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Author of the best-selling book, THE LACY TECHNIQUES OF SALESMANSHIP

success handbook for salespeople

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preface

The daily struggle between prospects and salespeople continues to intensify. Prospects want the best deal at the best price. But, the ability of salespeople to negotiate price on territory today is extremely limited. In many cases, it's nonexistent. The result? The modern selling function is more complex than ever, requiring more strategies and greater stamina. For salespeople, "survival of the fittest" is now a truism.

Success in sales has always been directly proportional to one's mastery of the art of convincing. But to succeed in today's fiercely competitive, computerized marketing world requires survival skills as well. These survival skills involve more than a thorough knowledge of selling techniques. While salesmanship is still the name of the game, other factors come into play on a daily basis that are just as important. One's attitude, voice, ability to communicate, creativity, assertiveness, stress threshhold, and general health are only some of them. These factors can directly influence your success or failure.

Lacking an awareness of these factors or the ability to monitor them, it is no surprise that many salespeople have been left by the wayside. Too many. But you won't be one of them. Already in your hands is the handbook that will help you survive and bring you more success than you ever thought possible. Congratulations for taking this positive step.

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one

BUILD A WINNING ATTITUDE

It has often been said that man is his own worst enemy. What this means, of course, is that most of the problems we encounter in life are caused by ourselves. Oh, sure, there are always rationalizations—excuses, if you will, that place the blame on others, on economic conditions, on the environment, and even on fate. But deep down in our hearts we know, and may sometimes admit, that we need not look beyond ourselves for the real cause of our problems.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-ANALYSIS

This is especially true of outside salespeople. Why? Because so much of their time is spent very much on their own. They have no supervisor who knows, on a daily basis, everything that's going on. Were they on territory on time, for instance, and did they put in a full day, say the right things, see the right people.

and concentrate on the right products? These and countless other questions can only be answered by the outside salesperson; all too often, however, such questions are never asked. This freedom to make decisions for themselves, while preciously guarded, may well be self-defeating for outside sales personnel. And the situation is apt never to change. How can it? How much time in each month can a sales manager spend on territory with the salesstaff? Maybe one or two days, if the district is small; and only one or two days every six to eight weeks, if the district is medium-sized to large. That is hardly enough time to "put out the fires," let alone offer corrective supervision. At all of the sales management seminars that I have conducted, I have made this statement: "The supervision of outside salespeople is at best lousy." Not one attendee has ever disagreed—because it's true.

This being the case it behooves you, as a salesperson, to take a hard, objective look at yourself. And you should do this on a regular basis, particularly when things aren't going too well. Then, and only then, can you correct situations that are self-defeating and that hamper your forward progress, if not your entire selling career.

START WITH YOUR ATTITUDE

To properly take that hard, objective look at yourself, you must begin by thoroughly examining your general attitude. How is your attitude towards yourself, your prospects and customers, and your company?

Let's start with yourself. Do you think you're good at what you do? It's perfectly okay to think that you are. A healthy self-image is not the same thing, however, as conceit. It is a well-known fact that people who taste the slightest amount of success in selling will almost immediately develop an ego that sometimes becomes insufferable. And an egotistical attitude can spell defeat. What should your attitude towards yourself really be? You should feel that you can do the job and will do

it. You should also feel that you will do it well. At the same time, you should have a strong, intense desire to learn as much as you can in order to do the job better. Because unless you become more effective at selling as each week goes by, you will automatically put a ceiling on the amount of success that you will realize. This conclusion is based on the fact that there are only so many selling hours per day, and only five working days in a week. Accordingly, the amount of success you enjoy now will only increase in proportion to an increase in your effectiveness over the same period of time. If you're committed to steady improvement and feel determined to resist self-satisfaction and conceit, then your attitude can be considered a positive one.

Your attitude towards your prospects and customers deserves serious consideration as well. These are the people you depend on. They provide you with the orders, the cooperation, and the other essential ingredients of your success. Yet many salespeople hold improper attitudes toward their prospects and customers. By improper I mean that either they do not treat these people as well as they should, or they treat them altogether too well, to the point of subservience.

First let's talk about not treating them well enough. In this situation, the salesperson fails to respect the wishes of prospects and customers. And I don't mean wishes that are beyond the call of duty. I mean wishes such as one's preference to be called on in the morning and never in the afternoon; or another's desire to see salespeople on Tuesdays and Thursdays only; or the request of still another to be called on only when he is in his main store or main buying office. Many salespeople will balk at such wishes, maintaining that they are unreasonable. After all, they protest, why do I have to adjust my itinerary to suit them? The fact remains, however, that prospects and customers are the people who give you business. And if you are not interested in doing business with them at the times and places they request, then they will find someone else who is. That's the point to keep in mind constantly. There is hardly a salesperson left in the world who does not have a competitor.

Consequently, you can't really afford not to respect the wishes of a buyer when it is at all possible to do so.

By the same token, however, you must not swing completely to the other end of the spectrum. Avoid placing your buyers on a pedestal. Never approach buyers with the attitude that everything they say is right, that they can do no wrong, that they are to be agreed with under any circumstance, and that anything they want they must get. If you do, and if your customer is thanked profusely after every order, you will have communicated the message, "Gee, thanks. I appreciate this big favor you did for me by giving me an order." Nothing could be more damaging or wrong. There is absolutely no reason in the world why any salesperson should go to this extreme. If you have ever taken this attitude towards a buyer, you can easily straighten yourself out by realizing that customers only give you orders because the product or service you sell is useful to them. If it weren't, you wouldn't get their orders. In other words, you are doing your buyers as much of a favor by selling to them as they are for you by buying from you. Everything is even. There is no need for either party to feel indebted to the other because both gain from the transaction. That's what business is all about. Of course, this doesn't mean that you should act as though you don't really care whether you get an order or not. Under those conditions you would be forgetting that all buyers are human. And they are, make no mistake about it. They are no better than you are and should always be treated on an equal basis, but as humanly as possible, as politely as possible, and with the use of sound business ethics.

Now, how about your attitude towards your company? Believe it or not, this is a problem for many people who sell. They do not have a particularly high regard for the companies they represent and make no bones about it. They will even discuss their complaints with buyers and then wonder why strained relationships with company officials develop later on. If you do not have high regard for your company and do nothing but run it down, there is only one answer: get out of that

company right now. You will never succeed to any great degree if you are not happy with the conditions that exist within your company. And the time you spend complaining about them could be used much more profitably in the selling aspects of your career. There is no sense in continuing along such a blind road when you may eventually make the change anyway. So—I repeat—if you don't like the company you're with, don't talk about it. Find a company that you can be happier in. The move will be much better for you and for your present company as well.

But let's assume that everything is fine between your company and you. You get along with your superiors, you like the way the company does things, you like the products, and you approve of the way they're marketed. Under such circumstances, why should you examine your attitude towards your company? Because there are times, even though everything is fine, when salespeople are tempted to sell the company down the river in an effort to get big orders from their buyers. For example, a customer may surprise you one day with an offer to buy a carload of your product if the price is right. What is the right price? Usually it's a price determined by the customer in advance. Now you're expected to phone your company's headquarters and okay the transaction. And many salespeople will become so excited by the prospect of such a large order that they'll grab the nearest telephone, call their home office, and expect an immediate okay. Chances are the company official will answer "no" because the price is so low that it yields no profit; still, some salespeople will insist, arguing that they must get this price because it's an important buyer, a big order, and so on. Inevitably these salespeople lose the argument and are faced with the distasteful task of relating this message to the buyer. In doing so, they run down the company. For the next several months, they will repeat this story to anyone who will listen, putting down the company each time.

This example reflects a poor attitude towards the company. Not all requests can be granted. Those that are completely unreasonable must be turned down. A good salesperson will

accept this and never let such situations interfere with the company loyalty that is so important in good selling relationships. It shouldn't be hard for anyone to realize that a company pays salaries, commissions, expenses, car allowances, and more, from the profits realized in the course of doing business. When a salesperson asks the company to take a loss in order to keep a buyer happy, a lack of good judgment is being displayed. Instead of badmouthing the company to anyone—including buyers—who will listen, the salesperson should be wondering how this incident will look on the personnel records, when the time comes to be considered for promotion.

This example brings up a very important question: To whom are you, the salesperson, really responsible? When you think about it, you are really responsible to many people, including yourself. To yourself, you are responsible for doing a good job, making progress, building a career, and properly supporting yourself; you may also be responsible to your loved ones for supporting them as well. At the same time, you are responsible to the company for which you work and to the buyers who give you orders. All of these responsibilities are fairly equal in stature. It is when the balance between them is disturbed that problems occur. To feel a deeper responsibility for your buyers at the expense of your company and even yourself indicates an attitude problem that can easily be corrected when sound reasoning is applied.

POSITIVE MENTAL ATTITUDE

In the process of self-analysis, it is extremely important to determine if you have and maintain a positive mental attitude. Known as PMA, most people are well-aware of it but give it no more than lip service. At every sales meeting someone mentions the need to maintain a positive mental attitude. Everyone else agrees. No one is ever going to think negatively again. The meeting closes on an upbeat. And everyone leaves feeling stimulated and enthused. But what

happens? The very next day someone remarks, "There's no point in calling on that guy again, he won't ever buy our product." Someone else insists, "There's no way that I can make my quota this month." And another person comments, "After about the 15th of December buyers just won't see you until after the new year." On and on it goes, one negative thought after another. There is nothing more devastating in sales work than a negative attitude.

Why is it that such a large segment of the population, salespeople included, routinely entertains negative thoughts? For one thing the media—newspapers, television, and radio—transmits negative news to all of us daily. As one comedian put it, "If no one broke the ten commandments there wouldn't be any eleven o'clock news." Good news may not be as dramatic as a tragedy, a murder, or a robbery. But after a steady diet of bad news, unrelieved by an uplifting event or deed, we come to see the world in very negative terms.

Upbringing, too, exerts an influence on attitude. And if you really get down to brass tacks, most of us were brought up in a negative atmosphere. As children, we repeatedly heard negative remarks from our parents. See if some of the following don't ring a bell:

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"Put your boots on or you'll catch pneumonia."
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Each one of these statements could have been uttered in a positive manner. For example, someone could have told you: "Wear your boots so you'll stay healthy for the party Friday night." But negative messages—warnings, admonishments, and threats—were used instead because of the impact they carried in that form. The result? Most of us grew up wondering what was going to go wrong next, or fearing the terrible consequences of our own actions.

[&]quot;Don't get your feet wet or you'll get a sore throat."

[&]quot;Do your homework or you'll fail."

[&]quot;Go to bed or I'll kill you."

After so many years of a negative-type upbringing, it's very hard to become a positive thinker just because one becomes involved in sales work. What makes it even harder is the prevalence of negative influences and patterns around us that infiltrate our general attitude. To this very day, the tendency towards negativism persists. When we watch sports on television, for example, most of the commentary revolves around the people or team in the lead. The forward progress is commented on. Everything seems positive. But let the contest end up in a tie and now we must go to what is known as "sudden death." What does that mean? It means that all of a sudden our attention is directed to the loser rather than the winner. Why couldn't it be "sudden victory" and focus on the positive side?

Admittedly, it is not easy to develop a positive mental attitude and maintain it constantly. Even those who insist that they are positive thinkers will, from time to time, entertain negative thoughts. This is most likely to happen when we're confronted with a problem. Everyone has problems. But what do most people do about them? They worry. They lose sleep and become quite tense through the worrying process. You will agree, however, that worrying never solves a problem. It can be said that worrying is nothing more than negative thinking. It has no real value. When you are a bona fide positive thinker and you have a problem, this is what you do. You take a sheet of paper and write, across the top of it, the actual problem. Now you can look at it and understand it clearly. Then, using the rest of the sheet, you write down all of the possible solutions that are open to you. Finally, you pick the one that hurts the least and decide to go with it. Your problem is solved. It may not be the perfect solution—but then, real solutions to real problems seldom are. What you have is the best solution possible under the circumstances, and the freedom to go on to bigger and better things. That's positive thinking.

By now it must be clear that in order to survive in sales work one must have a positive mental attitude. Conversely, a negative mental attitude leads to self-destruction by distorting your sense of reasoning and rendering you unable to exercise common sense. Perhaps the difference between positive and negative mental attitudes can best be illustrated by a story I like to tell.

A salesman, working for a big corporation, was very excited about a sales contest that had been announced. He set his sights on the grand prize, a Caribbean cruise for two, and told his wife that she'd better start packing because they would be going. He worked extremely hard and made it. At the national sales convention there was tremendous fanfare during the announcement of the prize winners, and he was awarded the grand prize. He became the hero of the entire sales force. He enjoyed the attention and praises he received throughout the meeting, and couldn't wait for the day when he and his wife would embark on their trip.

After six weeks of anticipation, the time finally came for them to depart. They went to New York City and boarded the ship. At once they realized that the company had cut a few corners; it was obvious that they were not traveling first class. How was it obvious? There was no lavatory in the stateroom. But they were positive thinkers. Nothing was going to prevent them from having a good time. They looked around and discovered a lavatory just down the passageway, not far from their stateroom. So they said to each other, "What's the problem?" Then they proceeded to the main dining room, had a marvelous dinner, and returned to the stateroom as the ship was about to sail. Soon they bedded down for the night. Around midnight, however, the pretty wife was awakened; she was deathly seasick, literally green. She could think of only one thing: the lavatory at the end of the passageway. So she jumped out of her bunk, rushed through the stateroom door and headed straight for the lav. But halfway down the passageway she bumped into a man, a negative thinker with the very same problem, who was holding his stomach. Just as she collided with him she realized, for the first time, that she didn't have a stitch of clothing on, and she shrieked. The man looked at her calmly and said, "Don't worry, lady, I won't live to tell anybody."