

Don't let summer complacency kill sales

by
Garry Duncan

If you ask any war veteran about the word 'complacency', chances are good you will emphatically hear the well-known adage that complacency kills. Likewise, seasoned sellers know that complacency in selling kills deals and produces unsuccessful years. Complacency in professional sales has many familiar faces. Here are a few that you may recognize with suggestions to combat the malady.

- Relying on past success as an excuse for today is risky. William Pollard, the famous English clergyman, said, "The arrogance of success is to think that what we did yesterday is good enough for tomorrow." Of course, past successes and triumphs need celebration, but the real accomplishment is to achieve consistency. For example, just because a pilot makes numerous successful landings or a physician prescribes repeated successful treatments does not relieve them from the expectation or necessity to achieve successful results today, tomorrow and every day going forward. Champions work to set new records, and to get better.

Here are three actions to help dispose of crippling contentment generated from past success. First, challenge yourself, and set a goal to break your old record, proving to yourself and the world you still have it. Second, commit now to improve a skill, behavior or other issue that could be stronger, and third, engage a coach, colleague, or mentor, to help and guide you. Everyone has at least one competitor that is working to get better, so continually strive to grow and improve, so you can keep the competitive edge.

- Experience and comfort too often foster laissez-faire sales calls. Have you ever wondered why sales often come in waves? One reason is that when you get 'in the groove' and have everything working like clockwork, sales are good. Then overconfidence and a relaxed attitude take over, causing shoddy sales calls, which in turn interrupt the success curve. Making false assumptions, missing key questions, and improvised interviews eventually send a wakeup call in the form of lost deals, short-circuited sales processes, and falling close rates. Self-discipline is the answer. Again, think of the physician or the pilot. What would happen, if they chose, because of their vast experience, to ignore the landing checklist or the established protocol in making a diagnosis? Few would take that risk, and neither should you. More than one seasoned professional has taken in an outline or list of questions they didn't want to forget. Actually, that is a stroke to the prospect, implying their importance to you. Replicate success by adhering to your qualifying and presentation process that has proven to be successful.

- For professional salespeople, the lyrics, 'Roll out those lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer' does not mean spending everyday on the golf course, cutting each day short, or reducing prospecting activities. Avoid rationalizing that no one else is working either. Because many prospects are more difficult to reach because of vacations, weddings, and other summer events don't feel discouraged with prospecting results. Realize that it may take two to three times the average number of contacts to reach the number you normally would need to contact. Those you do reach are more likely in a relaxed and receptive mood. Military strategists know the advantage that can occur while the enemy is sleeping. Take advantage of the complacency competitors are no doubt experiencing too. Summer is one of the best times to initiate new contacts, establish new relationships, and gather reconnaissance on new opportunities and competitive actions. Activity now will pay handsomely in September, October, and November.
- Avoidance and procrastination can also signal that complacency is creeping into your mind-set. Are you keeping up your networking activities, phone calls and referral network, or is it easier to put things off, thinking you will do it later? It is a mistake to think it won't matter if you don't do it right away. Use the buddy system and embrace the idea of getting an accountability partner. Share your daily goals with a partner and check in with each other on a daily basis to validate your efforts. Coach each other how to avoid missteps and give encouragement and accolades for staying focused when you achieve daily goals. It is best to connect with each other daily or at least three times a week. Make the calls brief and reap the reward of staying on track during a languid time of year.

Complacency is not easy to avoid, and requires awareness, diligence, and self-discipline to keep it at bay. It is difficult for anyone to stay focused, energetic and goal oriented when running on empty. Summer is an excellent time to recharge your own battery. Take some time off too, but make it count. Let a colleague cover for you and really disconnect for a few days. Energy, creativity, and competitiveness will return making you stronger and better.