

Go From Good to Great: Five Ways to Boost Your Sales Career

by Chip Eichelberger



Many experienced sales professionals don't see the need for continuous improvement. They often think, "I've been selling for fifteen years, so I must be great." The number of years experience is not a measure of excellence - any honest golfer knows that. Such thinking can limit sales professionals from achieving a higher level of success.

Just because you've been doing something for years doesn't mean you can't or don't need to improve. Oftentimes, people get satisfied at just being good at what they do. *Then they stop doing all the little things that made them great, such as using a pre-call checklist, asking for referrals and testimonials, conducting timely follow-up, and sending thank-you notes.* But these little things make the difference between good and great.

In fact, a great chasm exists between good and great performance. Realize, however, that this doesn't mean you have to work *harder*. Rather, you need the discipline to execute the little things in an extraordinary way every day. Consider U2 front man Bono's example of taking something good and making it great. "An early version of our first single *Vertigo* was massaged, hammered, tweaked, lubed, sailed through two mixes, and got U2's unanimous stamp of 'very good.' **Very good is the enemy of great.** You think great is right next door. It's not. **It's in another country,**" Bono told *USA Today*. Instead of releasing the song at "very good," the band rearranged *Vertigo* with new melodies and rhythms. They soon discovered untapped reserves of ideas and fortitude, and the song went on to become a number one hit.

Has your sales performance been "good" or "great"? Have you been on cruise control in your job? When was the last time you went back into your "studio" and reevaluated what you do and how you are doing it? If your performance could use improvement, consider the five following strategies.

1. Ask "What Can I Do Better?"

When was the last time you asked a client what you could do to improve his or her experience with you? Years? Months? Never? If you want to continuously improve your sales skills, your clients and prospects will have the most valuable insight into how you can become better. So make it a priority to regularly ask them for their suggestions on how to improve and add more value. Sales managers should ask their sales people, "You have worked with me know for three months/three years. What can I do to be a better sales manager? How can I support you more?"

The same question is just as powerful with your family. When is the last time you asked your kids, "**What can I do to be a better mommy or daddy?**" How about asking your spouse? I guarantee they will have some feedback for you. It takes courage to ask and really listen to the answers. What you often find is that it will be little things they want you to do more often that you did not know were that important.

Although asking “What can I do better?” is an excellent way to continuously improve your performance, asking is really only the first step. The key is to listen when someone offers a suggestion. When a client starts talking, don’t try to defend yourself or justify your actions, just listen to what he or she has to say. Take your client’s suggestions seriously and follow up with the person later to ensure you make progress.

2. Set a Goal for Each Day

What activities drive performance for your business? Is it number of contacts? Referrals? Phone calls? Appointments? Determine this factor and set a measurable goal for doing a certain number of these activities each day. Many sales professionals think in terms of a sales funnel, and they need to keep a specific number of people in that funnel at all times to remain successful. How many new prospects do you need to contact to keep your funnel full?

As you do this, don’t forget about past clients. Many sales professionals become so focused on acquisition that they forget about retention. Past clients are easier to sell because they already know you and love the service you provide. But your competition is constantly trying to take your past clients away, and they may succeed if you lose contact and show indifference. *So, how many past clients are you going to call today?*

3. Keep Track of Your Progress

A good way to track your progress and ensure continuous improvement is to keep track of what you do. Create a scorecard to record your key performance numbers for each day— number of appointments, sales, referrals, etc. For example, if you want to make ten cold calls each day, then keep a record of the number of calls you make as well as the number of days you achieve your cold calling goal. Repeat this procedure for each goal or activity and post it where you can see it easily. This is the strategy I used when I managed the road teams for Tony Robbins – you can’t manage what you can’t measure. The quickest way to lose momentum is to stop tracking your results.

4. Tell an Effective Story

Everyone has a success story, and you may notice that businesses and products often use their story as a marketing tool. Whatever your story is, it must be unique, solve the customer problem and be compelling. Real estate agents, for example, may take pictures of their clients in front of their new homes and then show these photos to their prospects. Even a bottle of wine or a consumer product can tell a story to differentiate it on the shelf. Consider how you can document your success with quotes, testimonials, case studies and pictures, and then creatively use your story to attract new business.

5. Record Yourself

No one likes to admit they aren’t good at what they do. Even if a person fails, he or she won’t likely admit that individual performance was to blame. But people are often mediocre or just plain bad at sales, and they don’t even realize it.

Have you ever recorded yourself while you’re meeting with a client or prospect? Most people haven’t. However, recording yourself is an excellent way to identify your strengths and weaknesses.

How do you record a sales presentation? Explain to your client or prospect that you are consistently trying to improve the way you tell your story and your listening skills. Then ask if you can record the meeting for personal use. Most of the time, the prospect won't have any objections and they'll admire your professionalism. If you are speaking to a group, ask to use a video camera. If you are on the phone it is fairly easy. Many modern phone systems now have that capacity.

Once you have the recording, the moment of truth arrives. Yes, it takes guts to review the tape! On your first review, take notes on all the good things you do and write down all the questions you ask. Then go back, ideally with a more experienced peer, and review what you need to improve. The danger is the more you know, the more you tend to talk. So you'll often find that you need to **ask more questions and talk less!**

Continuous Improvement in Your Future

You may think that if you want to take your sales career to the next level of success, you just need to work harder. In reality, you need to work *smarter*. Start by asking your clients what you can do to improve. Then use their suggestions to set goals for yourself and track your progress. Know your success story and ensure that you communicate it effectively to your clients and prospects by recording yourself in a meeting.

Most sales professionals use these strategies initially, but people tend to fall out of good habits quickly. They become satisfied with providing a mediocre experience to their clients, when they should really be trying to amaze them. Providing a superior experience means constantly improving and refreshing what you do. One of the best ways to gain momentum is to go back to these habits and start doing them again. When you do, you can achieve limitless success.

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