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Can You Improve the Business Results of Your Under-Performers?

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"Awareness is a key in success. If you have it, teach it; if you lack it, seek it."—Michael Kitson

Have you heard the famous Margaret Thatcher quote, "Power is like being a lady, if you have to tell people you are, you aren't"? I always find it amusing when people refer to themselves in one vein or another but never really display that behavior firsthand. For example, I know one salesperson who will emphatically say, "I am a hard worker," but his career is mired by short stints because the employer who hires him within six months understands just the opposite.

For years, I felt *Awareness* was the most critical step in improving one's performance. So much so, that I felt if I could just create the "why" for someone who is underachieving, they will take the diagnosis and make a change for the better. But awareness turns out to be only a small part of the equation.

Today, at RevenueForce, we still go to great lengths to effectively diagnose why someone underperforms: by leveraging benchmarks that map to the sales process, developing a skill assessment to understand how well the individual can execute the skills in the sales process, and then assessing the individual with a proprietary attribute assessment that measures their engagement (motivation, attitude, and accountability).

This allows us to provide a holistic view of the individual, so they can "own" their development and tailor the training to their individual needs for performance improvement.

However, as a sales manager or coach, you are pushing a rock up a hill if an individual doesn't buy into the change required or, worse yet, is still unaware that they are underperforming even after the diagnosis. I call this person's state "oblivious." But getting improvement isn't as easy as creating awareness.

Awareness really is only the foundational step such as stepping on the scale if you decide to lose weight. Once awareness is created, individual *Desire* needs to kick in. The individual must "want" or "desire" to improve. This sounds like a no-brainer. There should be hundreds of reasons that would create a desire. But as we all know, desire is different for everyone. The **maintainers of status quo** are what I call average-to-low performers and their desire may be:

- To live a stress-free life and not overexert themselves
- To make just enough money to pay the mortgage or monthly expenses
- To sell just enough so as not to be on the radar screen of their manager
- To prioritize their personal life over their career and drink and party every night
- To play video games in their spare time vs. investing in their personal development

And there are numerous other behaviors that scream, "I am not motivated in the role I am in."

But desire for top-or-above average performers looks quite different and may be:

- To achieve because they are passionate and love what they do, and it is a part of their DNA
- To win because they are competitive or just hate to lose at anything
- To feel the need for achievement, or they may never feel their performance is good enough (right or wrong)
- Fear of failure or fear of being put on a performance plan or anything that would increase stress levels
- To have financial security or need to address a financial crisis or they just love material objects
- To feel the need to contribute to their team and feel their contribution is valued

Desire is the catalyst that hopefully ignites the fire to action.

Recently, I was coaching an individual who had numerous sales effectiveness and productivity deficiencies. But the biggest initial gap was scheduling and executing enough meetings per week, which doomed him to fail because of a lack of activity/opportunities. He was just spending too many days in his office on red light (nonrevenue producing) activities. He also had justified numerous “reasons” why he needed so much office time.

After creating awareness in the initial diagnosis that he needed more meetings weekly, we put a plan in place that would help him drive his activity and increase meetings weekly. After a great first six weeks on the plan in which we felt he had achieved the adoption of the new behaviors, he detoured back to his old habits. Keep in mind, during the short period of achieving his sales productivity goals, he started to see a lot of positive trending in his sales pipeline. That, in and of itself, should have motivated him to continue, but he just could not or would not sustain it.

Of course, he said all the right things regarding his desire to succeed and contribute to his team. In the end, his desire was not backed up by his behaviors. At this point, there really isn't anything his direct manager or personal coach can do for him unless he commits to work his plan.

This leads us to one of the most critical behaviors and where the rubber meets the road: *Discipline*. Did you know that 95 percent of those who lose weight regain it? Some 25 percent of people abandon their New Year's resolution after one week (60 percent within six months). Research has repeatedly shown that educating people about the benefits of a behavior does not translate into changing habits. Habits are formed by doing.

As mentioned earlier, if I am going to lose weight, I first need to step on a scale to see how much I need to lose (awareness). Next, I need to set goals of how much I need or want to lose and what my ideal waist size is (desire). Then I need to develop a strategy such as exercise and diet to achieve that goal and keep to the plan (discipline).

However, discipline is hard! Holding oneself accountable to both the behaviors and activities that lead you to achieving your goals is difficult.

I am a guitar owner (notice I did not say player). Every year for the past twenty years, I have set a goal to become a better player. I am aware that I am not a natural musician so everything I learn is a challenge. My desire is to one day play a gig in front of a real audience that is not my family or dog. But getting better requires lessons and practice. I had the awareness and the desire but consistently lacked discipline. There were numerous excuses as to why I wasn't practicing such as my travel schedule, etc. But the reality is I just did not have the discipline needed to become a better player.

2018 has been different. I just needed to “start” and get some traction or a little momentum. I am taking baby steps by taking a lesson whenever I am home (at least once a month). I am bringing songs that I want to invest my time in learning. I am happy with my progress to date, although my wife would prefer I also take voice lessons.

Discipline requires readily making sacrifices to meet your goals. Discipline may be:

- Making sacrifices of time—working longer hours or practicing your selling skills (especially learning industry trends and products or practicing presentations for salespeople)
- Spending more time in preparing for upcoming meetings to ensure better outcomes
- Investing in learning and studying your industry to become an expert and a valued resource to your customer
- Setting weekly activity goals and holding yourself accountable to the achievement of those goals—review them at the end of the week and determine why or why you did not accomplish your activity goals

- Forcing yourself to take action—work your plan and take baby steps to gain some momentum toward the goal and “just do it” or do something!
- Or it can even be as simple as following your company’s defined sales process and utilizing the sales enablement tools provided. Companies are investing in training their teams, yet adoption is so low. If you are a low performer, there is no reason: You are not following the training and process the company has laid out and committing to master the skills. Ironically, having been in the training business over twenty-five years, it is always the top performers who are the early adopters and easiest to train because they desire to get better!

Remember the quote by Albert Gray, “Successful people have the habit of doing things failures don’t like to do. They don’t like doing them either, but disliking is subordinated to the strength of purpose.” Not every aspect of your job will bring you joy. Discipline is doing the things you don’t necessarily want to do but you do them anyway because you recognize it is the only way to successful performance.

If you want to improve performance in your team, create awareness (step on the scale), establish a plan and reason “why” (desire), and then understand, identify, and be willing to pay the sacrifices (discipline) needed to achieve the goals.

Scott Anderson is a founding principal at RevenueForce LLC and Diamond Performance Solutions LLC. He is co-author of the book Reignite: How to Rekindle Your Passion for Selling. Scott has spent his entire career - more than twenty-five years - selling, managing salespeople, and providing sales consulting, training, and coaching to some of the biggest and best sales organizations in the world. He has worked with leading organizations including 3M, IBM, Cargill, UnitedHealth Group, Carlson Companies, Andersen Windows, Wells Fargo and The Hartford. He has authored numerous articles on sales effectiveness. He resides in Dallas, Texas.