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# Four ways to think more like a sales leader would

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Salespeople think like salespeople, when instead they should think like leaders and CEOs. Top salespeople know this, and act every day like the CEO of their own business.

Here are four principles to consider:

- **First in or last out** — Every good salesperson knows the best time to reach the “C” suite is early in the morning or after 5 p.m., because the gatekeeper isn’t in and/or everyone has gone home.

What do your customers say about you? “Make sure to call Laura early in the morning because you know that is the best time to reach her” or “Don’t call Laura until 9. Maybe she will be in by that time.”

Great CEOs know that hope is not a strategy. When the company isn’t hitting revenue numbers, it’s time to practice “no-option” behavior — meaning tighter rules for all salespeople and doing what it takes to get the job done. It’s always surprising to watch salespeople who aren’t hitting quota leave at 4:30 p.m. There’s a good chance that this person’s sales strategy is based on denial and hope. There’s also a good chance this rep won’t be around.

One sales mentor always stressed the power of making one more call, one more stop, one more contact. It was always amazing how many times that one more contact paid off in a sale.

- **Lifelong learning** — No prospect wants to be called on by a dumb salesperson. Most successful CEOs are enrolled at UGS — University of Getting Smarter. They understand we live in the knowledge age, and companies that compete and win are organizations that have a learning culture.

Alvin Toffler says it best: “The illiterate of the future are not those who cannot read or write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and re-learn.”

Experts in the emotional intelligence world call this competency “self-actualization.” People scoring high in this are on a continuous journey to reach their full potential. Steven Stein and Howard Book, authors of “The EQ Edge,” report that self-actualization is one of the key emotional intelligence skills found in top sales producers.

Successful salespeople are like successful CEOs. They don’t wait for someone to provide education, mentoring or advice. They take charge of their learning and growth. They bug their sales manager for coaching, their peers for best practices and their mentors for guidance.

- **Humility** — Jim Collins, author of “Good to Great,” researched and discovered that successful CEOs were extremely humble. They often said their success was due to luck or gave credit to others. In many cases, Collins found these successful CEOs weren’t flamboyant but very unassuming and modest. They set aside their personal ego needs and focused on the company.

Top salespeople are humble and give credit for their success to other members of the team — customer service, front desk and back room. They understand that everyone in the company is equally important; their job just may get more visibility.

Top salespeople get the big picture and focus on what's good for the company and not just their own book of business. For example, is it really good to hit your quota by selling to the transactional customer who is going to ask for discounts, be high-maintenance and expect extra value?

Humility is a good way to add revenue to the bottom line.

- **Accountability** — Successful CEOs know they're responsible for putting food on the table for many people. They take this responsibility seriously and are accountable to their organization for their actions and decisions.

Unfortunately, many sales organizations have bought into the myth that top sales producers are always high-maintenance, that it comes with the territory.

As a result, companies accept bad behavior, such as incomplete data in the CRM system or poor attendance at sales meetings. The answer they accept from top performers is, "Hey, I'm producing, so don't micromanage me."

Imagine if other departments were allowed to operate this way. For example, the accounting department doesn't feel like producing month-end reports because they have other things to do. Customer service doesn't log in customer conversations because they have so many calls coming in.

The salesperson who thinks like a CEO knows there are parts of every job that aren't enjoyable. He also knows that his data is important in driving strategic decisions at the company.

If you want to be great in sales, think and act like a leader, a CEO. After all, you sell to leaders. Why not act like one?

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