

Review and Renew

Great salespeople are their own best critics, constantly analyzing what did and didn't work so they can be better next time. By Rick Davis



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I have a mantra that salespeople should implant into their consciousness: if you want to be a great leader, catch people doing things right. If you want to be a great performer, catch yourself doing things wrong.

You have heard the old saying that goes “if you do the same things you have always done, you will get the same result.” In reality, if you do the same things you have always done, eventually you will fall behind your competitors.

Consider Circuit City, General Motors, and Sears. They were great companies for decades, and then seemingly overnight they became second rate. The reality is that they deteriorated slowly, but the evidence of their apathy only was revealed in recent years. These business icons failed to change with the times. They did the same things they had always done—and ultimately got different results. They lost to companies that were evolving and changing. If you want to succeed, you must evolve and grow.

Focusing on your mistakes might seem contrary to personal growth and productivity. Nevertheless, the only way to improve your performance in sales is to determine how to capitalize on the strengths and minimize the weak-

nesses. You must be willing to honestly and objectively identify what's deficient if you want to improve.

Most outside salespeople operate without direct supervision, alone in their vehicles with nobody to guide their performance. Inside salespeople as well are often left to their own devices, because of the pressures their branch managers face and the lack of time available for personal coaching.

Thus, in the absence of a mentor to coach you to loftier levels of performance, you must coach yourself. Only you are there every moment of your performance, observing what has helped you in your success and what has hampered you from achieving your goals.

If you want to grow, you must begin by achieving objectivity about your performance. The moment you become defensive and deflect criticism before considering its validity, you inadvertently destroy your own personal growth. That was the mistake of Circuit City, General Motors, and Sears. They became complacent, and complacency is the enemy of growth.

If you want to truly grow and achieve success, try the following.

1. Detach your self-appraisal from the results. Our industry has produced an abundance of salespeople

over the past decade who easily could boast of the tremendous sales growth they've achieved year to year. But sales growth of 15% in an industry that was growing 10% annually while prices were rising by another 5% is merely rising with the tide. Unfortunately, the pleasure of positive results produces complacency. Many salespeople have achieved results in spite of their (deficient) performances, not as a result of them.

2. Ask yourself what you did right. Focus on what you did well to achieve success. Try to isolate specific behaviors in your performance that enabled you to make it. Once you determine what those actions were, repeat them—habitually.

3. Ask yourself what you can improve. When you fail (and even when you achieve success), isolate the activities and behaviors that may have hampered the pursuit of your objectives. Be honest and strive to avoid repeating the mistakes that cost you future opportunities.

Lao Tzu, the father of Taoism, noted that it is better to know and think you do not than to not know and think you do. Strive to keep an open mind, and more opportunity will open up for you. ■