



Experience is Not the Best Teacher

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What is an experience but the present moment of a particular circumstance? They are as fleeting as they are arresting; as real as they are imagined; and as useful to us as they are benign.

Experiences are like the sounds of the pendulum's swing rushing through the air one moment, while telling the lessons of time about the dial in the next. They are all around us, but alone, experiences are neither good nor bad, right nor wrong, worthwhile or a waste . . . at least not until they are reflected upon . . . given relevance and meaning as a result.

Thus, experience is not the best teacher; rather, it is reflected experience that is the best instructor of life. Not until something becomes relevant to a person can it ever affect a change in their behavior or thinking. And not until something is reflected upon—a past experience that is pondered, considered, and internalized in search of its meaning and lesson, can it ever become relevant.

Relevance is discerned through reflection. Change is made through relevance.

It is at the point of relevance, or realization, that our experiences become useful to us; they change us and we discover how behaviors affect outcomes, and how behaviors adjusted can modify our outcomes. Therefore, reflected experience is the only effective means to get people to change, grow, and be successful.

What Does All This Mean to the Sales Professional?

Beware of amassing a lifetime of sales experience that yields no value aside from the commission. Beware of a life that says twenty years of sales experience equates to superior sales prowess and success. It's a virtual proverb that experienced means none other than you have a lot of time accrued in the industry.

Experience counts for nothing in many instances. Why? Because sales professionals often never take the time to reflect upon those experiences so they may learn and grow and become a better person and professional.

Reflection is Evaluation

Evaluate your activities and your sales conversations. Let others do the same. Be honest with yourself when doing so—analyze your marketing efforts and your sales techniques. Formulate a simple means (i.e. checklist) that causes you to reflect from time to time on your daily, weekly, monthly or yearly experiences.

It is not important how often you reflect upon your experiences as a sales professional, nor is it important how you evaluate yourself either. What is important is that you do it. Plain and simple as it sounds, schedule time if you have to reflect upon your business activities and results. The outcome will be growth for you personally and professionally.

A Final Note on Reflected Experience

Never expect training to change behavior or to provide a pathway to personal and professional growth. Training, particularly classroom sales training, has no real value in many organizations. Why? Because most training is very brief, impractical, and lacks a “reflection” component as well.

No one is going to change as a result of our desires. Peter Block, The Answer to How is Yes

Many Learning & Development divisions within sales organizations fail at achieving positive change for sales professionals because a follow-up component (reflection – evaluation of sales experience) is missing in their training model. Those units would be more accurately named Learning rather than Learning & Development because little to no development ever actually occurs.

Don't be like so many other sales professionals or organizations, who never take the time to reflect upon their sales and marketing experiences in order to learn from mistakes and successes.

Experience is Not the Best Teacher. Reflected Experience is the Best Teacher.