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Resolve to make 2011 your best year ever!

Along with the popping of champagne corks, noisemakers and Dick Clark, making resolutions is a time honored New Year's tradition. Listening to the lofty aspirations expressed at the turning of the year we should be living in a country overrun with slim, healthy, and happy millionaires, but this never seems to happen. Surveys indicate that less than 92% of us follow through on our resolutions. Over 45% fall away by the end of January and most resolutions are forgotten by midyear. So are resolutions a waste of time? Not necessarily. The desire to be a better person, to take charge of our lives is the driving force behind the advance of our civilization.

Resolutions commonly fail because few people make the effort to think about the changes they want to make in their lives. A resolution to "start living a healthy lifestyle" blurted out as you step off the bathroom scale is not likely to last the week. Resolutions that "stick" are well thought out and specific. They include action steps and deadlines. Before making a resolution you should ask yourself these fundamental questions:

- What specific change do I want to make in my life?
- Why do I want to make this change?
- How will making this change benefit me?
- What steps do I need to take to make this change happen?

These questions change a vague resolution into an actionable goal. To get you started, here are five resolutions for sales people and five for sales managers.

Sales Resolutions

- *I resolve to use a clearly defined sales process on every call.* Sales people, who plan a good call opening, ask good questions to uncover customer needs and then propose a solution based on those needs, increase their chances of success. Proposing a program before the problem is clearly defined is a waste of both your time and the prospect's time.
- *I resolve to cultivate "Win/Win" relationships with my customers.* Every sales transaction should benefit the customer, the rep, and the rep's paper. Because all parties mutually benefit from the relationship, they should all share mutual respect for one another. Your customers should respect your time and your ideas, just as you respect their time and opinions.

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To get respect you must demand respect. It is possible to deliver excellent customer service without being subservient. When you think of yourself as a highly skilled professional delivering a vital service, the customer will see you that way as well.

- *I resolve to be an advertising professional not a “space cadet.”* Focus on creating well-designed, effective ad programs rather than just selling space. Confront the customer when they want to jam too much copy into an ad or make a poor offer. As a true consultant, take pride in the ads you produce. Anyone can throw together a quick ad or let the customer do the layout; true professionals refuse to sell bad ads. Well-designed ads generate a better response and keep customers coming back for more, benefiting both the rep and the advertiser in the long run.
- *I resolve to focus on productivity rather than on effort.* Hemingway cautioned “Never mistake motion for action.” When asked about their sales results many sales reps will talk about how hard they are working. While hard work is an important component of success, by itself effort is not a measure of success. Selling is a bottom-line business. Carefully track your calls, presentations and closes, as well as your sales results. Use these numbers to measure your personal productivity. Hard work is not enough; success comes from working hard and smart.
- *I resolve to follow a personal development program.* Your most valuable asset is not your bank account, your car or even your home. It is your ability to earn a living. To increase your earnings potential you must constantly increase your store of knowledge. Set aside some time every week or even every day for personal development. You can read business books; listen to audio books; subscribe to online newsletters; seek out coaches and mentors or attend seminars. You do not have to invest large blocks of time to this effort. Ten minutes every workday devoted to reading amounts to 40 hours of sales training in the course of a year.

Management Resolutions

- *I resolve to always remember that I am the manager.* Most managers are promoted not because of their management abilities but because of their strong sales skills. If we continue to spend our days selling accounts for our people, we are managers in name only. Focusing on leadership tasks rather than on sales tasks is the best way to maximize your productivity. By coordinating your team’s efforts and concentrating their efforts on high value activities you can have a much bigger impact on your company’s bottom line.

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- *I resolve to schedule time every week to plan and analyze my team's sales activities.* The manager should be the “brains” of a sales team. It is the manager's job to make sure that the team is moving in the right direction and is making efficient use of their time. The manager should review the team's performance to identify areas of improvement. By constantly analyzing the team's actions and using this information to plan and direct their future activities the manager can consistently improve his/her group's performance. These activities require time and in spite of their importance often get shoved aside in the daily rush of business.
- *I resolve to be a positive influence on my team.* Offering criticism and correction to our team is an essential part of a manager's job description. Handled properly, this is helpful to the development of our sales people; handled poorly, criticism can destroy morale. Follow this simple rule: for every negative or critical comment you express make three positive or praising statements. By staying positive you will serve as an example to your people. Staying positive increases the impact of your constructive criticisms. If you make only critical comments the reps will tune you out. If you are positive most of the time, your advice will be seen as sincere and the reps will want to change to earn more praise.
- *I resolve to appoint myself CRO.* A leader should see themselves as the CRO, chief remover of obstacles, for their team. Spend time observing them in the field and listen to them. Track how they spend their time and look at the tasks they are asked to perform beyond their direct sales opportunities. Do what you can to streamline systems and provide them with the tools and support they need to do their jobs effectively. Work with other departments to free up as much time as possible for activities, which drive sales and improve customer service.
- *I resolve to make developing my people my top priority.* When I was a sales manager, I was discussing my role with our VP of sales. He nearly fell off his chair when I told him that I didn't see producing revenue as my #1 priority. A leader's primary focus should always be on the team. you build a team of highly motivated and well-trained sales professionals, the numbers will take care of themselves. As a manager, you should always be thinking about the developmental needs of your group and of each individual that makes up your team. You should look at their selling, interpersonal and organizational skills. As a person's skills improve they become more confident and more successful. This creates an unending upward spiral of skills, confidence, motivation, and success. The better



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trained your team is, the more successful and more manageable they will become. Since training is central to everything your team does, it is well worth the effort required to plan and implement a training program.

Conclusion

My father's favorite New Year's Eve toast was, "May your troubles last only as long as your resolutions." Given the very brief lifespan of most resolutions this was a kind sentiment indeed. Taking the time to consider what you want to accomplish and how you are going to make it happen converts weak resolutions into firm goals. When you do this, your resolutions will not only last much longer than your troubles, but they will be the very reason many of your troubles disappear.

This article was written by Jim Busch of the Pittsburgh Pennysaver.

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