risk and for most people that's uncomfortable. Those people who are truly successful accept risk as part of the game. If you are not prepared to accept some risk, to move out of your comfort zone then be prepared to fail.

That's alright as long as you don't whine when you see someone else who is prepared to pay a higher price than you end up being more successful. That's the difference, and that's the lesson I learned thirty years ago.

"Oh yes please, I want success" I've heard salespeople say, "but you want me to work on Sunday? You expect me to work every night? Look, I work hard enough during the week. Study? I gave up studying when I left school."

You see it's all a matter of commitment. Most people in selling, are not as totally committed as those who are the most successful. That's the cold stark reality.

Some people expect their current skill to see them through forever. Their attitude is that they have made it and their expectations are limited to the past. I remember watching footballers in the sixties who were just starting to show us their full potential when for some reason they seemed to lose the will and the drive to go on. Their careers were over before they given us the best and we all missed out. It still happens now.

I've seen it time and again in selling. I've seen those salespeople who complain that the boss doesn't motivate them or that there's a recession on or its raining. The only reason for failure is a lack of commitment to succeed.

Commitment means having high expectations of yourself and not relying upon other people to motivate you but realising that most people are really only interested in themselves. That's good news for salespeople, because if you concentrate on other people and help them get what they want, you cannot help but be successful.

It also means that you have to be prepared for people to be suspicious of your motives. For

salespeople the greatest threat to being successful is focusing on failure. More salespeople are trying to avoid failure rather than concentrating on how to be successful. You don't believe me?

Go to any sales conference, attend any huddle of salespeople in a bar, and you will see what I call 'Neg Jamborees'. Groups of salespeople comfortable in the knowledge that selling is awful and everyone else is doing as badly as they are. All of them with the same dream in mind of either joining another company where the grass is greener, being promoted to a management position, or getting a proper job out of sales altogether. The boss is useless, the company stinks, and the products went out with the ark.

These little jamborees are great fun to be at and are very soothing - for a second or two. I challenge you to find the groups of salespeople who are saying *"I love selling - this is a great company, and my boss is a terrific coach"*. That's because they don't go in for '**Neg Jamborees**'. They are somewhere with people like themselves, being successful, spending time with winners, feeding their minds with success, being committed to success.

Part of the commitment you need to make to yourself if you want to be successful is to stop attending '**Neg Jamborees**'. I've trained myself to feel physically ill when I hear people complaining. All I want to do is to get away from them, because I know it's addictive. Once you get hooked on it it's a very difficult habit to break and peer pressure is so great.

If we are really good at selling, we tend to be very sensitive people. We tend to want to be liked. It's hard to walk away from people you work with. It can make you look stand-offish but perhaps it's part of the price that you might have to pay.

If people concentrated as much on being successful as they do on avoiding failure, then there would be many more successful people around.

Whatever you do, don't say *"I want success"*, and then not be prepared to do something about it. It is no good setting goals, if you haven't got commitment. You can't play this game without being committed to the fact that there will be times in the early days when you may get hurt.

Be prepared to put up with a period of rejection. You have to learn how to fail first, then you can learn how to succeed.

Be what you want to be. You've only got one life and you should seek to do the best with it that you possibly can.

Whatever you want to be, accept that there is a price to be paid, but maybe the price isn't as bad as you thought in comparison to the reward.

One of the problems with getting what you want is getting it too soon. Getting off to a flying start is okay but you need to be aware that sometimes the bubble bursts. It is important that if it happens to you, you take it in your stride. Nothing that is really worth achieving happens without some pain at sometime. Get used to the idea though, that it happens to everybody. We all get hurt sometimes, we all have to face rejection, and we all come through it, and usually we are better people because of the experience. Given the choice, we would rather not have had the bad experiences which happen to us, but there is some inevitability to it.

It is the same in selling. If you want to be successful in selling then understand that it will happen to you at some time or another. Life tends to give out some pretty heavy doses of good and bad. Sometimes it seems like it is all bad, and sometimes it seems like it is all

good. The worst to cope with are the bad times, they seem longer. In reality it's usually 50-50.

The test for you is when times are bad. Some people give up. When it is bad they sink to the bottom and stay there. When everything is going well, that's great. Everything looks good and life is rosy. The real test of your commitment is to come through the bad times, and have the will to do something about the situation and get back to the good times. How many people do you know who are going through the bad times, and aren't happy to be there on their own? They want you to join them and keep them company.

What you have to realise is that it is all part of the game.

All life can give you is the opportunity. It is up to the individual, it is up to you to take that opportunity. You are in charge of your life, you've got the opportunity. The selling world is full of people who knock it because they are not prepared to pay the price. Believe in what you are doing and what you are selling, and commit yourself to being successful at it, or ask yourself "*Wouldn't you be better off doing something else?*"

We all have the golden opportunity to do what we want to do, and be who we want to be, because there exist opportunities and situations to help us overcome problems.

The dictionary defines commitment as an obligation undertaken, a responsibility. It is like entering into a contract with yourself and it needs to be binding.

You need to find a way to make that commitment binding with yourself. One way is to share it with someone close to you. Tell them what it is you want to achieve and by when. Make it formal. Write it down. If you have a diary at work, put your commitment on each page at the start of each week. Do it for the whole year then every time you turn the page to the next week - there it is. At the bottom of each alternate page write the words - "*Have you done it yet?*"

Accept the responsibility for your life and your own actions. Those people who have commitment know that success is down to them. They have a contract with themselves which says "My life and the successes and failures that come my way are down to me".

Look at yourself in the mirror. It might not be a pretty sight first thing in the morning but it is a good way to start the day just before you go to work.

Say to yourself "*I intend to be the best that I can possibly be today*". If you can say it out loud so much the better.

It's a good idea to write this phrase down on a card and keep it in your pocket - "*I intend to be the best I can possibly be today*".

If things are not going so well and the Negs have got to you, take the card out and read it. If you can find a mirror to say it to that's even better.

When you start doing this it might seem foolish. We are not very good at giving ourselves a mental boost. I can guarantee however, that within three weeks you will be able to do it naturally and that you will feel better, act more confidently, and will be committing yourself towards success.

This process alone will give you increased expectations of yourself that will open up a whole new world of achievement.

Expect to succeed and you will. Commit yourself to success and it will happen.

A warning. Just thinking about it will not make it happen. Those who are committed to success realise that thinking about success, concentrating on winning is important - but it is only the first step. Commitment means doing something about it.

Success in selling means committing yourself to activity of the sort that will bring you into close contact with clients. It means accepting the rejection that will initially come your way. It is however only temporary. People like to do business with people they feel are committed to their well-being. People like to do business with people they perceive are winners. People like to do business with people who look as though they know what they are doing and know where they are going.

Commit yourself to success and it will happen - but more importantly commit yourself to doing something about it? What are you going to commit yourself to today that move you closer to where you want to be?

The important thing is to never give up. Persistence is the winner's edge. In industries where cold canvassing is the norm, it has been shown that 80% of all new sales are made after the fifth call to the same prospect. 48% of all salespeople make one call and cross off the prospect. 25% quit after the second call. 12% of all salespeople call three times and then quit. Only 10% of all salespeople keep calling. You have to decide which side of the percentage barrier you want to operate on.

Confidence

Before you meet a customer, how confident are you that the conversation will go the way you want it to? The chances are that if you are unsure of yourself the customer will dominate the meeting, and that's true of any face to face encounter.

So how do you stay in control? How do you adopt that confident stance that seems to be the hallmark of those who are successful? Are people successful because they are confident, or are they confident because they are successful? It's a conundrum.

In selling, if you want to be successful, you have to believe that each sales presentation will be successful. That seems quite a reasonable assumption, but you must have been on sales calls before when you were not sure. The thing is, it really is pointless going on any sales call unless you are convinced that you will be successful.

I really have got enough other problems of my own without acquiring more by going on sales calls where I'm not sure whether I am going to be successful or not. You might call that confidence - I call it common sense.

Customers buy from confident people. We are all drawn to confident people. What you don't realise is that the very act of endowing others with confidence makes them confident. Let me run that by you again.

By believing others are confident they become confident - it's called the self-fulfilling prophecy. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that managers who have positive expectations of their people and can transmit that positive expectation influence the performance of their teams.

In a well recorded study in a school⁴, a group of teachers were told that a small number of

⁴ Productivity and the self-fulfilling prophecy. J. L. Single. Management World. November. 1980.
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children in their classes had been identified as potential high achievers. The teachers were asked not to influence the study, but that within twelve months the children would be getting higher results than their classmates. As it turned all of the identified children scored significantly higher in the end of term examinations than those not previously identified as high achievers. The startling thing about the results was that the students had been picked at random. The only things that made them higher achievers were the positive expectations of them transmitted by the teachers. The teachers were mortified. There have been other numerous examples of this phenomenon.

If positive expectations can work between manager and subordinate, teacher and student, then it can work for you. If other people believe you are confident, it will make you confident. Parents who have high expectations of their children without the pressure normally associated with parent-child relationships will deliver a high performance.

How can you therefore receive high expectations from other people? How can you influence others to believe you are confident? The important thing is to act confidently. It is a first major step. You might not feel confident inside but it is what you display outside that matters in the early stages. Later on, after others have endowed you with confidence you will also feel confident on the inside.

Have you ever been moved by a film, or a play and been moved emotionally? When you have seen something being acted that gave you those feelings, did you say to yourself *'This is just an act'*? I doubt it. Have you ever seen an actor being interviewed and thought to yourself - 'They look and sound different to the way they were in that film'? Of course you have, and yet for a while it throws you. We endow people with attributes and personalities based upon how they behave, not based upon how they are. We also put people into pigeon holes. When people are put in positions of authority, we assume that they are confident, and we treat them as though they are. A series of studies into charismatic leadership during the seventies and eighties proved that confidence and charisma is attached to leaders sometimes as a result of the authority they hold, not because they are confident or charismatic. The incredible thing is however, that that labelling by followers, often results in those leaders becoming more confident and charismatic.

Becoming confident does not involve major surgery. It won't mean growing another head. When you look at those who are confident they aren't necessarily taller, better looking, or have distinguishable attributes. It seems to come from the inside.

All the activity and attributes of confidence come from within. It takes place inside your head.

Saying to yourself regularly *"I am confident. I am positive. I am a success"* will help. Say it often enough and it will happen.

Confidence cannot be bought, borrowed or stolen. It's already there, only for a lot of people, they have mislaid the key. The key is your mind. The good news is that you can train your mind to give you messages of confidence.

You have to begin by visualising exactly what it is you want to do, or say, or achieve. Imagine yourself doing it. Imagine the feeling of success. If you want to make a speech but are fearful of standing up in front of an audience, play it through in your mind a number of times first. Visualise yourself walking out onto the stage. Hear the applause as you are introduced. Imagine people in the audience looking forward to your speech. Listen to yourself making a few ice-breaker comments as you put the audience at ease, and their laughter and applause. See yourself confidently controlling the audience.

It is this visualisation of the positive effect of your actions that will make you feel confident when the event actually happens. Practising in your mind is the next best thing to practising in reality. In China some time after the Cultural Revolution a party of foreign dignitaries were entertained by a pianist who played a repertoire of classical music to them without fault which was as good as anything the visitors had heard in the West. Their guide confided to them some time later that the pianist had been in solitary confinement for the last six years as part of the regime's crackdown on foreign art and culture. During her confinement the pianist had not had access to a piano. Each day for six years she played the piano in her head.

It goes without saying that continuous practice coupled with coaching makes for excellence in performance. You'll notice I didn't say a perfect performance. You need to get it straight in your mind that there can be no perfect performance. You do not have to live up to a perfect performance and the perfect score is always there to aim for. The pressure of having to live up to a perfect performance can be destructive, but as a goal it is worth continually striving for.

In the search for confidence I believe it is worth looking at the three kinds of confidence that probably apply to most of us:-

1. Confidence in the organisation you work for, or the company you run.
2. Confidence in the products or services you sell, and
3. Self-confidence.

Lets start with confidence in your company.

Is there another company that you would rather be working for? Have you heard about another company that looks after its employees better than yours? Are you always looking through the papers looking for a company that will offer you a better deal? Are you underpaid and over-worked? Is your boss taking advantage of you? Do you think that you should telling other people in the company what to do instead of the other way around? Do you strongly disagree with the company's policies? Is there something about the company that sometimes makes you feel unsure about others that you work for them? Do you think that there is a better company to work for?

Its not easy is it? But if you do think that the company you are working for is not as good as another company, and if you are serious about being successful, then you had better work for somebody else, or work for yourself. Unless you can answer these questions positively, unless you believe that you are working for the best company and that you want them to succeed and that you accept that not everyone is perfect, then you will not succeed. If you are not confident about your company then you will not be able to convince other people to buy from them. Remember, you are merely a facilitator of buying situations. You are the catalyst between your company and the customer. The sale you make is you. The pre-requisite is that you believe that your company is the best.

If you believe that the company is holding you back then leave. If you cannot agree with the company's policies then leave - or try to do something about it. However, when you reach the end of the road and have to face the fact that the company will not change its policies then either accept them totally, or leave. You cannot win a European Cup Winners Medal by playing in the third division.

Do you believe that the company as it is today has the right climate for your success? Most people never ask themselves this question for fear of the answer. In order to be successful, in order to get to feeling confident, you have to be confident about the company you work for. That does not mean that you blame the company for your lack of success. In any

company there are those that are succeeding. No matter how you think they are doing it, or what grievance you have, if there are people in your company succeeding then the reason why you are not has nothing to do with the company but has to do with you.

Perhaps this realisation in itself will help you to come to terms with yourself and the company. If not, for the sake of your self-respect, your peers, and the welfare of that company, then you should find somewhere else to work.

It is important for your own confidence to feel confident about the organisation you work for. Find out as much as you can about it. Study its history, its aims, and its performance. Make it your company. Self-employed people who are successful have no problem with company image. There is a lesson to be learned by those working for companies. Treat it as though it were your own business. Stop whining about things you cannot influence and concentrate on doing what is possible. Stop complaining about other people in the company and concentrate on your own performance. Stop taking part in discussions with other people about what is wrong with the company and talk to people who believe that most of the things about the company are positive. You will never be successful within your company if you are not confident about it.

Secondly how confident are you about the company's products and services? Do you believe that there are better products somewhere else? Do you believe that someone else is able to offer people a better service? Are you not sure about what you are selling? Is there something about the products and services you are selling that makes you feel uncomfortable? In the back of your mind are you looking forward to the time when you will be selling something else or perhaps get out of the front line in selling to do something else? Are you proud to tell people at home about the things you sell? Do you think that your products are too expensive? Is someone else's product range more attractive? Do you believe that if only you had the best products you would be more successful? Are you convinced that if you find the best product for the cheapest price it would make you more successful?

Dream on. Those people who are successful believe in their product and services. They totally understand that there is no such thing as cheap and quality. Every product and every service has its strengths and weaknesses. The difference in selling is the salesperson and that is you. You have to believe in what you are selling and in the range you have. If you do not have confidence in your service then the client is also entitled to doubt both it and you. I simply cannot understand anybody selling a product range they do not believe in. A pre-requisite of success in selling is confidence in your products and services.

Having a lot of confidence in your company and the products and services it sells helps. Another thing is to take charge of your life and to accept responsibility for your success. Most people sail through life going where the wind takes them. Every so often they stand up and look around, they rock the boat a little, and for a while it might change direction, but then they sit down again, and its not long before its on the same old course.

The winners, those who are confident, are not happy to wait for things to happen. They are not happy to let the wind of fortune take them along. They have confidence in their own ability, to tack against the wind and to plot their own course. Now anybody who sails the boat of life has got the basic ability to take charge of the course of their journey. Few do anything about it. The difference between those with confidence and those without it is determination - the will to win.

What I do not understand about some people is, if they don't expect to win, then why take part. There's a saying that goes, its playing the game that counts, not winning". Don't believe it. It's a myth put out by losers. There's a lot of them and they need to feel

comfortable about losing so they try to get you to believe that losing is OK. It's not.

What would happen if you were part of team and you were in a final game to win the cup. Just before the game you said to the manager "Listen, I just thought I'd let you know that I'm going to go out there to enjoy myself. I'm not bothered whether we win or not, I'm just pleased to be here. If we lose we lose. It's playing the game that's important after all. Having said that I'm going to try really hard".

Do you think the manager would be best pleased with that situation?

Look at your own situation. You are in selling. If you don't want to win, then why play?

In life there is no middle road. There are winners and there are losers. Everyone remembers the winners nobody remembers losers. More importantly, you have to live with yourself.

Without determination you will never be a winner. You have to believe that you will succeed and that requires energy and determination. You see it time and time again in football, golf, and tennis. The outsider who believes that they will win, and the favourite who believes that they just need to turn up. When they meet, the one with the greatest determination wins. Sometimes the outsider loses confidence just before the match. They talk themselves out of it. They have the skill, they lack the determination. Their attitude is wrong. On a level playing field with two people or teams of equal strength and skills, the one with greater determination will always win.

You might say that the people with the greatest talent win, but they don't. Challengers also have talent, otherwise they wouldn't be there. It's a matter of practise. Those with determination practise most. Practising your skills produces confidence in your ability. Practising in your mind produces confidence in the real event. Physically practising reinforces that confidence.

Without doubt the greatest contributor to self-confidence is practise. Those that are the most successful in any chosen walk of life are those who have had the greatest amount of practise. People who are determined to succeed understand that without practise they could not hope to succeed. Practise gives you the confidence to succeed in the real event. Those people who are at the top of their professional careers, careers which involve verbal and non-verbal skills, spend 100 times longer in practise than they do in delivering those skills in reality. They treat the practise sessions as real, and when it comes to the live performance are able to deliver of their best. How long do you spend in role play before each call?

Confidence comes through belief in your company and the products and services it sells. Confidence in yourself comes though using the knowledge you have of your company and its products and using your skills on the practise field before going onto the final.

SELF ESTEEM AND SELF IMAGE

The level of your personal success in selling will be determined by the level of your self image or self confidence. Confidence in your own ability will ultimately determine success in personal selling.

Let me give you an analogy about the importance of confidence. If you have ever played poker or any card game involving money, and in Casinos, chips, you will know that many elements of card games and this sort of scenario are determined by bluff or confidence. For example, if I start with 100 chips and you start with 10 chips then it is highly likely that you will play much more conservatively than I. We may begin with

the same level of talent but my confidence is greatly enhanced by the knowledge that I can play with a great deal more freedom than you. By raising the stakes by 20 chips will not make a great of difference to me, it makes an enormous difference to you. My 100 chips against your 10 chips means that I am prepared to risk, you are not.

Life and personal success at selling follows a similar pattern. The more chips of confidence I have the greater the level of success I will enjoy compared to someone who has less confidence chips. I have observed over the years that life seems to fall into a pattern of participation and risk. Very much like the card game, every time I participate in the game of life I risk losing some of my chips. Chips in this context my self-esteem. Every time I enter into a personal communication or a personal relationship I put at risk my self-esteem. I take the risk of being hurt, I take the risk of being offended. A natural tendency for most people is not to play the game in the first place. If you are not prepared to lose then don't take part in the card game. Those people that do lose at card games and lose significantly are those who worry the greatest about the potential loss. They concentrate more on losing than on winning. And isn't selling like that? The difference is, with people that have high self-esteem and high self-confidence, they are prepared to enter into more personal relationship games than those people with low self-esteem. They are prepared to take the risk, and it is risk taking that produces the highest results.

If you want high rewards and high success levels you must endure high risk to your self-esteem. People with high self-esteem and hence high confidence do not take rejection personally. So what if the prospect does not buy my product or service, I am not my product or service. What the customer is saying to me is that they do not have a need or a want or a desire to buy my product, and then only at that particular moment in time. You and I both know that peoples' circumstances change quite rapidly. Providing I am able to continue a relationship with that potential customer, there will eventually come a time when I can supply them with the company's product or services, when it is appropriate.

Self-confidence is not something that you are born with. It is something that you acquire. It is something that you develop, mostly during childhood. Some of us grew up in the sort of environment that made us feel confident. We were rewarded, we were loved, we given an opportunity to develop. We were encouraged. Others grew up in a situation of either a broken home, difficult situations at home, constantly admonished, put down and made to feel at times unworthy. Those early messages stay with us in our adult lives. All of that however is very much in the past and I think each and every one of us must realise that today we have total control over the rest of our lives. We make a decision about how to conduct the rest of our lives. The word confidence comes from the Latin meaning 'with faith'. Self-confidence is about having faith in yourself and your own ability. There is no reason therefore for confidence to be genetic. You can determine how much faith you have in yourself and in your own ability, and therefore build your self-esteem. You can make yourself as confident in your ability as you truly want to be.

So how do you go about building your own self confidence? It is said that the first way and one of the best methods is to take risks. Taking risks is probably the most direct route to building self-confidence. It is also the most painful, and that is why the vast majority of people avoid it. In order to build your self-confidence you need success. The only way to get success is to take a risk, and play the game. It is impossible to achieve success without getting onto the field of play. While you stand on the terraces watching other people playing you yourself will never feel the exhilaration and feelings of confidence that come from your first success. Success is very much a vicious circle. You have to taste success in order to be confident. You have to be confident in order to

continue to be successful. The first thing you need to do is to analyse the size of the risk. People tend not to embark upon risk taking because the size of the risk itself is too great. What you should do is to break down that boulder into small manageable pieces.

You can do almost anything in life and be as successful as you want to be in any chosen career by realising that all great endeavours are made up of smaller events. Your natural instinct is to say to yourself, well I'm here and the top salesperson is there. That seems too far to me, I don't think that I am going to make it. And that is because we have a tendency to look at the distant spot that we are trying to get to and say it is too far without concentrating on the ground in front of us. Every time you move a foot onto the ground in front of you, you are one foot nearer your goal in the distance. The Chinese have a proverb that a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. If you never embark upon the journey you will never reach your destination.

Most people refuse at the first hurdle, looking at the end result rather than working out what are the constituent parts that it takes to put the whole together. It is a bit like constructing a plastic model of an aircraft. The Jumbo Jet laid out on the table with all the bits yet to be snapped off the mainframe and glued together looks somewhat distance from the picture on the outside cover of the model. Yet you and I know that those small parts fitted together one by one will eventually produce the whole. It is no different to starting off with a pile of jigsaw pieces. The task at the outset may seem impossible to many people. Those who like jigsaws know that you begin with a method. The method for achieving sales success is in many ways no different. Begin with a figure. What do you have to do to achieve a sales target?

You have to see people. How do you get to see people? If no other method is available to you, you have to write to people and then telephone them up. Next, you have to sell them an appointment to see you. How successful have you got to be on the telephone in order to obtain enough appointments to achieve the target? Next, when you see people you have to sell them the benefits of you and your company's services and commit them to a course of action resulting in the satisfaction of their needs and wants and the earnings for you and your company. How successful do you have to be in selling people your ideas and services?

Acquiring confidence is essentially a process of breaking things down to small tasks which you can accomplish and through the accomplishment acquire confidence in your ability. It's a vicious circle

Take care of all the little things and the big things will take care of themselves.

It has been said that selling is a numbers game. There is a saying which goes 'You have to kiss a lot of frogs before you find your prince'. The important thing in selling is to just get out there and do it. Do it. Repeat it. Whether it works or not doesn't matter. Do it. Repeat it. Eventually you will do it well.

Tom Peters⁵ has a method which is ideal for salespeople. He calls it:-

'Ready, aim, fire. Do something, observe the result and take corrective action'.

And isn't that what selling is about? And isn't that what becoming a good salesperson is about. Go out and sell, analyse what happened and correct it. Any skill that is acquired is only ever acquired through repetition and learning. Bad salespeople are bad

⁵ A Passion for Excellence. T. Peters and N. Austin. Collins. 1985.
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because they don't learn, and most likely because they stop practising. If you are ever going to be any good at selling you have to continue to practise.

It is well known that the best salespeople in number terms, are usually those that have the most experience. Tenure in the job is a prime indicator of sales success. Now I am not saying that young salespeople can't be successful. Of course they can. The thing is though that the older you get the more successful you become. It is purely through doing something, observing the result and taking corrective action.

If somebody asked you if you could play the piano, what would your answer be? Obviously if you could play the piano you would say yes, or yes, but very badly. Those of you that could not answer yes, your natural reaction would highly likely be, '*no I can't play the piano*'. And yet a more measured response should be, '*I don't know, I haven't tried*', or '*I don't know, I haven't tried enough*'. It is absolutely certain that we can all play the piano if we try hard enough. Now isn't that a true statement about almost everything in life? There are those people, who say '*I can't*', but what they really mean is, they haven't tried to, or they haven't tried enough.

Let me give you have example. How many of you have ever thought of writing a book? I know I had for a long time, but it always seemed such an awesome task and I couldn't work out how I was ever going to get a publisher to accept the book. And with that firmly in mind I never did sit down and write more than one page. And every time I began writing one page I kept having this impression of a publisher rejecting the book. I ended up with quite a number of pages, the same one page crumpled up in the waste bin.

Twenty years ago I decided that if I kept putting it off very much longer I was never, ever going to write a book. What I had to do was to say, '*What will it take to get this book accepted by a publisher?*' I determined that the way that it was possible for me to do it would take ten years. Within that period what I would do was to become academically qualified in the subject that I wanted to write the book on, so that I would feel confident that a publisher would want to publish my material.

I set out on a course of study which was a post-graduate degree course, a DMS in Marketing Management. The reason for doing that was that I could enrol on that course because of both age and experience of the job. I knew that it would take 2 years to complete that course on a part time basis. It wasn't easy. After two years I finished the course. The final thesis for that programme, which over the two year period was interspersed with regular exams was to be some 3000 words. It took a long time to write 3000 words that were acceptable. After obtaining that qualification I looked around at sales books, books on selling, books on management, and in the main they ranged anywhere between 200 to 500 pages. A 200 page book represents 80,000 words. I could have stopped there, but I knew that the journey had only just begun, and I had to take another step. That step was doing a Master of Philosophy research degree into selling and sales training . It took 5 years, at the end of which time I had to produce a thesis which was to be no less than 20,000 words. It was completed on time.

Armed with my qualifications and my thesis I approached a publisher. The first publisher I approached in September 1990 was McGraw Hill. They accepted the material and said they would publish a book on sales training if I could produce 80,000 words by the spring of 1991. That meant in six months I had to write 80,000 words, where it had taken me 5 years to produce a final thesis of 20,000 words.

That task was daunting. But what did it mean I had to do? It meant that every four

weeks I had to produce 15,000 words. That meant that every day I had to produce at least 2,000 words plus. I can write about 800 words an hour. That meant nearly 3 hours every day. In fact, as I had a day job, it meant 3 hours every night. Those nights that I didn't manage 3 hours I made up for at weekends. By the end of January 1991 I had written 40,000 words, and was well on the way. One hour at a time, one day at a time, one week at a time, one month at a time. Within 8 years of my 10 year goal I achieved what I wanted to achieve. One step at a time.

The achievement of goals does not happen overnight. That is not to say that none of this happened without some pain. The acquisition of any new skill involves an awkward stage, when you get things wrong, when things don't go well. The same is in selling. In order to become any good at selling you have to go through the 'being particularly bad' stage - everything we do is the same. I can't imagine that anybody reading this book learned how to walk overnight. I would guess that there was an awkward stage. There was a stage when you wobble a bit. How about learning to ride a bicycle? Do you remember wobbling down the street? Do you remember falling off? Do you remember thinking to yourself that you would never get the hang of it? And did you? For the vast majority of you, yes you would have done. Some of you might even have gone on to buying a racing bicycle, or to join a cycling club. The only reason why you became proficient, or reasonably proficient, or were able to ride a bike was, you went through the pain barrier.

How did you manage to get your driving licence? When you got your provisional driving licence what did you do? Get into a car, start the engine up, put it into first gear, drive forward, put it into second gear, drive forward, put it into third gear? Within about ten minutes you were a totally proficient driver and 24 hours later you passed your test. I would tend to doubt it. Think about it. The only way you learnt how to drive was practising. And when you first began you were not very good. Just think of the way it was. Trying to engage the clutch and the gears at the same time and how jerky it was and how you bumped along and how you conked out and how the instructor had to be extremely patient. Or if it was your mother or your father teaching you how to drive, how annoyed they would get with you for the embarrassment that it caused.

Now think of what you do. Driving along with a hamburger in your left hand, the telephone or a cigarette in your right hand, the wheel balanced between your legs, the radio on full blast, turning round and slapping the kids when they are screaming in the back seat. It all came together at some time or other didn't it?

We have to be willing to go through what is called the novice stage, the awkward stage in learning. We need to understand that failure is simply a delay in the results that we are hoping for or expecting. If you learn golf, or tennis, or snooker, there will be a period where you are doing things wrong. Part of that learning period will mean slamming the ball into the net, or missing the line, or skying the ball up into the rough, or going into the sand bunker, or missing the easy shots in snooker. When you first begin snooker there are no easy shots, they are all extremely difficult. But when you watch a professional on the television he makes it look so easy. Why? We are not born with a billiard queue in our hand, or a tennis racket, or a golf club.

Sometimes the reason why people don't begin on journeys is that they have messages from the past that make them embarrassed about failing. I remember somebody on a presentation skills' course once. I asked him to stand up where he was and to tell everybody about himself. He was very nervous, the chin started to go, he started to rock a little bit and falter and I said '*Can you close your eyes a minute? Just tell me how you are feeling now*', and he said terrified, nervous, a bit upset, and I said, '*Keep*

your eyes closed and think of the earliest experience that you had, not the latest, but the earliest memory that you had of feeling exactly the same as you do now.' It took a few seconds, but eventually he said 'Yes, I've got it'. And I said, 'where are you?' and he said 'I am in the classroom, I'm at the board in front of the class and everybody is laughing at me and the teacher is laughing at me'. I said, 'the teacher is laughing at you - why is that?' and he said 'Well, I was asked to do something at the board and I got up wrong and the teacher began to laugh at me and everybody else laughed at me as well'. I said, 'How old are you now?' 'I'm 42.' 'And how old were you when that happened?' 'Um.....I had just started secondary school, I must have been about 12 years old'. I said 'So, how did you feel?' He said 'I felt terrible, I felt scared, ashamed, frightened.' And so I asked the key question: 'What did you decide at that particular moment?' He said 'I decided that I would never get up in front of a group of people again or answer any questions that I didn't know the answer to or attempt anything that put my emotions at risk.'

Our head is full of stories from childhood which determine the way we act in adult life. It has nothing to do with our capabilities. It has nothing to do with the things that we could do if we practised them. It has to do with the way that we felt a long time ago and continue to feel today because we haven't beaten it.

One of my footballing heroes is Malcolm Macdonald who played centre forward for Newcastle United. He holds the Newcastle record for scoring 32 goals in one season. He also holds the record for scoring 5 goals in one game for England. Not a lot of people know that he also holds the record for most misses on goals for Newcastle United, and most failed attempts on goal for England. People don't remember the amount of attempts, they only remember the successes, and there tends to be a feeling that people who achieve goals are successful all the time. This is clearly untrue. Is Thomas Eddison remembered for the 10,000 times he tried and failed to create a light bulb? Clearly not. He is only remembered for the one time that he succeeded. It was a 10,000 step process before he got to the one that worked. The reason that Edison was able to get through, what took years to develop that particular light bulb is that he had a picture in his mind of succeeding, he knew what he wanted to invent.

If there is something in your life that you want, if there is a goal that you want to achieve, it is important that you visualise it in your mind. Why don't you take five minutes every morning and every evening and close your eyes and see the goal that you want to achieve? Perhaps it is being number one at the next sales conference. Perhaps you can see yourself walking up to the stage and giving that five minute speech on how you did it. Think about it. See it in your mind's eye - five minutes every morning and every evening until you can almost taste it. What you see in your mind's eye is extremely important. If you see it often enough you will become that goal.

What you see in your mind's eye is what you will become. Your body cannot tell the difference between fantasy and thought - it is thought and feelings that make your body react.

Something else that I have done before with a group of people is to ask them to stand up, close their eyes, and imagine themselves at the top of a fifty-storey sky scraper, on the roof, near the parapet, standing up with their toes right at the edge. I ask them to describe what it is like, and the weather conditions. With their eyes still closed I ask them to imagine themselves looking down. Standing there watching people with their eyes closed in a classroom and not on top of a skyscraper, it is amazing the expressions that you can get on their faces, and if you record it and show it back, it only proves that what you think is what your body believes.

Sometimes, in order to be confident you need to think about the successes that you have had in your life, as a child, as a teenager and as an adult. Divide your life up into thirds and think hard about the things that you have achieved, and any successes, no matter how small and insignificant you feel they are. It is important to reward yourself emotionally for those successes. Learning to walk, learning to talk, and learning to write. The success of riding a bike, the success of passing an exam, no matter what the grade was.

The problem is that our lives sometimes get fed with negative messages about the successes that we have. You go home from school, you got three A's, one B and one C in your exams, and your father says 'Where did the C come from?', instead of acknowledging the A's. Learning to ride a bike is no mean task. You fall off and tear your trousers and scuff your shoes, then you get disciplined for the damage you caused to yourself or the bike, and not the fact that learning to ride a bike involves falling off.

Writing your life down and dividing it up into three, and putting all those successes down is an important part of emotional therapy of building of self-confidence and belief in yourself. It is sometimes quite amazing if you start to chart down all your small successes, how successful you will see that you have already been. Getting the job that you have currently, making the last sale, speaking at a sales meeting. They are all successes. They are all things that you can quite proudly say that you have achieved. They may not be as much as you want, but they are a start. They are a first step on that journey to success. You will become even more successful. Perhaps sometimes you will just have to believe it. You just have to close your eyes and see it.

Sometimes it is a good idea to buy a second diary and in that second diary you write down the successes that you achieve every day. The greatest problem with most of us is that we sometimes believe that our lives are full of incidentals and minor items, and rarely a success comes along. If you keep a success diary in which you write the things that happen to you in a day that you can justifiably feel proud of and include all those items that you can qualify in your definition of success, you will be amazed at how successful you already are and how good it will make you feel. For example, you phone forty people up and you get five appointments. That is not 35 failures, although it may seem like it - it's 5 successes. You see 3 people and get a second appointment from one of them. That is not a 33% strike rate, that's 100% success with one person. It depends on how you look at it. And if you keep your diary full of the successes and leave the failures out, when you come to review, every week, every month, every quarter, what you have achieved personally within that period, not just your work goals and ambitions and dreams, but your personal successes, you will be quite amazed at how good you feel about yourself. It is people who feel good about themselves that emanate that certain something which says that they are confident.

There is another stage that you can take with your success diary. Every night, with your successes in your diary, stand in front of the mirror and look yourself in the eye and go over and repeat out aloud those things that you have achieved during the day. It is important that you find something, even if it is only getting to work on time, even if it is only just doing the job. Getting to work on time and just doing the job are important steps towards success. Without doing those things you can't be successful, so write them down and feel good about them. So look yourself in the eye and tell yourself that you feel good about them.

Take a blank sheet of paper and write at the top of it '**My Positive Strengths**' and think of all the things about you that are positive and that you see are your particular strengths. Leave the paper open, add to it when you think of more. Add to it when you

develop something, when you require a new skill or acquire some extra knowledge. It is also important if you can get somebody else to add to your bit of paper, or to take a separate bit of paper and ask them: 'What do you think my positive strengths are?' You would be surprised what other people see in you, and the effect on you of reading things about yourself that someone else sees in you will be astronomical.

I heard of a programme in a school where an occupational psychologist was working on many of the things that we have talked about with a group of sixth formers, and asked them to take a form home to their parents. On the top of the form was a heading: 'The Positive Strengths and Attributes of my Son or Daughter'. They had to list those things down and initial each and every one of them. On the right hand side of the form they could put an explanation of what was meant by a particular phrase or heading and then the sixth formers had to take it back to school. At the end of the term they were asked, out of all the things that they had done, what was the most enjoyable? The vast majority said that the exercise where they had to get their parents to write down all of the positive attributes that they had as sons or daughters, affected them the most and gave them the most pleasure. When the psychologist asked them why, they said, *'Well, my parents rarely ever tell me the good things about myself.'* In fact, in many cases there were some people there whose parents had never said anything good to them since they were 3 or 4 years old.

As human beings we are extremely bad at giving positive feedback to each other, let alone ourselves, that is why, when you do it, the effect will last forever. Don't be put off by other people's criticisms of you. Set your goal and go for it. History is littered with people who were told at the outset that they wouldn't achieve their particular goal, and in the face of all adversity, they did.

Think of the poor man who said that the Beatles had no musical talent and refused to sign them up, allowing Brian Epstein to stand in. The Beatles did not lose faith in their musical talent and became the most prestigious composers and recorders of pop music in the annals of pop history. A memo from the testing director at MGM studios in 1933 said of Fred Astaire *'this man can't act, can't sing, can dance a little'*. Someone said of Albert Einstein: *'He doesn't wear socks and forgets to cut his hair - could be mentally retarded.'*

Product Knowledge Gives Extra Confidence

Something that a lot of salespeople fear is that the customer will ask a question, or come up with a reason about the product that they cannot answer. This only happens to salespeople who have not taken the professional care to find out all about the product themselves. Do not wait for the company to provide product knowledge. You should make it your business to find out all about the product yourself. If the company also provides a significant amount of product training then that should be a bonus, not a replacement. In addition, after the initial induction period you should also make absolutely certain that you keep your knowledge up to date. Then on those occasions that you actually the customer, who has more product knowledge than you, you will be able truthfully say – *"You know, I make it my business to know all about my products, as you would expect. I can honestly say, that that is the first time I have come across that particular fact. I would like to thank you for telling me. I won't be as embarrassed as I am now when someone else as knowledgeable about you brings it up next time"*. In this way, you can feel good about a gap in your knowledge and stroke the customer's ego at the same time!

Expertise

I have already said that it is important to be an expert but not have the need to show it. That does not mean that I do not recognise the enormous value that there is in terms expertise that it adds to your self-esteem. We all benefit from the feeling that we have something, a talent, skill, or level of knowledge that is in short supply. Knowledge about your company's products is not exception.

Enthusiasm

With a high level of product, knowledge should come enthusiasm for your product. Many sales are made by salespeople who display such passion for their product that the customer is influenced by that enthusiasm. It is almost as though the customer says to himself or herself – *“goodness, if he can get so worked up about that product, then there must be something in it”*. As we know, enthusiasm is catching.

Qualification

Like most things – other people influence the way we are and the way in which we behave. They also affect the way we remember things. Whilst this article is from my stored memories I can't honestly say that some of the examples and analogies are mine alone (apart from those I have related about myself). When I was on the road as a salesperson I used to listen to many motivational tapes to inspire me. I apologise in advance for any analogy/ story/ reference taken in good faith from another source.

Frank Salisbury