



Invest in yourself

Making time for sales training makes a big difference

by Phil Sasso

One day, two lumberjacks competed in a log-cutting contest. One man was young and the other considerably older. For four hours, both men worked at cutting and stacking logs. The young man worked vigorously, never stopping. The older man stopped about every 20 minutes, sitting on a log.

At the end they stood beside their log piles to be judged. The younger man stood drenched in sweat. His stack reached just above his waist. The senior logger looked only slightly tired. His stack nearly reached his shoulders.

"How did you do it?" one observer asked. "Did you win because 'slow and

steady wins the race?'"

"Nope," replied the quiet logger.

"When you were sitting with your back to us resting, were you actually sharpening your saw blade?" asked another observer.

"Nah," said the older lumberjack, "I was just putting gas in my chain saw."

Now there's a competitor that's working harder and smarter! In much the same way, running a successful mobile tool dealership today isn't just about working harder. It's about working smarter, too.

In today's competitive marketplace

and facing a potentially challenging economy, success is not just about sharpening your saw. It's about turbo-charging your saw.

Top mobile distributors know this. So, what sets top-earning mobile tool dealers apart from the rest? Some have more inventory. Some are better at collections. A lot have great truck layouts. Many show new tools every week, "toting and promoting." All that is good. But almost every top dealer is a lifelong learner, a constant work in progress.

Investing in your business is important. But investing in yourself may be even more important. According to Dunn & Bradstreet, more businesses in the U.S. fail because of lack of knowledge than because of lack of money. Being a lifelong learner can pay back big dividends.

Think there's nothing more for you to learn? Be careful. Once you think you've "arrived," you could easily get knocked off your perch.

Take New England Patriot's QB Tom Brady. He walked into Super Bowl XLII just coming off a perfect regular season. He was playing at the top of his game. The competing quarterback was relatively young and inexperienced. What did Brady need to do? He only had to show up and do what he always did. But as history proved, doing things the same old way doesn't guarantee success in football. Or in mobile tool distribution.

Did you ever walk in one of your customer's shops and discover that he bought a new Gizmo from your competitor—an expensive new Gizmo! What happened? You didn't see that coming! What was wrong with that customer?

Maybe the problem was not what's wrong with your customer. Maybe it was what your competitor did right.

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Maybe he demonstrated equipment you didn't. Maybe he asked the right questions. Maybe he took the time to listen. Maybe he did something you could have—if you invested more time in sales training.

Can sales training keep your customer from buying from your competition? Yes, quite often. Training keeps you sharp. It reminds you how to open a sale or teaches you new ways to close one. Think of sales techniques as the tools of your trade. Like the techs you sell to, the more tools you have, the more money you can make.

You can wait for your customer to ask you for an item, or you can ask him for the sale. You can hope for more sales, or you can take control.

Of course, it's important to learn new sales theories. But more importantly, you need to put those theories into practice. And the more you practice those sales techniques, the more

naturally they'll come. You'll answer an objection with ease. The response will come naturally. You won't sound stiff or awkward, but persuasive.

I'm not talking about going to a one-time sales seminar, getting hyped up and falling back to your old ways in a week or two. (I've done that!) I'm talking about committing to on-going training. And don't just wait to do it someday. Start today.

How? Here are just a few ways to keep improving your salesmanship:

Read. Get a new book and make it your companion wherever you read. Don't like it? Don't finish it. Just get another. I like: Harry Beckwith's *Selling The Invisible* and most books by Jeffrey Gitomer.

Listen. Buy a sales training CD or download an MP3. Listen on your truck's stereo between stops and turn transit time into training time. I've enjoyed hearing Tom Hopkins and Zig

Ziglar live. An associate of mine likes Brian Tracy CDs.

Go online. Your flag may have an online forum. (Independent? Check out IMTDA's Yahoo Group <http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/IMTD>). Get my marketing tip emails (philsasso.com/blog). And don't forget *Professional Distributor's* online resources at www.professionaldistributormagazine.com and the editor's blog at www.professionaldistributormagazine.com/interactive.

As you can tell I'm a huge proponent of ongoing sales education. That's because I believe once you're done learning, you're done. **PH**

Phil Sasso is the president of Sasso Marketing Inc., an aftermarket advertising and public relations firm. Phil is also a speaker and a consultant—and he wants to write a book on sales & marketing. Someday. Subscribe to his free marketing tip email at: philsasso.com/blog.

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