THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS OF SELLING

MICHAEL SMITH AND RICHARD BEAUMONT
"Excellence is not a skill. It’s an attitude."
- Ralph Marston
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When you strip it all back, sales – the act of meeting a customer's needs and providing them with something which matches those needs – is pretty simple really.

You find out what the customer needs, demonstrate that what you have meets those needs, and bang... you make the sale. What could go wrong?

When you look at the reasons why people don't generate the results that their knowhow and experience should deliver, there are usually a number of consistent themes; themes that arise over time, through habit or uncertainty, or pressures to be all things to all people.

Because let's face it. None of us head into our calls to not make the sale. Far from it. The vast majority of us strive for excellence and to be the best.

So there's something to be said in acknowledging the mistakes that we make. And then doing something about them.

In this new e-book, we lift the lid on what those consistent themes are – and importantly, what to do about them, in order to increase the chances of successful selling.

If you're in a sales role, if you're looking for increased performance and higher growth, then make sure you know the Seven Deadly Sins Of Selling – and how to beat them.

And as you would imagine, whilst it's essential to know what these are, it's even more critical to do something about them.

So be bold and take action.

- Jim Rohn

Don't wish it were easier, wish you were better.
Imagine that your sales territory was the family business; that you have been entrusted with the work your father and grandfather had done to build the business, and you are expected to pass it on to your children.

Suppose then that in order for you to visit a customer, once you have bought the tools of your trade: car, laptop, and samples, to name a few, that you have worked out the cost of each visit.

That figure is around 300 pounds.

With this knowledge where would you choose to spend your time?

If each visit were to cost you personally, would you be motivated to ensure that you achieved the maximum return for your investment – of time and money? Of course!

And the fact is it is no different when running a sales territory.

Time is money.
Time is valuable.
You’re running the family business.

You Can’t See Everyone.

In the majority of sales territories there are a significant number of customers. To visit all of them even once, may take a long time. But spending sales time so thinly is an inefficient method of managing a territory; with no concentrated effort, the goal of growing or even maintaining business is difficult if not impossible to achieve.

Alternatively, taking a strategic decision to focus on a particular group of customers for a defined period brings focus and direction to activities.
You can't see everyone.
Now comes the real skill.

*How do you stay focused on those customers and avoid being distracted by other customers?*

*What approach can you take to continue to manage the relationships?*

*Could a phone call or a mail provide a sufficient ‘touch’ until such a time as you can turn your attention back to them?*

The key here is protecting valuable face-to-face time.

Face time must be reserved for the customers you have strategically identified to assist in you hitting your target.

Stay focused – don’t get distracted.

*You don’t close a sale, you open a relationship if you want to build a long-term, successful enterprise*
- Patricia Fripp

**CHOOSE**

There are many ways of prioritising customers.

Firstly, the key success defining factors have to be identified. These vary from industry to industry, however they will fall in to these general categories:

**Their ‘potential’**. In other words, the volume the customer could potentially provide.

**Their ‘convertibility’**. The ease or difficulty of persuading him or her to change their buying habit.

**The ‘relationship’ factor**. The strength of the relationship between them, the sales professional, the product or service and the company

*Generally it is the relationship which is the multiplying factor of the first two.*

*No relationship, no trust, no trust, no sale.*

Next the success factors can be used to either rank or rate the customer. A score can be attributed to each customer. This then provides a ranking.

Based on capacity and territory coverage, a cutoff point is then agreed. (This is much like a leaderboard in golf, where those who fail to make the cut are not included in the next day’s play.)

**AVOIDING THE TRAP**

Spending time with the wrong customers is one of the major traps sales professionals fall into. Trying to please everyone – we end up pleasing no one.

**We cannot work harder so we must work smarter.**

So select a tool to define a strategic method to group customers and stick to it – it’s what the best sales professionals do.

Remember, customers buy from people they trust, trust the people they get to know and get to know the people they see most often.

**TAKE ACTION:**

If your sales territory were your family business, where would you spend your time and with whom?

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DEADLY SIN 2: WINGING IT

PROPER PLANNING PREVENTS POOR PERFORMANCE
Sales is a mental game where mindset is the multiplier for even skills or knowledge. Get your philosophy and approach to selling right, and the chances are that the rest will follow.

Through having a proper plan we can increase our level of confidence which in turn, drives performance.

It’s a virtuous cycle.

CONSIDER THIS
Imagine you’re at a conference with your entire company. Your manager comes to you five minutes before the start and gives you the sales results for the whole business, and asks you to present the numbers with an associated commentary of the ‘reasons why’.

*Here’s the data, present it now.*

On a scale of 1-10, how confident are you that you can do a good job? I guess your confidence level would be pretty low.

If however she asks you two weeks before, giving you time to think and plan out what you will say before coming on stage to deliver to your peers, what would your level of self-belief be then?

Of course it would go up – not because you would be a more skilled presenter in that time, but because you would have been given and taken the time to think about the material, create a plan and prepare thoroughly.

Preparation brings confidence.
Confidence brings success.
Success means sales.

IT’S HOW YOU FEEL
Mental and physical preparation are key success factors.

These include:
- Having an opening statement to engage the customer
- Recapping previous discussions to create call-continuity
- Preparing questions and considering possible objections

80% of call success comes from how you feel – how you feel is determined by the quality of the planning.

Without a clearly defined objective how can you know if you have been successful or not? And, if you don’t know how successful you are, how can you move towards your goals?

Goals allow you to control the direction of change in your favour.

- Brian Tracy
GET SMART

Goals aren’t enough. You need goals plus deadlines: goals big enough to get excited about and deadlines to make you run. One isn’t much good without the other, but together they can be tremendous. - Ben Feldman

We have all heard the SMART acronym, (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) however writing truly SMART objectives is a misrepresented and under-used skill.

There are five simple questions we can ask ourselves to ensure the call objective is SMART:

What is it specifically that I want to achieve?
What will be my measure of success?
How likely is it that I can achieve this goal in the planned visit and how many further visits might be needed to achieve this?
If I achieve this goal how will it move me closer to my strategic objective?

How will I know if I have reached my goal at the end of the call?

GET CLEAR

Through setting clearly defined objectives we provide ourselves with a ready-made way of analysing to what extent we’ve reached the goal and a more deliberate approach to planning our activity.

The alternative is to not be clear on why you are visiting the customer – and let’s face it, no one would advise that. However, how many times have you seen it happen?

You will significantly enhance your effectiveness through having clear goals for every customer visit you make.

By starting with the expected outcome at the very beginning you will focus your efforts on achieving the goal in everything you do in the call. Results can only improve through this.

TAKE ACTION:

What steps could you possibly take to create a clearer and more complete plan for your next customer visit?
Think about it.
If you are speaking and the person you are talking to cuts in and begins addressing the point you’ve made partway through you making it, what does that show?

‘I don’t value you and your opinions enough to hear what you have to say. I’ve heard enough now!’

Is this message conducive to good communication?
Is this message likely to make the other person want to listen to you?
Most of the time, we’re not great listeners.
Typically we retain 25-50% of what we hear.

Why is that?
Our minds are able to process thoughts at 600 words per minute whereas we’re only able to speak at 150 words per minute – so our mind gets bored.

Now for sales people that’s not a good thing. We know that whoever is asking the questions is in control of the conversation – they are the party ‘gathering’ information.
If you’re speaking they’re not!

PEOPLE-PEOPLE
The nature of sales people is that we are typically social beings, ‘people-people’, and results focused.

We are social and love to communicate and we like to see results – just think about the buzz you get when you hit your target!
And this, in part, is probably why we’ve gravitated towards sales.

However, the best sales people are great listeners.

By working to become a great listener, you will improve your connection with people, as well as your ability to influence, persuade and negotiate. Even more, you’ll avoid conflict and misunderstandings. All of these are necessary for sales success.
Most people think ‘selling’ is the same as ‘talking’. But the most effective salespeople know that listening is the most important part of their job. - Roy Bartell

CLEAR OUT THE CLUTTER

These actions will help you become a better listener:

• Active listening
• Body language
• The 80:20 rule

The way to become a better listener is to practice ‘active listening’. This is about making a conscious effort to ‘hear’ the non-verbal signals being sent; the tone of voice as well as the words being said. In order to do this you must pay attention to the other person very carefully and observe the amount of congruency between these three elements.

If the mind has a tendency to get bored and wander then:

Train yourself to keep focused on what the other person is saying.

If you find it difficult to concentrate on what someone is saying, the truth is, you’re not listening. In order to really hear someone, you need to rid your mind of all the clutter of everyday life.

You’ll know that you’re listening actively because you won’t be thinking about anything else.

Tune out whatever else may be going on around you. Avoid forming counter arguments in your head.

All of these contribute to a lack of listening and therefore a lack of understanding.
LISTEN AND UNDERSTAND

Active listening is also reflected in how the listener behaves.

To enhance your listening skills, you need to let the other person know that you are listening to what he or she is saying. To understand the importance of this, ask yourself:

*Have you ever been engaged in a conversation and wondered if the other person was listening to what you were saying?*

You wonder if your message is getting across, or if it's even worthwhile continuing to speak.

It feels like talking to a brick wall and it's something you want to avoid.

To demonstrate you are listening:

**Focus** – give the customer your undivided attention

**Maintain eye-contact** – put aside distracting thoughts. Don't mentally prepare.

**Show that you are listening through acknowledgement** – an acknowledgement can be something as simple as a nod of the head or a simple ‘interesting’. (And you’re not necessarily agreeing with the person, you are simply indicating that you are listening.)

Using body language and other signs to acknowledge you are listening also reminds you to pay attention and not let your mind wander.

Providing feedback helps show you are listening and are interested.

It also allows you to check you understood correctly.

Phrases which show that you’re listening include, ‘It looks like you mean…’, ‘What I’m hearing is…’ and ‘Sounds like you’re saying…’

Without interrupting, summarise periodically, using the speaker’s own words to reflect the value you place on them.

Then, when the moment’s right, respond appropriately with a comment or further question.

As a general rule, speaking 20% and listening 80% of the time is a good guide. This way you’ll continually gather information and the customer feels valued.

**LISTEN THE CUSTOMER INTO BUYING**

Listening is one of the most important skills we can have.

When utilised successfully, you can ‘listen the customer into buying something’.

It takes a lot of concentration and determination to be an active listener, but you significantly improve your communication by doing so.

Be deliberate with your listening and remind yourself frequently that your goal is to truly hear what the other person is saying. Set aside all other thoughts and behaviours and concentrate on the message. Ask questions, reflect, and paraphrase to ensure you understand the message. If you don’t, then you’ll find that what someone says and what you hear can be amazingly different.

**TAKE ACTION:**

*Consider the next conversation you have and notice how much you really listen.*
So you’ve appreciated the need to intently listen to the customer and now it’s time to consider how you’re going to gather the information needed to discuss and agree a way forward as you facilitate the buying process.

There are some fundamental questions to ask to ensure you know the facts and figures:

*How many do you use?*

*What do they cost?*

*Who supplies you?*

Yet a focus on only understanding this information fails to hook into the key motives customers have – and that is *why* they do what they do.

And this is a significantly more interesting line of questioning for the customer and the salesperson.

**FOCUS ON QUALITY**

If we are to truly understand how our products or services can fill a gap a customer has and therefore facilitate the buying process, we must take time to understand their mindset, environment and concerns. And we achieve this through asking great questions: questions which bring insight and hook into the heart of the customer’s world, whilst causing them to consider the rewards and benefits of changing a buying habit.

*The quality of the questions we ask determines the quality of the responses we get.*

But it’s not just about asking questions.

*Because we need to make sure that we take the customer on a journey with us.*

Once we’ve posed the question or questions we need to ensure we’ve understood correctly. We achieve this through summarising.

Summarising does two things:

1. It shows to the customer that we were listening
2. It also means that we can check that we understood the message as it was intended

Remember, the speed at which we think and the speed at which we speak are different – this can result in our mind wandering or not receiving all of the information presented.

This is a common cause of miscommunication.

But through summarising, we ensure the information stated and the information received have not been ‘lost in translation’.

*The secret of man's success resides in his insight into the moods of people, and his tact in dealing with them.*

- J. G. Holland
Open questions begin with what, where, who, when, how, and why.
Yet these can be further refined into two groups.
Both are a set of open questions, but approach questioning from two different perspectives to achieve different results.

**FACTS AND MOTIVES**
Suppose you wanted to find out about someone’s hobby – playing tennis for example. You may ask questions such as:

‘How often do you play tennis?’
‘How many hours a week do you practice?’
‘Who do you play with?’

These seek out specifics; they enquire about **factual** information. Yet they do not explore an individual’s ‘reason why’ – the thing which **motivates** them.

To understand this we must ask different types of open questions – questions which motivate and stimulate:

‘What do you find most enjoyable about tennis?’
‘What excites you most about playing tennis?’
‘Why did you choose to begin playing?’
‘What brings you the greatest sense of satisfaction?’

These questions now hook into emotions, drivers and passions. How something makes you feel is a significantly more powerful driver than a logical analysis.

**CHECK-IN**
We highlighted the importance of summarising to minimise the risk of miscommunication and to demonstrate clarity of understanding.

But how might we achieve this?

Well you may use phrases such as ‘If I’ve understood you correctly…’ or ‘So what you’re saying is…’ This acts as a staging point in the conversation, ensuring you’re both on the same page.

Suppose the customer has given you a list of reasons why he does or doesn’t do something.

How can you diagnose where to begin?

One possible solution is to ask him to prioritise:

‘Of the things you’ve mentioned, which is the most important?’
‘If you could address just one of those issues tomorrow, which would you choose?’

This allows you to prioritise where to focus and means you don’t start with a topic which is of lesser importance – which could mean that you run out of time to address the real issue affecting the customer.

**THE TRUSTED ADVISOR**
Understanding the key needs and wants a customer has allows you to prioritise the order in which you discuss possible options and a way forward. Through having a full understanding of the customer, your ability to provide the solutions your product or service brings increases.

This understanding is the key to you becoming a ‘trusted advisor’ to your customer; the person they call first when they need to find a clear way forward.

**TAKE ACTION:**
What possible questions could you ask which motivate and stimulate your customers?
There’s an equation which comes to mind when faced with a customer’s objection or challenge:

\[ S + R = O \]

Where, Stimulus (S) + Response (R) = Outcome (O)

It seems obvious but true: our response, not the event itself, has a greater impact on the outcome.

So taking personal responsibility for our response is vital to our ability to maintain communication. How we view things, how we think about things determines our response.

So let’s begin with how we view objections.

WE’VE ALL BEEN THERE

You’ve made a great demonstration of how your product or service meets the stated needs of the customer. You’re certain it’s the right thing for them and their organisation and then they hit you with a ‘Columbo’ moment.

Remember Columbo – the US detective?

He’d ask that innocuous question or make a throw away statement that would be the start of the unravelling of the killer’s finely crafted alibi.

How do you feel when the customer asks that awkward question or makes that challenging statement which tells you he’s not fully convinced – that he has some ‘reservations’?

Instinctively you don’t like it. None of us do.

All manner of hindering thinking floods into your mind and you see what you thought was a ‘dead cert’ leading to a ‘no’.

But what if you viewed that awkward question or challenging statement as a positive, as an indicator that you’re on the
right track?

How might your response – and therefore the outcome – differ?

Let’s consider the alternative.

**NO REACTION!**

You’ve made the proposal and demonstrated a solution – and you get nothing; the customer expresses no opinion at all.

*All sales professionals know that apathy is their enemy.*

If the customer doesn’t care enough to challenge or to enquire further, then they’re not really interested. Diametric opposition to your proposal is better than apathy, because you have somewhere to go, a viewpoint to unpick to work towards agreement.

With apathy that’s not an option.

So how should we view objections?

They are a sign of interest – that the customer cares enough to want to explore your proposal in further detail.

Objections are a ‘request for more information’ or the ‘negative expression of a need’.

We should view objections as a positive indicator. *If objections are positive, why not seek them out?*

Is there anything stopping you from ‘checking-in’ with the customer that his view of your solution is just that - a solution for them?

There are many phrases you can use to seek out objections.

‘What level of confidence do you have that this will address the needs you described?’

‘How effective would this be in fulfilling your needs?’

‘What concerns, if any, do you have about this?’

After all, would you rather know now that they’re not fully convinced, or later in the discussion, when those un-expressed doubts have engrained themselves in their mind.

Seek out objections, they’re your friend.

**THE RESPONSE**

How do we typically react to an objection?

“I’m worried about this aspect of your product.’

‘I’m concerned larger companies can address our needs better.’

‘It’s too expensive.’

I’m sure you’ve heard these statements more than once in your sales career.

*How do you feel when a customer makes these or similar statements?*

We generally have a limited set of responses:

- We ignore the comment and carry on
- We immediately pull out evidence, proof or validation that the claim is untrue and work to prove the customer wrong
- We leave the customer’s office, unsure of how to deal with the response and promise to return with further evidence (this is usually us buying time to research how we can disprove the customer’s claim)
- Or we deny the truth of what the customer is saying, defending our product.

This is the way we instinctively react to a threat, because that’s often how we perceive an objection – a threat.

Our responses are limited to ignoring, confrontation, avoidance or defensiveness.
But none of these are effective communication strategies.

Indeed, if we ignore the objection the customer will probably feel vindicated that he is right.

If we are aggressive the situation becomes confrontational.

If we avoid by fleeing to come back another day, the customer continues to have the concern, which over time may develop in severity.

If we are defensive the customer may feel this is because he is right and substantiate their concern.

So what can we do to improve the quality of our response and therefore positively affect the outcome of the conversation?

**The ultimate answer is to keep quality communication open.**

The objection is not a personal attack, no matter how passionate we are about our product or service and our company.

> If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant: if we did not sometimes taste of adversity, prosperity would not be so welcome. - Josh Billings

*So what is the best way to respond?*

Firstly, don’t respond.

Listen and pause.

Don’t be in a rush to respond.

Listening intently puts the customer at the heart of your thinking.

**FLIP IT**

Tuning into the customer at this point means that you won’t miss vital clues whilst waiting for your turn to speak. Ensure the customer has said all he wants to and pause before speaking next to ensure he has finished.

The next issue is respect.

Respect the customer’s opinion – acknowledge it and empathise with them.

I’m not suggesting agreeing with him but **acknowledge and accept** that he has expressed an opinion and that you respect him for that. Phrases which could work are:

‘I understand why you might think/feel that.’

‘Thank you for being so open with me.’

‘I understand how that could affect you.’

If your mind set is that you see the objection as a positive, this sentence will come across with the genuineness that it should.

Now it’s time to put your questioning skills back to work – you need to understand specifically what the customer is concerned about. So give them the chance to express all objections.

Specify exactly the concern – to the point where you can state it back to them and they nod in agreement.

This demonstrates that you’ve understood them and that you are clear in your mind exactly what the issue is.

Sometimes the first objection we state is not the one we are most concerned about, but rather the one we are most comfortable expressing.

So ask ‘what else’ is on their mind:

‘Is this the most troubling concern you have?’

‘What other concerns do you have?’

Only once you’ve understood exactly the key issue should you begin to present further information to manage the objection. Only now should you respond— with evidence, testimonials, or whatever proof source back up your claims.
However, it continues to be important that you ‘check-in’ along the way, to see to what extent the additional information you provide satisfies his concern. For when he agrees with the substance of the evidence, it makes the concern less of an issue, and the objection is neutralised.

**UH-OH**

What if you have no answer, what if there is no answer – what if the customer is right. How might we prevent this from becoming an impasse?

He must like some things about what you are saying otherwise the conversation would have ended long ago.

A great strategy in this situation is to use a trade-off statement:

*No product is 100% perfect, the point you make is valid, however do the other advantages you see from using this product/service outweigh the concern you have?*

In the majority of cases the answer is ‘yes’. Remember this is a secondary option if a neutralisation strategy has not satisfied the customer.

**IT’S ALL ABOUT YOU**

Your attitude to objection handling is vital to how you deal with objections.

Remember, S+R=O

*Your natural reactions are not necessarily the most helpful.*

Modifying your behaviour to prevent defensiveness, aggression and avoidance will lead to a more productive discussion. Using the structure above helps you frame your response to respect the customer, understand his reservations and gain permission to respond.

Ultimately, all this is aimed at keeping communication open and the interaction conversational.

**TAKE ACTION:**

The next time you’re met with an objection, notice your reaction and consider: how might you possibly apply the structure above?
Firstly let’s begin by asking:  
What is closing?
Closing is gaining a commitment to an action that will help, progress or advance the process.
There are two traps we fall into when closing.
Picture the scene.
You’ve had a stimulating discussion with your customer. You felt you’ve really made a positive impression. You asked quality questions which helped identify a problem and a need they had. They liked the solution and seemed satisfied with the answers you gave. You walked out and sat back in your car.
You’re now unsure of what happens next. What was the agreement?
The first trap is not reaching a conclusion or commitment from the customer or prospect.
And we should not shy away from asking for this commitment.
The customer knows that you are not simply there for a nice chat. She knows you are a salesperson and expects that you are going to ask her for something – don’t disappoint by not asking.
The key here is ensuring that your next action or step is something positive and constructive and which is aligned with the customer’s objectives.
The second trap sales people fall into is:
Reaching a forced conclusion when the customer is not ready to give a genuine ‘yes’. In other words, there is no genuine agreement.
This may lead to the customer changing their mind or exhibiting ‘buyer’s remorse’; where given time to reflect in the period following the discussion, they reverse their commitment or buying decision.
That feeling is not one conducive to a lasting relationship with repeat sales.
The key to ‘closing’ is asking for a commitment and identifying when the right time is to ask.

You don’t close a sale, you open a relationship if you want to build a long-term, successful enterprise.
- Patricia Fripp

I like to think of sales as the ability to gracefully persuade, not manipulate, a person or persons into a win-win situation.
- Bo Benett
What's your NEXT STEP?
A major part of effective communication is listening to the other person – not simply listening to their words, but also to their tone and body language. These buying signals provide a clear indication of the right time to ask. The signals may come in the form of a statement:

Suppose your customer says something like:

‘I like that, it sounds good’.

This is an obvious indication that you are on the right track.

Suppose then that they ask questions in which they project themselves using the product. Such as:

‘How long does it take to get used to the product or service’

‘How long will the product take to arrive?’

Again, this is a clear indication that they have begun to imagine themselves using the product or service.

Sometimes these signals are not expressed overtly.

So how then can we analyse if it’s the right time to close?

One great way of achieving this is through the use of ‘trial closing questions’.

These differ from an out-and-out close, in that they seek opinions and thoughts rather than a decision.

For example, suppose you had discussed a possible way forward for the customer to address a need they have or move towards a certain goal. In order to assess if it’s the right time to ask for a decision you could ask:

‘To what extent do you feel the solution we’ve discussed addresses the issue you stated earlier?’

This has the effect of allowing them to reflect on the proposal and add in any additions if required. It also means that if they state overtly how this addresses the issue, they are reinforcing the solution in their own mind.

Importantly for you it means that it’s the right time to ask for a commitment – it’s the natural conclusion to the conversation and it will feel like a natural next step for you and your customer.

NO DRUMROLL PLEASE

Closing is not something big we build up to, nor the aggressive end to a sales call. There doesn’t need to be fanfare or drumroll!

Done well, closing should be the natural conclusion of a well-managed conversation.

There is no trickery in closing – the only rule is that you must close to some kind of commitment or next step on every call.

Do I mean you must close the deal every time? No. Of course it’s not always possible.

But what is possible is to get a commitment to an agreed action which will help, progress or advance the process of buying.

Always ensure you get a commitment to another action – this may be as simple as agreement on when to have the next appointment.

Listen to the words being spoken and be responsive to the buying signals you hear.

Use ‘trial closing’ to check for opinions to confirm if the moment is correct to ask for a commitment.

Closing is simply the natural end to a sales conversation to agree on next steps.

TAKE ACTION:

What steps could you possibly take to ensure that more of your meetings result in clear, progressive activity for you and your customer?
As a sales professional, one of the most essential skills is the ability to self-analyse. If we don't consider how effective we are then we run the risk of doing the same thing over and over again.

No change.
No development.
No improvement.
If everything we did were successful, then repetition would be fantastic.
Yet it seldom is – for the simple reason that our environment constantly changes. We can borrow ideas yet we can't borrow situations.
Our need to evaluate how well we achieved a task or whether we achieved it at all is a key indicator of future success.
Self-analysis separates the mediocre sales professional from the great one.

**HOW DID IT GO?**
Self-reflection is key.

A major indicator of a high level of emotional intelligence is your ability to reflect and analyse how well you did. And after all, what gets measured gets done.
So if we measure something we say to ourselves and others: 'this is important'.
Sales managers are an excellent resource – they can provide you with insightful comment about how well you performed in front of the customer.
A good sales manager will act like a mirror, allowing you to reflect on how you performed in each of your sales interactions – acting as a personal coach – through which we become better sales people.
Unfortunately though, our sales manager cannot travel with us all of the time.
So how can we continue to hold up that mirror when travelling alone?
There are three simple steps to becoming an ever evolving sales professional, one who

*Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.*
- Albert Einstein
adapts to the changing environment capable of overcoming new challenges as they arise. And it involves asking some reflective questions.

One of the best predictors of ultimate success in either sales or non-sales selling isn’t natural talent or even industry expertise, but how you explain your failures and rejections.

- Daniel H. Pink

What did I do well in that call?

It is important that we ask this question to ourselves first.

Because as humans, we have a tendency to focus on the negative.

We punish ourselves for the things we did wrong.

In his book, The Inner Game Of Tennis, Timothy Gallwey talks of how, after making a mistake, we mentally ask ourselves:

‘Why did I do that?’
‘I always do that.’
‘I’m no good at that.’

And it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The ‘self-talk’ we give ourselves determines the mental attitude we carry with us.

So focusing on the positive maintains the positive mental attitude required of all successful sales professionals.

By asking ‘what did I do well’ first, we frame our mindset as positive. And we should follow up ‘from the things I did well, what will I carry forward and do again in future calls?’

The phrasing of the next reflective question is important.

And it is not ‘what did I do badly?’ It is:

If I were to do that again, what could I possibly do differently?

Notice the subtleties of the change in language. Asking yourself about doing something differently and doing something badly have very different effects on our thinking.

Considering what ‘could possibly be done’ allows the mind to open up and explore options; to build on what went well and identify where opportunities lie.

It is creative and experiential and allows you to picture the future.

The final stage in the self-reflection process is to ask:

What do I commit to do again (or what behaviour will I modify), which will help me in the future?

Now the next part is important. Really important.

Write down, in ink, the answers to your questions.

In writing it down you will make a tangible commitment to yourself.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

The difference between winning and losing may not be huge. In fact, it’s often the small things compounding.

In all competitions — sporting events or in business — it is those who take time to ask themselves the question ‘how can I do this even better next time?’ who are the ones who develop a personal ‘winning culture’.

In order to analyse we must record the successes as well as the areas of improvement we have. We must consciously repeat the activities which bring us success and identify when activities do not work –
and have the confidence to experiment with ideas and approaches until they do work.

My challenge to you – if you truly want to stay ahead of the competition is to take the time to think.

Send yourself a message at the end of each week.

‘This week I learned ____________, and by me working to do this better next time I will continue to increase my confidence in my sales ability’.

The more you feed your mind with analysis the more effective and successful you become.

**TAKE ACTION:**

How could you possibly routinely plan the time to self-reflect on your performance?
The Seven Deadly Sins Of Selling are not really a guide to what not to do. They are more a way of highlighting common mistakes salespeople make and the influence they have on effectiveness.

No one sets out to make a mistake. And in fact they are a critical part of all of our personal and professional development.

Yet if we are not aware of these issues, we may not see the effect of our actions.

The discussion topics here have been designed to provide some guidance to what to do and how to avoid common mistakes.

So your challenge now is to convert the Seven Deadly Sins in to actionable items by considering:

If your sales territory were your family business, where would you spend your time and with whom?

What steps could you take to create a clearer and more complete set of plans, for your next customer visit?

During the next conversation you have, take time to notice how much you really listen.

What possible questions could you ask which might motivate and stimulate your customers?

The next time you’re met with an objection, notice your reaction and think: how might you possibly apply the objection-handling framework?

What steps could you possibly take to ensure that more of your meetings result in clear, progressive activity for you and your customer?

How could you routinely plan the time to self-reflect on your performance?

Above all, continue to adapt to the changing environment. Know that change is constant.

Take confidence from the tools you have been given to adapt and overcome.

You are a sales professional. It is up to you to implement change, to continue to strengthen your sales abilities and mental attitudes.

Take personal responsibility for your own success.
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

MICHAEL SMITH

Michael graduated from the University of Leeds after completing a BSc in Medical Biochemistry. After taking up a sales role in a medical device company, he quickly established a successful career in the industry, which saw him appointed to numerous sales and marketing management roles across three multi-national companies, most recently as Director of Sales for Europe.

In 2010, Michael was awarded an MBA with distinction from the University of Warwick where his final dissertation focused on strategies for market entry. In 2012, Michael completed his Professional Certificate in Coaching at Henley Business School.

In 2013 Michael created GO NAKED® – a series of training, coaching and development programmes based on seven principles of success which can help individuals and businesses to increased performance. He is now group Director at Developed Edge, who specialise in sale and leadership training for the Healthcare industry.

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RICHARD BEAUMONT

Richard has an extensive background in teaching and a 15 year career in sales and sales training. Prior to embarking on his sales career, Richard worked as an English teacher, where his interest in learning and development evolved. He has worked for both large corporate organisations as well as with smaller teams and start-up businesses. His specialism has been in sales, sales training and coaching, where he has worked extensively, supporting customer facing roles as well as sales management.

These roles have seen him work both in the UK and internationally, across EMEA and APAC. In 2014, Richard completed his Professional Certificate in Coaching at Henley Business School. Richard now works as EMEA Sales Training Manager at a multi-national medical device company.

He is passionate about the development of individuals and teams and helping them accomplish sales success.