

CHAPTER 1

What It Takes to Be a Top Producer

Ten Characteristics of Top Sales Producers

If you are reading this book right now, then I know you want to perform better in your sales career. If you are a business owner, then I know you want to help your sales team accomplish more. It shows that you are willing to take the time to search out strategies and learn the word-for-word scripts that will give you an edge over your competition. That's a good thing, but are you ready to really commit to doing the things that will catapult you into that rarified stratum of top sales producers?

You know the top producers I am talking about. They are the ones who are always at or near the top of the sales production list every month, who always win the sales contests, and who always seem to be in a good mood. They are positive and confident, and they have that feeling that no matter what happens to the leads or the economy or the company, they will find a way to succeed.

Years ago I heard a sales motivator say:

“If you are willing to do the things that most sales reps aren't willing to do, then soon you'll be able to do and have the things that most sales reps will never be able to do and have.”

When I heard that statement, I was a struggling sales rep, and I was sick and tired of being sick and tired. I was at a crossroads in my career (and my life), and I was either going to find a different way of

making a living, or I was going to go back to school and get out of sales altogether.

What I did was commit to being one of the top producers.

I heard another motivator say that if the grass looks greener on the other side of the street, then you need to fertilize your lawn. He said that you don't have to change where you are in order to succeed, but rather that you can bloom where you are planted.

And as I mentioned before, I had many examples of that in the company where I worked. The top producers made it look easy. They never seemed to struggle. They instead seemed to intuitively know how to handle almost any sales situation. It was inspiring and intimidating at the same time. It wasn't until I finally made a commitment to be one of them that I saw how much time, discipline, and effort they put into being the best.

While it did take a lot of effort for me to get there from where I was as a struggling sales rep, with commitment, determination, and daily focus, it was all worth it. Once I became a top producer, I felt like I knew the secret of what it took to live a better life, to enjoy the job and profession that just 90 days before I hated. Suddenly, I understood how easy it was—once I was ready to do the things it took to be a top producer.

And you can do it, too.

The good news, as I have said, is that success leaves clues, and if you are willing to invest the time, money, and effort into completely changing your results and your life, then you can. You *can* bloom where you are planted, and you can start enjoying the things that top producers take for granted—the things that most sales reps will never get to enjoy.

You will find what I consider to be the top ten characteristics of top sales producers. These are not only the things I did to completely change my results and reach the top, but they are also the things I see in nearly every top producer, in every company, that I have coached and consulted with over the past 25 years.

As you read through the list, look at the top producers at your company (you may even be one of the top reps already), and ask yourself how many of them are doing these things. Look at your own behavior and ask yourself how many of these things *you* are doing, and how many of them you can begin practicing right now.

I guarantee that the more of these characteristics you adopt, the more successful you will be.

So if you're ready, then let's get started.

TOP CHARACTERISTIC #1: MAKE A COMMITMENT

Let me ask you this: Are you willing to make an intensive, 90-day commitment to transforming your sales career? Would you be willing if I told you that by diligently following the proven techniques and scripts you will learn in this book, you would make a dramatic improvement in how you prospect and qualify new business, how you conduct your sales presentation, and how you deal with objections and close business? If I told you that you could move into the Top 20 Percent of the producers in your company and even double your income in just 90 days, would you be willing to make the commitment to do what is necessary?

If your answer is yes, then get ready to radically change many of your habits, and get ready to put in the time it's going to take to completely change the way you sell over the phone. As you will continue to read in this section of 10 characteristics, there are many things you are going to be doing differently, but if you make the commitment now to adopting and incorporating these techniques into your selling career, then the results can and will be life changing. But it is all going to start with making that commitment.

The best way to think about this is like making a commitment to getting an A in a college course that is run on the quarter system. If any of you have attended a quarter course in college before, then you know how much is packed into each weekly session. I remember that on the first day of class at UCLA, the instructor went through the first three chapters of the textbook. By the end of the one-and-a-half-hour class, I was already behind three chapters. And that was one of only

five classes I was taking that quarter! What I had to do was seriously commit to studying, drilling, and rehearsing the material over and over again. With a lot of hard work and effort, I did ace the class, but it took a total commitment at the very beginning.

The same thing will be true for you in learning a new set of skills, habits, and techniques to help you sell over the phone. In fact, one of the most difficult things you will have to do is to “unlearn” the way you do things now. Right now, you probably do things automatically—and incorrectly. Learning a new way of responding to the objections you get over and over again will be a challenge, and you’ll have to practice, drill, rehearse, and record yourself relentlessly to change those old habits, but once you do, something magical happens.

Once you start diligently working to change, improve, and adopt new ways of qualifying, dealing with stalls, and closing sales, your results begin to dramatically change. Suddenly, situations that used to frustrate you begin to get easier to handle, and soon you find yourself winning more and more sales. As you do, your confidence goes up, and so does your paycheck! At the end of each month, there is actually money left over, and suddenly you can begin saving for and buying the things that matter to you and your family. No more struggling because you don’t have enough money. How will that feel?

All of this begins affecting you differently outside of the office as well. Suddenly, you begin sleeping better, no longer worrying about money and bills. You wake up with a new energy (rather than dread), and Mondays are positively transformed! Your spouse and kids begin noticing a difference, and you soon start seeing the world as a place of opportunity rather than one of closed-ended traps. Literally, your world changes. You can achieve all this if you are simply willing to make that 90-day commitment to get started.

In addition to the immediate changes, though, what making the commitment also does for you is alter the future of your career. That’s because once you learn proven and effective skills for selling over the phone, your results change not only for the next 90 days, but for the rest of this year, and all the ones that follow. As soon as you adopt a new, successful way of selling, everything becomes easier

for you. New opportunities in management open up, your career path changes, and your confidence and enthusiasm for the profession of sales completely transforms. All of a sudden, sales becomes the greatest of professions, and your choices of what to sell, and where, are unlimited. And all you have to do is make a commitment today to putting in the time and effort required to get there.

For everything you will gain, 90 days of intense study and practice are well worth the effort. In essence, all you are doing is developing new habits that will become your new, automatic way of doing things. I heard a saying years ago that I still repeat today:

“First we form habits, and then they form us.”

Once you form your new, more effective selling habits, they will transform you into a top producer at your company, and in your industry. Once again, I know because it happened for me. I still fondly look back on the 90 days I took to script out and memorize more effective responses. I still remember sitting in the conference room at lunchtime listening to my recordings with a buddy and critiquing each other's calls. I remember the determination I had as I got back on the phone that afternoon—determined not to make the same mistakes, to mute myself and listen to what my prospect was telling me.

Most of all, I remembered what that sales trainer told us the month before: “if you are willing to do the things that most sales reps aren't willing to do, then you will soon be able to have and enjoy the things that most sales reps will never be able to have.” Soon I was driving a better car, buying my first house, and winning the trip to Hawaii at the end of the year. I still remember the feeling I had being picked up in a limousine (paid for by the company) in Maui and driven along the coastline to my hotel on the beach. I can't tell you how grateful I am that I was willing to make that commitment to myself!

So if you are willing to make that commitment to have a better sales career and life, then read on and get ready to make the changes that will have an enduring effect on everything you do from here on out.

TOP CHARACTERISTIC #2: BE PREPARED FOR RECURRING SELLING SITUATIONS

This is absolutely huge. The strange thing is that 80 percent of salespeople (and sales teams) simply don't take the time or make the effort to do it. Now that you have made the commitment, this one tip will catapult your sales and your confidence.

Remember what I said earlier: one of the most important things you will ever learn about sales is that 80 to 90 percent of the objections, stalls, put-offs, and sales situations you run into day after day are the same. The blow-offs you got yesterday are the same ones you got last month and that you'll get next month and next year. Think about it: How many times do you hear this when you prospect or cold call?

From the gatekeeper:

"Will he know what this call is regarding?"

From the prospect:

"I wouldn't be interested."

"We already have someone who handles that."

"Just email me something."

Do any of these sound familiar? Of course they do! And I will bet you could add another four or five, couldn't you?

And how about the objections and stalls you get when you close a sale? How about these:

"We just aren't ready to make a decision yet."

"I'm going to have to talk to my partner/boss/spouse/committee."

"Your price isn't in our budget."

Are these sounding familiar? Of course they are! Once again, you could easily come up with about five or seven more, couldn't you?

Again, here is the point: the best thing about sales—and what makes it so easy for top performers who recognize and prepare for

it—is that there are only about seven or nine objections or stalls per selling situation, per product, or service. You keep getting them over and over and over again!

Now here is the problem: most sales reps and companies do not leverage this important fact. Knowing what the objections and stalls are in advance is like knowing all the answers to an exam ahead of time. If you knew what the answers for a final exam were going to be, wouldn't you script out the correct answers in advance? Of course you would! Yet for some unknown reason, most sales reps don't take the time to script out and then practice, drill, and rehearse the most effective responses ahead of time. Instead, 80 percent of sales reps (and sales teams) choose to ad-lib and make up ineffective responses to these repeatable selling situations, stalls, or objections. This dooms them to fail and is perhaps the biggest problem in the selling profession today. It makes most sales reps' lives a living nightmare, and it is why most inside sales teams fail to reach their revenue goals.

Top producers, on the other hand, do leverage this sales fact to stack the odds in their favor.

They take the time to develop, memorize, and then deliver effective responses to these objections, and so they easily handle and overcome them. They are not afraid of getting resistance. They are instead prepared for it. Knowing what is coming and being prepared for it enables them to listen to what their prospect is saying and allows them to question the objection and find out what is really holding a prospect back. This makes them confident and allows them to stay in the game and overcome the stalls and objections while other sales reps fold and go away. This allows top producers to persevere and close more sales. It also makes their job easy and stress-free, because they know in advance what's coming, and they are prepared for it.

An example would be the objection: "I'm going to need to check with the boss." Eighty percent of sales reps handle this common smokescreen objection incorrectly by saying something like: "Well, when should I call you back?"

By doing it this way, they simply create a stall and then they worry that when they finally do hear back from the prospect, the answer will be, “Well, the boss doesn’t want to do it.”

How many times has this happened to you?

A top producer, on the other hand, handles this very differently. Instead, because she has prepared for this recurring smokescreen in advance, she knows two or three proven ways to get around it. So instead of creating a stall, she uses a script that gets her prospect to reveal the true objection. She would say:

“I understand and I’m curious about something. Let’s say for a moment that your boss can go either way on this and tells you to do whatever you think is best, based on what we’ve gone over so far and what you understand about this. What would you likely do?”

This is called isolating the smokescreen objection, and based on what the prospect then says, the top producer will have the information she needs to take the next effective step. Hint: Any answer other than, “I would do it” means that talking to the so-called boss is a smokescreen and *not* the real objection. If this is the case, then the producer has more work to do to uncover what is really holding this prospect back. And guess how she’s going to do that? By using additional scripts that she has prepared in advance.

This is what I mean by knowing what is coming in advance, and then being able to leverage that knowledge and effectively and competently handle it.

And that is your assignment for this week. Start by making a list of all the stalls, put-offs, and objections you get with your sale during the prospecting call, the presentation, and all the follow-up calls. Then commit to adapting and customizing the many scripts you’ll read in this book so they are just right to handle them. Then, once you’ve found the ones that work (I recommend you script out three or four responses for each objection), spend the time to practice, drill, and rehearse those best-practice responses until you can deliver each one automatically.

If you are willing to do this—again, what 80 percent of your competition won't take the time and effort to do—then soon you will enjoy closing more sales, making more money, and living a more confident and successful life as a sales professional.

TOP CHARACTERISTIC #3: RECORD & CRITIQUE YOUR CALLS FOR 90 DAYS

A top inside sales trainer, Stan Billue, first introduced me to this concept. He said that nothing would help you double your income in 90 days faster than recording and critiquing your calls each day. He also said that most sales reps would not be willing to do this (and he's right). But, he said, if you *are* willing to do it, then you can quickly move into the Top 20 Percent of the selling professionals in your company and industry. (He was right there, too.)

If you have any resistance to this idea, then just remember that all professionals record their performances and use them to improve how they practice and perform. Think about how much time football players spend watching game film, or dancers spend watching film of their practices and performances, or actors and directors spend watching a previous day's shoot.

Every professional records, critiques, and gets better by analyzing and improving their technique, their strategies, and their performance by recording and breaking down each part of their performance. You need to, as well. Once I made a commitment to recording and carefully critiquing my calls, I was amazed by how much I found. You will be, too. Here are some things to be on the lookout for when playing your calls back.

1. How well did you listen to your prospect or client? This is huge, because once you begin hearing yourself on a sales call, you'll be amazed by how much—and how quickly—you start talking. In fact, you will be stunned by how quickly you start talking over your prospect.
2. Did you hear what your prospect or client was truly saying, or did you just hear what you wanted to hear? Clients

and prospects are always trying to tell us what's important to them, but most of the time, we don't hear it. When you begin listening to your calls, you will see the need to begin using your mute button so you can begin hearing the buying signals—and potential objections.

3. Did you ask all the right qualifying questions? A fundamental problem in sales is that most prospects don't close because they were never properly qualified to begin with. By listening to your recordings and discovering what information you did and didn't get, you'll be able to strengthen your calls on the front end, thereby producing more qualified leads to close later on.
4. Did you follow your best-practice scripts, or did you fall back on your old habits of ad-libbing? In the beginning, you'll find that following a new script is hard! Our tendency is to fall back on our old scripts and start ad-libbing again. By recording yourself, you will begin to hold yourself accountable to the new techniques and scripts you are trying to learn.
5. When answering an objection, did you end by asking for the order, or did you simply talk past the close? This is a common—and huge mistake—because many sales reps are afraid of asking for the order for fear of getting more objections. So when they try to counter an objection, they tend to just keep pitching and describing features and benefits. This leads to more confusion and more questions from the prospect. The proper way to handle an objection is to carefully answer it, confirm your answer, and then ask for the sale again. When listening to your recordings, ask yourself if you are following this proven formula.
6. Did you introduce an objection by talking too much? This will give you shivers the first time you hear yourself doing it.
7. How about tie-downs and trial closes? Most sales reps love to talk. It is a bad habit, because in inside sales, you have

no idea what your prospect is thinking—unless you stop to ask them. By recording yourself, you will get an idea of how much you are talking, and how much you are listening.

8. Are you improving? This is big as well, because we all need positive reinforcement. You need to hear yourself getting better, celebrate your improvement, and see the benefits of all the work you're doing to get better. By recording yourself, you will be able to do just that.
9. How is your tone, your pacing, and your energy? All of these things are crucial on a call, and if you are not objectively listening to yourself, you have no idea of how you sound—and also no way of correcting yourself.
10. You will find many other ways to improve as well—ways that would never occur to you if you were not recording and listening to yourself. It's why the other 80 percent rarely, if ever, improve.

As you begin listening to yourself, you might find that it is uncomfortable in the beginning.

Nobody likes to hear the sound of their own voice, and no one likes to hear how bad they usually are, but don't be put off! Make a commitment to improving on each call every day. I guarantee that if you do, you will soon be happy you did, because nothing pays off faster than practicing this crucial characteristic.

The easiest way to start is to pick a partner at work and begin listening to each other's calls during lunch. Get a buddy, make a commitment to critiquing each other, and be hard on one another in your effort to be better. This is serious work you are doing, and if you are both truly dedicated to improving, you will soon find that it becomes fun—take my word for it! What you will also find is that when you're back on the phone, just before you go off script or talk over someone, you will see your partner's face and you'll hit your mute button to avoid making a mistake that your partner will point out later. This is the way to bring awareness into your selling habits and a way to be mindful on each and every call. It's how you improve dramatically in a short period of time. And remember, the new habits and skills you are

developing during this 90-day period will serve you well for months and years to come!

As soon as you can, find a way to record and download your recordings for playback and critique. The sooner you do, the sooner you'll leapfrog over your competition.

TOP CHARACTERISTIC #4: THOROUGHLY QUALIFY EACH PROSPECT

I'll start with a story: I was in the Bay Area conducting onsite training for a group of IT inside sales reps who sold software, and I was talking about what makes up a qualified lead and how important it is. I went over the six things you need to know about each prospect before you set up an appointment or presentation, and then I covered specific scripted questions (along with rebuttals for any resistance) and how to get this information.

The sales reps sat around the conference table with a look of wonder on their faces. Only one person in the back of the room was smiling broadly and nodding his head up and down. It turned out that he was a new rep who had just joined the team after working for IBM. After I was done with the qualifying piece of the training, this rep raised his hand and told the following story:

"I know exactly what you're talking about in terms of fully qualifying leads before setting them up for a demo or appointment. In fact, the number one rep in our division at IBM had a team of 'qualifiers' who would make the initial calls and then turn the leads over to this this guy for his approval.

"This rep (we'll call him Brad), had put together a 'qualifying checklist' of 10 items he demanded his qualifiers ask, and if they turned a lead over without at least eight of the questions answered, he turned the lead back over and told them to call back and get the rest of the questions answered.

"Now here's the thing," this rep said, now almost shaking with enthusiasm. "All the other reps would have been happy if three or four of the questions had been answered. We would all have considered that a good lead to call!

"But not Brad. Brad wouldn't waste his time with what he called 'non-qualified leads,' because he said he didn't need the practice of trying to

close sales. He said he was only interested in pitching and closing qualified leads.”

Then he dropped the bomb that made believers out of all the other sales reps in attendance:

“The thing was, because of this, Brad was the number-one producer in our division and grossed over \$1 million a year in commissions!”

And that is why Characteristic Number 4 is so important. You need to make sure you are fully qualifying each and every prospect or lead you generate. I have found from personal experience—and taught for years—this fundamental truth in sales: you can’t close an unqualified lead. You must know the following criteria about every lead before you set up a demo or appointment:

1. Why will this prospect buy? What are their specific buying motives? What are the areas of your pitch that you need to concentrate—and get buy-in on—for each prospect? If you don’t know what each prospect is looking for, then you won’t know how to speak to it.
2. Why won’t this prospect buy? What are the likely roadblocks that might stall or derail this sale? Once again, if you don’t know what you are up against in terms of why the prospect might not choose you, then you won’t know how to avoid or address these key, potentially dangerous areas.
3. Who are all the decision makers? What is this person’s role in the sales process? If he or she is an influencer, how much influence does he or she have, and when in the sales process does he or she wield it?
4. Timeline. What is the decision process like? How long will it take? How many hoops do you need to jump through? How soon—or how long—is your prospect going to take to make a decision on this? Knowing this important detail gives you leverage over the close and lets you know when—and how often—to ask for the sale.
5. Competition. Who are you competing against? Is their old supplier or vendor still in the mix? How many other

companies are they looking at? What does your prospect like about your competitor's offer, and why? What is your unique advantage, and how important is it to your prospect? Most of all, why would they choose you over another company or provider?

6. Budget. What is your prospect or client looking to spend for your product or service? Is your solution perceived as having enough value to justify that investment? If not, how can you build that?

These are the six basic qualifiers that you need to know about every lead before you enter the closing area. There may be more given your particular sale, and if so, you'd better create your own qualifying checklist and make sure that you know this information well in advance. (If you would like more detail on how to get this qualifying information, then you will find it in my first book of scripts, *The Ultimate Book of Phone Scripts*, in which I explain this qualification process in detail, along with all the questions you will need at each stage.)

Now, I know we don't live in a perfect world, and not all prospects will sit through a thorough attempt to qualify them. No worries, because if you did not learn everything on the first call, then you can make up for this by "requalifying" at the beginning of your presentation or close. Ask whatever questions you missed during qualifying at the beginning of the presentation call so you will have the leverage you'll need to confidently close later. You will find some specific, scripted ways to do that in the next characteristic.

There is a reason Brad wasn't interested in attempting to close leads that were not completely qualified. He knew the basic rule of sales that I stated earlier: you can't close an unqualified lead. If you are a sales professional or sales manager, just look carefully (and honestly) at your current pipeline, and ask yourself how qualified the prospects in there are. If there are some holes, then requalify them the next time you speak with them. Then, from this point forward, do the right thing from the beginning: fully qualify upfront, and watch your closing ratio—and your income—soar.

TOP CHARACTERISTIC #5: RE-QUALIFY PROSPECTS AT THE BEGINNING OF YOUR CLOSE

To start with, let's see how most sales reps give a closing presentation or demo. Most sales reps get a prospect on the phone, go through a long-winded presentation, and seldom check in. At the end, they vaguely ask for the sale with a weak statement like:

“So, what do you think?”

A client of mine once described his sales team as “spraying and praying.” They “sprayed” a long presentation, and then at the end “prayed” the prospect was on board and would buy. If that is how you or your sales team members are doing it now, then you know how sick a feeling it is to finally ask for the sale and get turned down.

Top producers handle this in a very different way. First, top producers put much better quality leads into their sales cylinder because they follow Top Characteristic Number 4 of fully qualifying their leads. Next, when they get a prospect back on the phone, before they jump into their demo or presentation, they take the time up front to requalify their prospect so there are no surprises when they ask for the sale at the end.

What they are requalifying for are things like the decision-making ability of the person they are pitching, the timeline for making the decision (especially using a trial close like: “And if at the end, you like what you see today, is this something you can move forward with?”), and any other qualifying areas that weren't covered during the qualifying call.

Here is a list of some sample questions you can ask at the beginning of your presentation to help requalify your prospect so you have the information you need to guide this call toward a closed sale:

“I know you mentioned last time that you were particularly interested in learning about _____. What other area would you like to see today?”

And

“You mentioned that you were the one who would decide on something like this—is that still the case?”

And

“I know you said you wanted to find a solution as soon as possible, so let me ask you: If this is everything you’re looking for, would you be able to make a decision on this today?”

And

“You know, _____, we talked about the range of investment being between \$10,000 to \$50,000, depending on which program you went with. If you do like this today, what kind of commitment are you thinking of making?”

And

“I’m happy we have some time to go over how all this works, and let me ask you: If after you see the presentation today, you agree this is what you’re looking for, is this something you can give me the go-ahead to put to work for you today?”

If some of these questions seem intimidating to you, it is probably because you haven’t been thoroughly qualifying your prospects to begin with. You may be more used to the “spray and pray” approach. I am here to tell you that you will close more deals, avoid more frustration, and confidently close more sales if you begin requalifying your prospects up front.

The benefits of doing this are many. To start with, if you find that a prospect isn’t going to make a decision at the end of your demo, but rather has lots of concerns or objections already, then you can adjust your pitch accordingly. You can shorten it or ask for their main interest points and address those first. Then, after you have answered any questions, you can begin overcoming some of the obstacles or determining if this is a prospect who is ever going to close at all.

If you find that many of your prospects aren’t going to make a decision at the end of your presentation, then you can go back to your qualifying script and put in more specific questions so you get better qualified leads for your next close.

On the other hand, if you find out that your prospect is indeed ready to go, then you can use more tie-downs and trial closes during

your presentation to build that important “buying momentum” and then confidently ask for and get the sale sooner. Either way, you will know where you stand at the beginning of your presentation and what you have to do to win the deal.

Take some time this week to restructure the opening of your presentation or demo and put in some of the requalifying questions you read earlier or that you will find later in this book. Or, adapt some of your own. The more you ask these kinds of questions, the stronger a closer you will become.

One last note: don’t be afraid that you are going to scare away buyers by doing this.

Buyers will respond to these kinds of questions positively and give you honest answers. Only non-buyers will give you trouble, and wouldn’t you rather know up front who is going to buy and who isn’t?

TOP CHARACTERISTIC #6: BUILD RAPPORT BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER A SALE

While most people think that salespeople have the “gift of gab” and can seemingly talk to anybody, it is not that way at all. If you don’t believe me, just listen to a few of your own recordings or those of your teammates.

The truth is, knowing how to honestly and naturally build rapport with someone takes a lot of skill, practice, and patience. Unfortunately, most sales reps are in a tremendous hurry to get their pitch out so they often treat prospects as obstacles to go through to get a sale.

This is a big problem.

Years ago, my first sales manager (my older brother, Peter Brooks), taught me an important lesson. As I rushed through a pitch to qualify and then tried to close prospects, he told me that I was missing out on the most important thing—connecting with and treating people with respect and a genuine interest to help them.

He told me, “Michael, these are just people you’re speaking with. Treat them as such, and you’ll go much further than you are now.”

It took awhile for me to relax and overcome my fear of rejection, but as I got more successful, I began to develop a genuine interest in the people I was speaking with. Once I remembered that they had lives, responsibilities, families, fears, and goals just like me, it made talking to them, rather than at them, so much easier.

Once I did that, it was much easier to build real rapport, earn trust, and create an atmosphere that allowed the sale to naturally unfold. You have probably all heard the saying that people buy from people they like, know, and trust, right? When selling over the phone, learning how to develop genuine rapport will help get someone to like, know, and begin to trust you.

You have three opportunities to develop rapport: before (during the initial qualifying call), during (during the close or presentation), and after (once your prospect becomes a client).

Here are some tips on how to build rapport during all three stages.

On the prospecting call. This is perhaps the hardest time to do this, because your prospect doesn't know anything about you other than that you're a sales rep trying to sell them something. This is when their defenses are at their highest.

The way to build rapport during this phase is to concentrate on relating with them right at the beginning, before you start pitching. You do this by asking any number of things like how the weather is ("Is it still over a hundred degrees there?"), or how the new conversion or transition (a project they are involved in) is going, or if they're super busy now that it's Monday, or if they are relieved that it's Friday. Find some common ground and build some rapport around it before you launch into your pitch. Your goal is to try to build a connection before you put your sales hat on.

A good way to do this is to develop a touch-point plan of leaving voice mails and sending emails if you're not able to reach someone right away. By leaving a carefully constructed series of messages beforehand, you can start building that rapport before you even speak with them. Then, when you do reach them, you can begin your conversation by asking if they received your messages and if they have had a chance to read them yet. If not, then build rapport as described before you go

into your pitch. (You will get a detailed example of how to build that touch-point plan later in this book.)

Building rapport this way takes a little practice, but if you truly become interested in each and every person you speak with, they will feel it, and you will separate yourself from all the other sales reps who are just trying to sell them. Believe me, this will pay big dividends for you.

Build rapport during your presentation. Most sales reps are in a hurry to get through their pitch so they can see if a prospect is going to buy or not. This is not only bad technique, but it is also rude. Prospects can often detect a sales rep's "commission breath," as one of my clients called it, and nothing turns them off quicker than when they detect yours.

Top producers, on the other hand, continue their interest in their prospect and concentrate on having a conversation throughout their presentation rather than making their pitch a rushed monologue. The way you do this is by putting lots of tie-downs, open-ended questions, and even trial closes into your presentation. Your goal should be to check in with, engage, and involve your prospect in a conversation rather than deliver a pitch.

An example of this is by checking in with your prospect after you have given a benefit or explained how something works. Asking simple things like, "How would that fit in with what you are doing?" or "Does that fit in with your current initiative?" is a good start. Using open-ended questions is good, too. Instead of asking, "Are you with me?" you should ask, "What questions do you have for me so far?" By building rapport in this way, you also begin getting an idea of how interested or engaged your prospect is. The more engaged they are, the better your chances of advancing the sale.

Spend some time this week to rewrite your demo or presentation to give your prospect opportunities to acknowledge, engage, and ask lots of questions. The more rapport you can build during the close, the better.

Continue to build rapport after the sale. Many sales reps are surprised to hear this, but aftercare of a new client is just as important as getting

one to begin with. Most sales reps forget a client once their order is complete, but top producers know that right after a prospect has purchased is the best time to either up sell them or get a referral.

The way you do this is by once again having a conversation and expanding upon your rapport. Get in the habit of calling your new clients every week or so just to see how they are doing. Offer any assistance and continue to develop a relationship with them. If you have an opportunity to offer an additional service or product, do so. If not, then have your referral script handy.

Also, consider drip marketing to your new customer by using a greeting card system such as www.sendoutcards.com/mrinsidesales. The more you can “touch” your new client, the stickier they are going to become and the more likely you will be able to do more and longer-term business with them.

In conclusion, building rapport seems to be a lost art for many salespeople. This is why most people (yourself included) hate getting calls from sales reps. Top producers know the value of treating people with respect and with genuine interest. By doing so, you can not only develop a long and loyal customer base, but you can begin to enjoy your career more as well. Sounds like a win-win to me.

TOP CHARACTERISTIC #7: ASK FOR THE SALES MULTIPLE TIMES

Most sales team’s calls I listen to (while reviewing my client’s closing and presentation calls), ask for the sale only about one time (if, surprisingly, at all!). If they get a stall or objection, they generally fold and go away in defeat. It’s rare that I hear someone ask for the sale more than three times. Think about that for yourself or your sales team. How many times do you ask for the sale before you give up?

I was taught years ago that the close doesn’t even *begin* until the prospect has said no at least three times! I was taught that to win the sale, I needed to show enthusiasm and confidence, and that I needed to be persistent and show that I believed in the reason the prospect should buy more than they believed that they shouldn’t buy.

Now, please do not misunderstand me here. I can just hear some of you complaining that you don’t want to be like a telemarketer, or

an obnoxious salesperson, or unprofessional or pushy. Good, because I don't want you to be, either. What I'm talking about is something completely different. Let me explain.

To start with, you must be working with a qualified prospect who has a legitimate interest in your product or service, has a need, is a decision maker, has a budget, and so on. This is the first step. If you don't have all of these things and you begin asking for the sale three to five times or more, then guess what? You're going to become a pushy salesperson.

If you do have these qualifiers in place, then you can feel confident that you're dealing with someone who can and will benefit from your product or service. If that is true, then it is up to you to present value, overcome legitimate stalls and objections, and repeatedly ask for the sale.

You have to remember that many times a prospect is on the fence, and the only way to push him or her off it (and on to your side), is to be persistent and satisfy any doubt or hesitation he or she has with your belief, confidence, and enthusiasm. Here is how you do it.

First, you have to have a set of solid and proven rebuttals for all of the common stalls or objections you are going to get. You must know these responses inside and out so you are not put off when you get them. Remember, if you have to think about how to respond, it is already too late. So many sales reps act like a deer caught in headlights when they get an objection, and because of this, many give up as soon as they do.

You can (and must) avoid that defeated feeling by being prepared with a rebuttal that not only addresses the concern, but that then leads you back into building value and matching up the benefits of your product or service with each prospect's unique buying motives (you know, the ones you uncovered during the qualifying stage). In other words, you need a way back into your pitch. You can use something as simple as:

"I totally understand how you feel. It does seem that way at first, but actually the way it works is ..."

Then continue to build value or discuss a benefit and give them a further reason to buy!

Once you have answered the objection, you must confirm your answer with: “Do you see how that works?” (In other words, use a tie-down.)

If you get a yes, then you ask for the order again: “Then here is what I recommend we do. . . .”

There you have it—you’ve just asked for the sale again. When you then get another objection or stall, you answer it, confirm your answer, and ask for the sale again! This is the long-lost art of closing the sale. You must be prepared to keep pitching, keep building value, and keep asking for the sale three, five, or even more times.

Now again, for any of you rolling your eyes, you obviously need to be in tune with each prospect, and if someone is getting upset or really isn’t going to buy or commit right then, then you back off. I am not suggesting you be pushy or unprofessional in any way, but you have to show belief in your product or service, and you have to be persistent.

Now sometimes a prospect will just go blank and be uninterested for some reason. Perhaps they have already committed to some other company or the budget has gone away, or something else happened. In this case, I recommend you use one of my favorite ways to reopen a dialogue, or at least learn something that will help you keep this from happening in the future with another prospect. I often like to say:

“You know, _____, I love to learn: Do you mind telling me why?”

Then listen very carefully and then connect with what they say, playing off it to reopen the sale.

If you are committed to doing what the other sales reps are not going to do, then I recommend you get your favorite 10 or 15 closes together to handle the five to eight common objections you always get (see Top Characteristic Number 2). Take some time to script them out to match your personality and style so they feel natural to you. Then commit to memorizing them: it helps to record them into your smart-phone so you can play this recording of these scripts, in your own voice and with the inflection you want to deliver, over and over again until you have internalized them. Then begin practicing and delivering them

automatically each time the selling situation or objection comes up. Once you have these specific rebuttals memorized, then you need to add on some closing statements that automatically direct you to asking for the sale again. Later on, in Chapter Nine “Winning Closing Techniques,” you will find some of these specific closing statements.

By combining your rebuttals with closing statements you feel comfortable with, you will then be able to persevere and ask for the sale over and over again. When you begin doing that, something amazing will start to happen: you’ll begin closing more sales. You will begin closing prospects who you would have given up on before. Your confidence will go up as you do. Your weekly checks will go up (and you’ll love that!). Before you know it, you will have created a whole new skill set and elevated your selling career. You will suddenly be in the Top 20 Percent of your company, and as you revise your pitch even more and get better and better, you’ll move into the Top 10 Percent, and then the Top 5 or even Top 1 Percent.

TOP CHARACTERISTIC #8: TREAT GATEKEEPERS WITH COURTESY AND RESPECT

If you have to make cold or warm calls to prospects, then you probably have to deal with your share of gatekeepers. These can be receptionists, office managers, assistants, and so on. No matter what role they have, whoever stands between you and your prospect is someone you have to deal with first.

Most salespeople struggle to effectively deal with and get past these so-called gatekeepers. The majority of the time, the problems they have they bring on themselves. This is because most sales reps treat these people as obstacles to get past by using tricks or by acting authoritatively or by being downright rude, and you can imagine how that goes.

Also, many salespeople simply don’t understand some basic rules in regard to how to speak to gatekeepers, so they create their own problems by giving incomplete information, which just triggers the gatekeepers to do their job and keep them away from the decision maker.

Here is a common mistake:

Rep: “Oh hi, is Mr. Jones in?”

Gatekeeper: “May I tell him who is calling?”

Rep: “This is Bob.”

Gatekeeper: “Bob who?”

Rep: “Bob Smith.”

Gatekeeper: “With what company?”

Rep: “The XYZ company.”

Gatekeeper: “Will he know what this call is regarding?”

Rep: “Ah, it’s about his (whatever the rep is selling).”

Gatekeeper: “Has he spoken to you before?”

Rep: “Ah, no. . . .”

Once a sales rep gets into that kind of dialogue with a gatekeeper, they rarely win. Over and over again, they will be turned away.

The way to fix all this is easy: always give your first and last name and the company you’re calling from right away. Then—and this is crucial—always end with an *instructional statement* like: “Is Bob available, please.”

By the way, that is crucial, too: always be polite and use “please”—two or three times even. Here’s an effective opening:

Rep: “Hi could I speak with Bob, please?”

Gatekeeper: “May I tell him who is calling?”

Rep: “Yes, please. Please tell him that [your first and last name] with [your company name] is holding, please.”

If you do this right and with a smile in your voice, you will avoid 80 percent of the screening that you get now. Guaranteed. I know this is effective, because I still use it today and *it works*.

Also, if you don’t know a contact’s name, use the “I need a little bit of help, please,” technique. Always wait for the other person to respond before you ask for it:

Rep: “Hi, I need a little bit of help, please.”

(Now pause long enough for the gatekeeper to respond.)

Gatekeeper: “How can I help?”

Rep: “I need to speak with the person who handles your _____. Who would that be, please?”

This is very effective if, again, you say it with a smile in your voice.

Speaking of a smile, always put a *big* smile on your face right before your prospect (or gatekeeper) picks up the phone. It does wonders for how you project your attitude and opening line. In fact, putting a mirror on your desk is very helpful as well. Make sure to look at yourself when the other person answers the phone, and soon you will find yourself speaking with more emotion, energy, and enthusiasm. Before you dismiss this technique, try it for yourself.

By the way, don’t be afraid of building a little bit of rapport with the gatekeeper as well.

Ask them if they are happy it’s Friday, or how their Monday is going, or if they are glad it’s hump day. Ask about the weather. Anything to be personable and to show them that you value them as people rather than as just an obstacle to get around.

The bottom line is that top producers know how to interact with gatekeepers and know how to gain their trust and get them on their side. By using these techniques, you can now begin doing that as well.

Characteristics 9 and 10 both focus on the one trait that is perhaps the most important of all. You find this characteristic in *all* top performers, not just in top sales producers. You see it in top athletes, actors, musicians, dancers, top businesspeople, and so on.

All top producers have this quality in abundant amounts, and parts 9 and 10 will focus on how to develop, grow, protect, and maintain it within a sales context. Here’s what it is:

“All top producers develop and maintain a positive, can-and-will-do *attitude*.”

TOP CHARACTERISTIC #9: RESIGN FROM THE COMPANY CLUB

What I mean by this is that you have to stay away from the group of salespeople (or even managers) in your office who do nothing but grumble about how bad or unfair things are in your company or about how bad the economy or industry is. You know who and what I am talking about. You usually find them congregating in the break room or hallway or warehouse, or they are outside smoking cigarettes or waiting for the food truck. Many companies have them, and they are poison for your career and your life.

This company club can be made up of average salespeople or a mix of under-producers and unhappy managers who feel they deserve more, or even above-average salespeople who think they should be treated better. They grumble and talk negatively about any and everything: the leads are bad, or marketing is doing a crappy job, or the good leads are being given to the top producers only. They grumble about the product, or the pricing of the product, or the warranty, or durability. They grumble about the office environment, the phone system, the computers, or their desks, or the noise level. They grumble about the commission structure, the salary or benefits, or the bonuses they did or didn't get.

They are generally lazy, or bored, or uninterested, and they set a low standard and drag everyone who will let them down to their level. Instead of focusing on solutions or on making things work, they look for reasons why a new sales campaign or lead source won't work. They are a cancer to all companies, and they are especially deadly to you and your sales attitude.

The answer? Resign from their club.

I remember the club at the company I used to work at. When I was a bottom 80 percent producer, I used to love the club. Every morning the club would meet in the kitchen to eat the free donuts or bagels the company provided. Were we grateful and thankful for the free food and good coffee? No. If they gave us bagels, where was the salmon? If they brought donuts, where were the bagels?

Once we poured our coffee and started in on the free food, we would start in on the leads, or the industry, or the company, or on how

the top producers always got preferential treatment. We grumbled our way through the food, grumbled our way back to our desks, and grumbled our way into lunch.

If we missed a sale, we would reconvene in the break room to talk about how we could never sell this stuff with all the things that were wrong with it. How in the world did they expect us to be competitive if they were going to put out such trash? And the leads! On and on we would go until it was finally time to go home. Then we'd grumble to our wives or husbands. As long as I remained a member of that club, my attitude and results were going to suffer.

Everything changed, though, when I made a commitment to become a top producer. Once I had, the first thing I did was resign from the company club. Instead of commiserating with the club, I arrived at the office an hour early and started cold calling or closing leads I had set up the night before. When the club finally wandered in, I often already had a deal on the board and was going for another one. I declined invitations to go to lunch with them, and instead I ate at my desk and rewrote my closes while I listened to my calls and tried to find ways to improve.

When the club members came over to my desk during work hours, I didn't stop calling to talk with them. I went right on calling and working instead. They soon got the hint. When they tried to engage me in the break room, I was pleasant but told them I had to meet my call quota and wanted to get back to work. After a while, they left me alone.

What was interesting is that I noticed that the other top producers acted the same way I now did. They were also the ones who came in early and left late. They were the ones who were more focused on working than chatting, and if they did want to talk, it was usually to strategize a better way of closing a deal. I almost never heard them grumble or talk badly about the company, the industry, or the market.

The top producers (of which group I became a part) were more interested in finding ways to succeed and exceed quota. They didn't mind working harder, or getting help or leveraging management's or

each other's experience. When we spoke with one another, it was usually to challenge each other to do better. We competed in a positive way to up each other's game. We shared resources and closing techniques.

What I found is that we had our own club, but it was lightly attended because we had work to do. On those occasions when we did get together, it was to talk about better things like what neighborhood we were moving into, or whether we liked Mercedes or BMW better, or how we were setting up our retirement accounts. These were not the kinds of subjects that were ever discussed in the company club.

What I find even now as a consultant is that many of the companies I work with have a company club. When I'm on site, I can see their members gathering and chitchatting. I also see the top producers at their desks, working away. I've found that top producers are usually loners who are always working, always looking for ways to improve. At the end of my training, the company club members thank me politely (or not at all) and then head off to the break room to talk about what a waste of time the training was.

The top producers, however, are in the training room picking my brain for a new technique, or to discuss one of the scripts or closes I have developed for them. They are thirsty for information, and you can see the commitment on their faces. They are top producers who are always looking for a way to up their game. In fact, when I get back to my office, the Top 1 Percent have often reached out to me to inquire about my one-on-one coaching program. They are willing to pay for it out of their own pockets because they know the investment will pay them many, many times over.

So the question for you is: Are you a part of the company club in your office? If so, then resign today and start finding ways to build your attitude rather than spending your time ripping it down. And you can begin building your attitude up by following Top Characteristic Number 10.

TOP CHARACTERISTIC #10: INVEST DAILY IN YOUR ATTITUDE

Now that you have resigned from the company club, you can use that time and energy to do the one thing that will have the most impact

on your performance and your life: invest in ways to build up your attitude on a daily basis. Before we get in to some ways to do that, let me emphasize the importance of investing time and energy *every day* to improving, strengthening, and elevating your attitude. The “every day” part is the key. Think about it: How many times a day do you eat? If you are like most people, then you probably eat three times a day and have some snacks in between. Now let me ask you: If you skipped breakfast, how would you be feeling by, say, 11 A.M.? Cranky? Hungry? Unable to concentrate much? How about if you also skipped lunch that day? How would you be feeling around, say, 3:30 P.M.? Would you be ready for that big presentation? Or that meeting with your sales manager or boss?

Okay, now let’s say you got home by 6 P.M. and you hadn’t eaten anything all day. How would you be around your wife and kids? (Or roommate or girl/boyfriend or dog?) Would *you* want to be around you? Now imagine going two days without food. Try three. I think we could all agree you’d be pretty much worthless by then (if not way before!).

The reason I bring this up is that your mind, your attitude, needs feeding just like your body does. If you don’t make a concerted effort to feed it regularly, then it, too, will get sluggish and worthless pretty soon. If you don’t spend active time feeding your mind, feeding your attitude positive material, then you will be more susceptible to negativity, more susceptible to members of the club, and each time you have a bad outcome—client doesn’t reload, new prospect doesn’t buy, you don’t make your lead numbers—you will get more and more discouraged.

And if you let that happen, then you will begin searching for reasons why you won’t succeed.

And if you let that continue, you will either find them or you will make them up.

Top producers make it a priority to consciously feed their minds positive stories and positive examples, and they cultivate a can-do, positive attitude. They spend time taking in other positive thinkers’ ideas and strategies, and they purposefully employ those strategies in their lives. They listen to audio books, or they read (or reread) books on how

to get better and do better. Many top performers also spend time with affirmations and visualizations linked to purposeful and motivating goal setting. All this pays off. Those producers who are in the habit of developing a vision, and who dedicate themselves to achieving it—no matter what—those are the top producers, the top athletes, and other top performers who always outperform their competition.

But it all starts by making a commitment to developing, feeding and cultivating a positive, can-do attitude. The key, again, is to do this daily (several times a day, actually). So how do you get into the habit of doing this? A good start is to find the medium that works best for you. If you are a reader, then get some books that resonate with you and commit to reading a certain amount of pages each day. If you prefer audio books, then get those books on MP3 and listen to them on the way to and from work, or when you get home, or at the gym, or when you're walking the dog.

One resource I still work with today are subliminal recordings. Subliminal recordings are great because they speak right to your subconscious mind, which runs just about everything in your life. I listen to recordings either during meditation or during relaxation sessions. I also use them to help me go to sleep on a regular basis. A great resource for these can be found here: <http://www.instant-hypnosis.com/?afl=69646>.

Just browse the sections and download a few to get started. I'll tell you now, it's much better to lie in bed listening to one of the powerful recordings than to lie in bed worrying about your income!

Another good thing to do is to pick up a few books or audio programs on setting goals. Just listing what it is you're going to accomplish this year (or in the next six months) can be highly motivating by itself. As soon as you define your vision, you will find that you begin to automatically feel more positive and motivated. When setting goals, just remember: *"Whatever you want to have or achieve is possible. Other people around the world have and have achieved the very thing that lives in your heart. If they can have it and do it, so can you."*

But you will need to work for it first. You will need to rearrange your consciousness so that it can embrace the new expectation of

what you come to believe is possible. And this is where affirmations are crucial.

Affirmations are simply statements or images that you feed yourself, thoughts and emotions that you tend to dwell on throughout the day and night. Everybody already uses affirmations—you're using them right now. The problem is that most people are using the wrong affirmations and getting the things they don't want as a result. The reason for this is that most people's random self-talk is incredibly negative. That is where affirmations come in. Affirmations are nothing more than carefully constructed words, phrases, and stories that you design in advance that support the goals you've identified are important to you.

There are many books on this subject, and you can easily do a search to find the one(s) that speak to you. Affirmations are key to help you feel positive about yourself and your career and maintain the positive attitude that will enable you to persevere and succeed.

With all of the resources mentioned here: books, CDs/MP3s, subliminal recordings, goal setting, affirmations, and so forth, you will be able to put together a varied and full course of "food for your attitude" that you will be able to munch on throughout your day. If you are not doing this now, or have stopped doing it, then start today. It is amazing how just a little bit of positive energy can turn around a day, a week, a month, or a whole life. Remember, all top producers have a positive, can-do attitude. If you don't believe me, then get around some of them—their attitude is contagious. Yours needs to be, too.

In ending this section on the Top Ten Characteristics of Top Sales Producers, I hope you have seen some ideas that resonate and that you feel will work for you. Just adopting a few of these habits will have an immediate and dramatic effect on your career in sales, and on your life in general. I hope you have already adopted some of the characteristics, and you already know how valuable they are. Make a commitment today to put even more of them to work for yourself. I guarantee that the more you use, the better you will feel and perform.

