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# Would I Be Happy As A Rep?

by DEAN BAUM

You are, in all probability, already a rep. So, maybe this should read:

- “Should I be happy as a rep?”
- “Do I still enjoy being a rep?”
- “If not, why not?”

I think these are rather basic questions that ought to be considered. The answers are not simple, but the principles behind the questions are.

If you are indeed a rep, the initial questions to ask are: “Why did I take the step, and have I realized what I needed or wanted to accomplish? Am I reasonably happy, or at least am I happier doing this than whatever I was doing before?”

Things change, and what was at one time an enjoyable endeavor may not continue as one. The reasons are many: Change in principals, loss of income, problems with major customers, difficulties in merging the rep lifestyle with your personal life. However, these variables can change for the better or worse during your tenure as a rep.

What is (or was) your main reason for wanting the “rep life”? In many cases the rep wants to get out of the “rat race,” away from the political issues of corporate life, out of dealing with a less than (perceived) desirable boss. These could be valid reasons. Perhaps you can’t stand being behind a desk 40 hours a week. Perhaps you feel you could steer your course better. All these are reasons people have given to go into our business.

But, still, are you/would you be suited for it? Would you be (are you) happy as a rep?

Ask yourself some questions to ascertain the answers.

- What makes most reps happy? A sincere like of people. A rep should have, or develop, a real liking for people. He should enjoy being around a diverse section of the human race. He should like finding out about people, conversing with them. Why? Because that is precisely what he is going to be doing if he is to be successful. This includes dealing with

people on the phone, in person, via correspondence, in conferences, at trade shows, in a variety of settings.

A rep should like the challenge of making a sale, and it should excite him when he does. Universally, most reps jump up and down when they make a sale. It’s a real rush. It’s part of the enjoyment of the business.

- Would I be happy as a rep?

A rep should enjoy the field that he is selling in. Years back, author Studs Turkel wrote a book about his life experiences of interviewing people. One of the interviews was with a famous hair stylist. I still remember his comment: “I have no patience with someone that doesn’t love his (or her) job. If he is unhappy, quit and get one he loves.” Perhaps it may not be that simple for some, but he was correct. Life is too short to stay in a job you are unhappy with. A large part of that is enjoyment of what you do. This stylist loved doing women’s hair. You too should enjoy and love the field you are working in and the job you are doing. If not, strive hard to change it. Sit back and consider what would make you happy, then go after it with everything you have.

Being successful is one facet of

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being happy as a rep. If you are achieving what you set out to do, then that results in a positive feeling. Obviously, if what you are doing is not succeeding, then you will not be a “happy camper.” However, it should be noted that it takes time to build a rep agency. If you feel it’s what you need in life, don’t give up; it will happen.

Knowledge is power. It is also required in order to do a good job in any field. So, if you are or if you want to be in a particular discipline, learn all there is to know about it. The chancellor of Washington University was fond of saying: “The person that stops learning today is uneducated tomorrow.”

Once you learn the basics, it’s not over. Learning is a lifelong process. Our brains were designed and made to make that possible and to make it an enjoyable experience. In order to sell a product, you have to know the product. In order to be happy selling it, you must know it.

**Reinvention** — One of the curious things about being a rep is that throughout the history of rep agencies, they change. Why? Because change is a way of life. Companies go out of business, companies merge, companies

change reps. You may have to be able to reinvent your agency throughout its growth. Usually, if properly done, this makes for a stronger company. It is a factor that you will probably have to deal with if you want to still enjoy being a rep.

**A good business structure** — Many good salespeople are not necessarily good businesspeople. In order to be a good rep, you have to establish a sound, working business structure. If you are unable to do that, get help. It may mean the difference between success and happiness on the one hand, and failure and disillusionment on the other.

Am I able to work independently? This is a key factor in the success and, therefore, happiness of a rep. If you cannot effectively work without supervision, you are almost guaranteed to fail.

**Freedom** — This is a most misused word; however, there are degrees of freedom, and being a rep allows one some latitude. If you have been on a long and successful road trip or if you have had a great month, no one is going to tell you that you can’t take off three days and go fishing. However, with freedom comes respon-

sibility. I have known one person that said: “I just could not make it on my own; I didn’t have the motivation. I wouldn’t work when I should have.” On the other hand, I have seen more workaholics. To those I would give a reminder: “You are working to live, you are not living to work.” So, being a rep takes balance. But, many like the idea of being able to manage their own time and not having to live behind a desk.

**Travel** — Obviously, a rep must like to travel. I love to go and see places, even those in my territory that I have been to before, to talk to new people and have new experiences.

**Sales ability** — Sure you need it. Can you attain it? You bet you can. Take an interactive sales course and then practice the principles. If you have been in the business many years, don’t think you know it all; rather, ask: “What can I learn today that will allow me to do my job better tomorrow?”

I think what drives most successful, happy reps is the challenge of the sale. They enjoy it, and that is why they go after it constantly, day after day, and succeed.

So, these are what I found as key factors in being happy as a rep and some of the challenges we may face. There are other factors. What are your reasons? If you are embarking upon this field, welcome. Keep in touch with your fellow reps; they are a great bunch. They are a very positive group of great salespeople. They’ll help you. Don’t give up — if it’s what you want to do, you’ll succeed!

If you are a rep, I hope you are happy. If not, do what you need to change that. Enjoy life! Enjoy the great game of being an independent rep — a great profession. □

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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