



RONKELLEHER

Equipping, Enabling, and Encouraging Marketplace Leaders

21 Habits of Incredibly Successful Salespeople *Teaching Your Organization to Sell*

A not-to recent issue of Success magazine was entitled “*Everybody Sells.*” They are absolutely right. Anyone working for a living sells, for that matter so does everyone else. Think about it. The stay at home mom or dad is selling an activity plan for the day to the kids. Selling your 7-year old on why they don’t need the most recent fad toy is harder than any sale faced in the business world. The executive is selling an idea or a vision when they give the end of the year motivation speech to the troops. Pastors are selling when they deliver a message to a congregation because they are trying to get you to understand how a point of scripture relates to your life. And of course, there are the professional sales people who sell products, services, and ideas for a living.

Whether you are a professional salesperson or not, selling is important to you. Your ability to influence others to do things is largely a reflection of your ability to sell your ideas. While selling is often viewed as an art form there are certain skills everyone can and should develop to increase their sales ability. If you don’t believe me think about the performance gains you would realize in your organization if every good idea that was generated was captured, developed, and sold. Regardless of whether you sell ideas, products, or services, if you could capitalize on just a fraction of the genius that exists in your employees all previous performance records would be broken. Would that kind of performance enhance your productivity? Your bottom line? Of course it would! A first step in creating this kind of organization is to teach everyone to sell, and to sell well.

While most of the examples offered come from years of experience selling physical products to wholesalers or end users, you should be able to draw a correlation to your organization or business as well.



21 Habits of Incredibly Successful Salespeople

Learn to balance work and your personal life.

I just finished reading a best-selling book on building employee performance. The author recommended forcing people to work at home in the evenings and on weekends so that they would have more time to spend with customers during the work day. This is the manufacturing equivalent of running the production line longer to get more finished goods rather than finding a way to make production more efficient.

The Bible says very specifically that our priorities are to be God first, family second, and work third. Workaholics tend to go first to divorce court, and then to recovery hospitals to treat their burnout.

Be early not just punctual.

Football coach Vince Lombardi was famous for “Lombardi time.” If he said meet at 8:00, he expected everyone ready to go at 7:45. By arriving at your buyer’s office 5-10 minutes early for your appointment you show the buyer that his business and his time are important to you.

One of my pet peeves is people who are late. If you’re late it telegraphs the message that your time is more important than everyone else’s. Of course there are times when it can’t be helped but always call ahead to let someone know that you’ll be a few minutes late. If you have to cancel an appointment try to do it at least a day ahead of time to allow the person a chance to reschedule their day.

Look the part of the professional you are.

The way you look tells a customer a lot about you before you even open your mouth. You don’t need \$1,000 suits, and you don’t need to be a slave to fashion, but if you still have polyester leisure suits in your closet you need to update your wardrobe. Whatever industry you are in, dress the part of a consummate professional and always be well groomed, neat, and crisp. Visiting a buyer in a wrinkled suit with scuffed shoes says you don’t take much pride in yourself.

Start a little early and work a little late.

I often have to return phone calls to people in earlier time zones and I like to get people early in the day before they’ve gotten bogged down in the day’s activities. Fortunately for me I’m an early riser so I always make those east coast calls the first thing I do in the morning. It’s fun to call someone at 6:00am knowing they are just getting to work at 8:00 or 9:00am. On the other hand I like to be accessible to my west coast customers who often call after 5:00pm. I always call them back and at least leave a message on their answering machine that night so they know I’ve gotten their message and have tried to contact them. There is no doubt in my mind that people notice and appreciate your efforts to be available whenever they need you. *“Lazy hands make a man poor,*



but diligent hands bring wealth. He who gathers crops in summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son.” (Prov. 10:4-5).

Enjoy the work you do.

The Bible says that God knew us in our mother’s womb, and that He shaped us and created a unique purpose for our lives. Regardless of the work you do, you should do what God shaped you to do. If you get up every morning hating the idea of going to work you’re either in the wrong line of work or working for the wrong company.

Life is too short to spend a third of it in misery. Worse, if you don’t like the work you do how long will it take before your performance suffers? How long before you bring your bad attitude home to your family? Children will see your example, good or bad, and it will become their expectation as well.

Never just say “No” to a customer.

There are camps in the business world that believe doing anything and everything a customer asks is the definition of good service. I disagree. There are times when a customer is just plain wrong. But rather than just ignoring their request, or saying, “No,” try first to find an area of compromise and failing that, give them an explanation.

Many times you can’t do exactly what a customer wants, but you can come close through compromise. I had a customer who demanded that I buy shelves to put my product on in his stores. Buying shelves was something my company prohibited, but I could supply labor to shelve the product so I traded what I could do for what I couldn’t do, and still met the customer’s need to save some money.

Get customers to believe in you not just your product.

There are times when product quality is so far above competition that buyers don’t care who sells to them. But more often than not product quality differences among competitors is minimal. When this happens buyers usually go with the product represented by the person they know and trust the most.

Take time to get to know your customers. I remember one stoic customer who never spoke more than a few words and certainly never smiled. My boss came with me on a call and noticed pictures of beautiful cars on the wall. My boss and buyer talked for 15 minutes about the ins and outs of restoring collectible cars while I sat there feeling pretty useless. Taking a look around your buyer’s office will provide clues about their interests, hobbies, and families. Get to know these people; send them birthday cards, and thank-you notes, ask about their families, and learn about their hobbies. Do things that show you care about him or her as a person, not just as an order.



Fight for your customers when they're right.

Don't be afraid to fight company bureaucracy to change the rules when it is clear your customer has a good idea. Years ago product was usually shipped by a manufacturer to the grocer's warehouse. Grocery companies had huge fleets of trucks that were empty after they dropped of the load at the store driving right by a manufacturer's plant. The grocers said, "How about I pick up your product in my empty truck and save you the trouble of shipping it?" Most companies immediately said, "No." Eventually most manufacturers changed their minds when they realized how much money they could save by letting the grocers pick up product in their trucks! What is known as "backhaul" is a common practice today.

Do extra things for your customers.

I have never met a buyer that did not at some time require some special treatment that had little if anything to do with my job as a salesman. But when a customer's order is late because a truck had a flat tire the buyer doesn't have the trucker's phone number he has yours.

One of my buyer's taught business classes at a local college and asked me to fill in for him one night. Teaching a college business marketing class certainly didn't have anything to do with what I sold him but I taught the class, had a great time, and that single act helped forge a much stronger relationship with this buyer.

Another customer was a commercial baker who I had sold on trying a shortening made specifically for pie crusts. You should have seen the look on his face when I showed up the first day of the production run at 4:00am to watch them make the first pies with my product! When he told me he didn't like the color of his pie crusts I got on the phone and talked to other experts. We determined that by changing the type of sugar he used we could give him a rich golden brown crust at no additional cost. That had nothing to do with shortening, but it solved a problem he'd had for years.

Listen to your customers.

The greatest weakness of the average extroverted salesperson is that they won't shut-up long enough to listen to what their buyer wants and needs. The best training I received in this area occurred when I was selling institutional food products to restaurant chains. It was a matter of policy that we would contact CEO's and executive chefs and meet with them several times to understand the needs of their organization before we ever mentioned a product name. We called these appointments "fact-finding calls."

It's amazing how much you can learn about what a buyer needs and what motivates him or her if you'll take the time to ask the questions and then listen to the answers.



Practice SBWA

You've heard of MBWA (Management By Walking Around)? SBWA (Selling By Walking Around) is MBWA's close cousin. You can't sell anything sitting behind a desk in your office. You can design a presentation and you can practice it until you're blue in the face, but you can't sell anything until you're sitting across from a buyer! *"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven."* (Eccl. 3:1).

Expect continual improvement.

The birth announcement section of the newspaper doesn't read, *"A 7-lb. 8-oz. expert was born today at 3:30am."* To be good at your craft takes a lot of work. To become an expert takes devotion. To stay an expert takes constant study. The world around us is changing quickly and so is the way we do business. How many people do you know that sell mimeograph machines, or watches that have to be wound manually?

The best source of job satisfaction is knowing that no one could have done it better than you did. Learn how to do your job that well, and then keep figuring out how to do it even better. *"Wise men store up knowledge, but the mouth of a fool invites ruin."* (Proverbs 10:14).

Know your competition.

We usually know what our own products will do but what about our competitors? Do you know how your major competitors market their products? Do you know what they tell your buyers about their products? Do you know the strengths and weaknesses of every product in their line? If not, you should.

One of my wholesale buyers was transferred to a new area he knew nothing about. He asked me to prepare a review of the business to help teach him the basics. I arrived with a notebook full of every piece of documentation I could get my hands on about every product in the category from every manufacturer. It listed the strengths and weaknesses of every product and today it sits on his desk as a ready reference to his business.

Whom do you think this buyer regards as an expert to call when he has a problem? I'd rather answer a dozen of these questions than have him calling my competitor for answers!

Motivate through positive reinforcement.

I've known managers who thought it cute to reward the lowest performers with a trophy like an old ugly boot or a troll doll that had to be displayed in the poor performer's office for a month until it was "awarded" to someone else the next month. This is contrary to Biblical principle. The Bible tells us to build each other up, not to tear people down and humiliate them. *"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."* (Eph 4:29).



Demand integrity from yourself and others.

Several times over the years customers have told me about salesmen who make claims about products that turn out not to be true or they promise to provide a service and then back out later. These kinds of breaches of trust reflect not only on the individual, but on the company they work for as well.

If you go to industry association meeting you'll find people saying all they want is to be treated fairly; to be "playing on a level field" with the rest of their competitors. But the truth is most buyers want the level playing field tilted just a bit in their direction. Don't ever fall into this trap. Don't ever let them even think they're getting something you wouldn't also offer fairly to their competitors. If you do, you may get the order today, but you will have planted a seed of doubt in that customer's mind, "Am I really getting the best deal from him?" As painful as it might be it is better to walk away from business that is won through deception or unfair treatment of a customer. Early on God tells business people to be honest, "*Use honest scales and honest weights, an honest ephah and an honest hin.*" (Lev 19:36).

Accept responsibility when things go wrong

No matter how good you are Murphy's Law will strike you at some time. When things go wrong take responsibility for the error, and do what you can to fix the situation immediately. Once when I took over a customer from another sales manager first thing I did was audit the financial records. To my horror I discovered the customer had overspent his cooperative marketing fund by \$80,000, or about 25% of his annual fund. On my second call with the buyer I brought the problem to his attention, accepted corporate responsibility for the overspend, and laid out a plan to re-balance the books. He wasn't happy, but he knew he was partially to blame and together we fixed the problem.

Give credit to others when things go well.

American F-16 pilot, Scott O'Grady, shot down by a Serbian missile, survived a week without food or water in hostile territory. In the press conference following his rescue O'Grady thanked God and the men and women of the rescue squad for his saving life. He downplayed the importance of his own actions that contributed to his survival: eating bugs, getting water from a sponge, and evading enemy troops.

Success is generally the result of a team of people all doing their jobs well. Give credit to the people who do the work whether they're on the front lines or not.

Take appropriate risks.

Risk aversion is a sure-fire prescription for mediocre performance. It is impossible to win big unless you're willing to take some risks. It is a risk to plant the wheat seed rather than grind it into flour, but if it grows you'll have 30-60 times as much. Learn to assess risk and build it into your



business plan. At the same time beware the “get rich quick” scenarios. Anyone who offers something that seems to be too good to be true usually is, and the appeal is to your greed not your common sense.

Never, never, never give up.

Winston Churchill’s commencement speech was the shortest on record; “Never, never, never give up.” What separates an outstanding salesperson from a mediocre one? The best salespeople learn to never give up. Edison made 10,000 light bulbs before the first one worked. And every one he made got him that much closer to the one that worked.

Create an intrapreneurial organization.

Empowerment is a hot topic these days. People say business needs to allow employees the freedom to create, to build, to think freely. But this is nothing new, people have always done better work when they had the freedom to do the best they could. *“Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”* (1 Cor. 13:6-7 LB). Expect the best in people and get out of their way so they can accomplish it!

Lead first, coach second, manage third.

Leaders set an example by the work that they do, coaches help others to learn how to do the work, and managers check whether the work was done. If there is a good example in the form of a strong leader, and a coach who builds the skills of the organization, there will be little need for a manager to check to see if the work got done! The Bible says we should teach our children how to use the gifts God gave them. Why can’t we do the same for the people we work with? *“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.”* (Proverbs22:6).

One Final Thought

The one characteristic that sets Christians apart from the rest of the world is our relationship with Christ. Success from a worldly point of view means nothing apart from our relationship with Jesus. It is this relationship that is the cornerstone of our faith. It is the foundation upon which we build our families, our careers, and the society in which we live.

As His ambassadors we must live a life that reflects His values and principles, not the world’s. In the crush of a busy workday it is easy to lose track of that simple fact. And because it is so easy to be distracted we must become therefore, ever more diligent in maintaining our relationship with our Lord. Find a good church in your neighborhood and anchor yourself to it, find a group of your Christian peers in which you can confide and discuss the work issues you face, look for ways to apply God’s standards at work as you read and study His word daily. Above all remember that He is always with us to help us and guide us if we will just turn to Him.



Words to Ponder

The secret of education lies in respecting the pupil. Ralph Waldo Emerson

Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth. He who gathers crops in summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son. Prov. 10:4-5

The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep. Eccl. 5:12

Nothing is really work unless you would rather be doing something else. James Matthew Barrie

I would give no thought to what the world might say of me, if only I could transmit to posterity the reputation of an honest man. Sam Houston

Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf. Prov. 11:28

A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who pours out lies will perish. Prov. 19:9

You may be deceived if you trust too much, but you will live in torment if you don't trust enough.
Frank Crane

A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense. Prov. 19:11



Meeting Notes

Use these meeting notes to focus your entire organization on the importance of selling, and the use of selling skills to enhance job productivity. This meeting is far more effective if people from a variety of departments are represented (For example: sales, advertising, manufacturing, finance, administrative, etc.).

1) Review each of the 21 habits of incredibly successful sales people with your group.

- Personal habits.
- Customer service habits.
- Work habits and skills.

2) Using a generated chart, ask the group to add characteristics they believe are important to success in your organization. No discussion allowed, just list the ideas. At this point there are no right or wrong ideas. Complete this for each area; personal habits, customer service habits, and work habits and skills.

3) Ask the group to discuss the added characteristics.

- Does everyone agree the characteristic is important?
- Ask the group to combine similar characteristics into one.

4) For every characteristic on the list have the group create a definition. For example, “What does it mean in your organization to “Get customers to believe in you not just your product?”

- Get input from each of the functional areas represented.

5) Have each function discuss how they can develop each characteristic.

- For example; the customer is different in sales than in advertising. What do you different to meet the needs of these different customers?



Key Points:

There are literally hundreds of characteristics of successful sales people. Many of them are specific to the types of industries that people work in but the habits listed here are common to most. The 21 habits of incredibly successful sales people can be divided into three categories; personal habits, customer service habits, and work habits and skills.

Personal Habits

- Learn to balance your work and family life.
- Be early not just punctual.
- Look the part of professional you are.
- Start a little early and work a little late.
- Enjoy the work you do.

Customer Service Habits

- Never just say “No” to a customer.
- Fight for your customer when they’re right.
- Get customers to believe in you not just your product.
- Listen to your customers.
- Do extra things for your customer.

Work Habits and Skills

- Practice Sales Management by Walking Around.
- Expect continual improvement.
- Know your competition.
- Motivate through positive reinforcement.
- Demand integrity from yourself and others.
- Accept responsibility when things go wrong.
- Give credit to others when things go well.
- Take appropriate risks.
- Never, never, never give up.
- Create an intrapreneurial organization.
- Lead first, coach second, and manage third.