



WEEK 1

START NOW

Whenever I coach or mentor a salesperson following my 52 Weeks of Sales Success approach, I'm invariably asked, "So, when do we get started?" And I invariably answer, "Now."

Prior to implementing any self-improvement program—weight loss, smoking cessation, whatever—many people give themselves a grace period to indulge their cravings. They'll start dieting after Thanksgiving, for example, or stop smoking on Monday.

For some people, this approach might work, but for many people, when that date finally arrives, they simply bump out the date. They still have half a box of candy or a few cigarettes left that they don't want to waste, so they put it off until they've depleted their supply. In the meantime, they buy some more candy or cigarettes, and end up never getting around to following up on their good intentions.

If you are serious about boosting sales and profits, start making changes today, right now. As soon as you have a plan in place, start working the plan immediately. Why wait? Seize the opportunity now!

DO THE HARDEST THING FIRST

What keeps most people from getting started at the beginning of the day is that they wake up facing a difficult or distasteful task that they do not even want to think about. Ironically, this becomes all

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they think about, and then they look for any distraction they can think of to avoid performing that task.

To start your day right, tackle the task you find most difficult or unpleasant first. If you hate making phone calls, do it early in the morning rather than waiting until the end of the day. If you plan on having a difficult encounter with a colleague or one of your assistants, deal with it immediately rather than letting it ruin your entire day. Get it out of the way, so you can start to look forward to what you truly love about your work and to your dollar-productive activities—tasks that carry the promise of generating revenue.

If “Do the Hardest Thing First” doesn’t quite work for you, consider some variations on this approach. The key is to become productive as early as possible in the day. Here are some other suggestions for starting your day off right:

- *Take a step-by-step approach.* Jot down a list of everything you need to get done today and prioritize items on the list.
- *Perform the most profitable tasks first.* Focus on dollar-productive (revenue-generating) tasks first.
- *Perform the easiest tasks first.* If tackling the most difficult task is just too overwhelming, consider dealing with something easy to work up some momentum.
- *Perform the most obvious tasks first.* If a task obviously needs to be accomplished before you can perform other tasks, tackle the obvious task first.

I generally tackle the most difficult tasks first. I call the people I don’t want to talk to, address any problems that cross my desk, and immediately tend to the task I am most strongly inclined to avoid. Then, I focus on the most profitable (dollar-productive or revenue-generating) activities. I learned about dollar-productive activities from the “Condo King,” Allen Domb, while shadowing him. If I have any time left near the end of the day, I deal with the remaining items on my list in their order of importance.

TELL EVERYONE YOU KNOW WHAT YOU DO

If you have just launched your career in sales, the very first step you need to take to be successful is to tell everyone you know about your job, and I mean everybody—friends, family members, neighbors,

acquaintances, and even your old friends from high school. Develop a list and mail out something, then give them a quick call. Maybe you're a travel agent or you're selling cars or computers or home furnishings or stocks and bonds—things that everyone needs and everyone buys sooner or later. Family and friends become the first customers for many salespeople and you build from there.

But even if you are selling jet airplanes or complex software, let everyone know what you do. Just because you are selling something your friends and family know nothing about or have no direct connection to does not mean they cannot introduce you to people they know who need your products or services.

REMAIN POSITIVE

Positive people generate positive energy, which ultimately attracts customers, colleagues, and opportunities. Negativity bogs people down, saps their energy, and drives people away. Stay away from negative people. They have no value in your life.

With customers, you should always be positive. If someone asks how your business is going, say it is unbelievable. You could be just steps away from bankruptcy, but you have to present a positive outlook. This extends to your competition. Never badmouth your rivals. Mudslinging will never help you win your customer. It probably will only backfire.

If you're having trouble maintaining a positive outlook, you can find plenty of inspirational books, audio recordings, and web sites to improve your outlook. For starters, visit Mr. Positive himself, my friend and colleague Dave Boufford at www.mrpositive.com. SimpleTruths also offers some inspirational movies, including *212° The Extra Degree*, which you can check out at www.simpletruths.com/movies. Get yourself pumped up and stay that way! This can make a huge difference in your career.

WORK FOR TODAY, TOMORROW, AND YOUR FUTURE

As a salesperson, you are probably very busy attending to today's business, but if that is all you are attending to, then you are merely *doing* business, not *building a business*. This is a common trap, and it often results in a sales career that is less successful and more stressful than it really needs to be. You end up constantly chasing

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your tail—hunting for new clients one day, serving them the next, and starting the whole cycle over again the following day. Every month, it's either feast or famine.

To avoid having a sales career marked with slumps and spikes that burns you out long before you hit your stride, always be working on today's business, tomorrow's business, and future business. Take some time every day to sow the seeds of tomorrow's and your future business, so you will always have plenty of business to harvest. This will take you off the sales roller coaster that destroys both the personal and professional lives of so many salespeople.

By taking this approach, you can flatten out the hills and valleys and establish a steady flow of business and revenue. You can plan your business and scale your workforce more effectively, so you are not in a constant cycle of hiring people and then laying them off. You and your team will be much happier and more productive.

Tip: *Remember your ABCs and Ds.* A projects are those that need immediate attention and that are very close to generating revenue. B projects are in the works. C projects are in the planning stage. And D projects are those you have just begun considering. Keep clearing those As off your plate, moving Bs to As, Cs to Bs, and Ds to Cs (or delete the Ds that are not worth pursuing or that you know will never move up the ladder). With this system in place, you can always be sure that you are working on today's business, tomorrow's business, and future business.

STICK TO IT

Very likely you have heard the expression: It is always darkest before the dawn. Everybody knows that expression, yet it fails to encourage many people to stick with it. Time and time again, I see very skilled professionals give up just before they are about to achieve success. They get discouraged, run out of steam, and collapse right before they cross the finish line.

Remember: If you keep working hard, things will improve.

I coined a word for this: *sticktoitism*. You're probably already familiar with the word stick-to-itiveness. That is the official word—the one you will find in most dictionaries. I prefer my version, and I

prefer it so much that I am determined it will earn its place in the dictionary some day. In short, sticktoitism is the dogged determination required to get something done in the face of adversity.

You need to make a commitment to yourself, right here and right now to be a successful salesperson. Promise yourself that no obstacle will block you from your goal and that you will continue to pursue your goal regardless of how impossible the odds of success seem to be. If you honor that commitment, I can guarantee that you will achieve whatever level of success you are capable of dreaming for yourself because you will not let up until you have achieved it.

My friend John Vigi became one of the nation's top stockbrokers, but when he started out, he had no clients and no commissions. John remembers cold-calling as many as 300 people in a row without a single sale. Talk about discouraging! His secret of success, however, is no secret. He had the sticktoitism required to succeed, and succeed he did.

His determination and sticktoitism brought the attention of Merrill Lynch leadership and he was promoted and celebrated by his company many times over. During his time at Merrill Lynch, his portfolio of clients kept him busy enough to be among Merrill Lynch's top brokers nationwide. For me it's the same. I don't have to work nearly as hard at selling as I once did. I've established my customer base and hired great assistants. Now I have an ever-growing business along with more time to pursue my professional and personal goals, more time for family and community and myself.

Stick to it, and you will succeed.

Ralph's Rule: If you are a novice, remember this: Even the most successful producers started out alone and afraid, but you can overcome this with natural curiosity, hard work, and savvy marketing. Ask questions, work hard, and let everyone know who you are, what you do, and what you sell.
