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Characteristics  
of a **TOP**  
**PRODUCER**

Model yourself on these rules to push  
yourself to the next level.

BY JAMES LORENZEN



*Selling* is an unnatural act. Think about it: when you were growing up, you probably heard these statements (you can finish them yourself):

- Don't go where you're...
- Don't talk to...
- Don't speak unless you're...

So, what happens? You grow up and go into sales. You go where you're not wanted, you're talking to strangers, and you're speaking without being spoken to.

How many of your friends in school said, "When I graduate, I'm going into sales!" Not many, I'll bet. So, how do top producers become that way when they never intended to be in sales in the first place?

What are their characteristics? The answer depends on the type of salesperson. The answer would be different for someone in door-to-door selling, making one-time

sales, than it would for someone in a highly consultative selling situation where customer satisfaction and value-added expertise are important. How about when expertise must be combined with trust, and success requires a long-term relationship with continued rev-

enue production? That's different from a retail clerk who depends on relationships and product quality for repeat business with no built-in residual.

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A "top ten list" would likely look different depending upon which group of salespeople you're talking about. Some common de-

nominators do exist, however. We've all heard about persistence and perseverance. In fact, they're usually the first two traits people talk about. But what are the others? I'll bet if you asked 10 top producers to tell you their Top Ten List, you'd see some differences.

I've had a successful career in sales; in fact, some years ago when I was in print advertising sales, I was regarded to be at the top of my industry. Here's an admission, though: I've also had some sales experiences that didn't turn out so well. You can call them "learning experiences" or just flat-out

failures, but there are some differences between the “wins” and the “losses.”

For what it’s worth, here’s my own personal list of what it takes to be successful.

**1** **A belief in what they’re selling.** You could call it passion just as easily – and much of that belief comes from your attitude about what you’re really doing.

When I was selling advertising to small business owners, what I was really doing was helping them realize their dream of building a business of their own and achieve financial security. It also helped that I truly admired and respected the people I was selling to; small business owners embody the spirit of America, which for generations has been about risk-taking, building something and creating jobs.

When I could turn a prospect into an ongoing client, I was creating an economy that didn’t exist before I walked through the door. Now, my client was going to be building his/her business, while back at my company, we were creating work for all the support people and vendors who supplied goods and services for the client!

This wasn’t always true for me in the financial services industry. I loved helping clients, but I hated selling the products! That was the primary reason for my moving from a commission-based model to a fee-based model. With product sales out of the picture and income being fee-generated, I could focus on the work and forget the product sales.

So, why was sales okay for me in advertising and not okay in financial services? Simple: I could control the quality of what I was selling. While I didn’t have control over outcomes in either case, in advertising I could control the quality of the work being created. I couldn’t do that in financial services’ product sales. I could only

control the quality of the planning process.

**2** **They see selling as fun.** Selling should be fun. The reason you see so many sports analogies is because they ring true! Selling is part art, but it’s definitely a skill. Professionals are often called upon to execute that skill under pressure. Seeing it as a fun challenge rather than something to be dreaded is critical. The “fun” element also ties into number 1, belief. It’s easy to have fun when you believe, and when you marry belief and fun, you get passion. By the way, salespeople are fun people to begin with – probably because they’re optimistic. When you go

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out the door every morning, make up your mind to have fun!

**3** **They have a desire to learn.** I began training salespeople 25 years ago, and I’ve never met a “natural-born” top producer. Sure, there are people with natural gifts in every field, including sales, but it takes more than personality and talent to get to the top of any profession. Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus and Chris Everett were born with talent, but they didn’t get to the top without good coaches and a lot of practice. Tiger Woods even changed coaches and his swing while he was performing at the top of his game! The dedication of even the best player to go to a coach and say, “Watch me. Tell me what I’m doing and how I can improve,” is what separates the best from the rest.

**4** **They understand the true hierarchy of selling.** Top producers understand that prospects aren’t stupid and can see right through the rep who’s focused on the transaction rather than the customer’s long-term success. This is especially true in the B2B world of solution-based, consultative selling. When the customer’s interests truly come first, the salesperson understands she/he is the customer’s representative to the company, not the other way around.

**5** **They ask a lot of questions and make few statements.** This really leads into my next point, but all the top producers I’ve met understand that selling is teaching, and the Socratic method works. The more you ask, the more you learn. The more you learn, the more you know. Knowledge is power.

**6** **They are good listeners.** Just reread number 5. I will only add this: take notes as they’re talking. One thing I’ve learned is that things that get written down don’t somehow magically change later.

**7** **They’re honest.** They will change companies if the one they’re representing loses its reputation or the product line loses quality. (See the last line of number 4.)

**8** **Desire for accomplishment.** Money may be the prime motivator in the beginning – the desire for financial gain and independence beyond what wages would pay – but once they become top producers, there’s more to it. Money becomes more of a “score-keeping” tool. What they really want is to accomplish things others around them never even try.





**9** They have a sales “business plan” and trust their process. If “comfort” is important to them, they find it in making a plan, then executing the plan on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. They know that when they follow their plan good things happen.

**10** Top producers don’t “present.” Virtually all “presentations” have one thing in common. The prospect goes in with the attitude that after it’s done, she/he will go away to “think it over.” Top producers follow numbers 4, 5, and 6 to learn all they can, then – after taking pains to be sure all issues have been raised – begin an “application process.” Applying their solutions point-by-point to the specific issues that have been raised – and gaining commitment on each one – rather than doing a “laundry list” presentation, is their key to speaking the prospect’s language.

**11** Give them more than they thought they bought. For top producers, it means going the extra mile on service. For someone writing an article, it means adding an 11th characteristic to my Top Ten list.

Obviously, there could be others added to the list: status, control, etc., and they’d be valid, but these are the ones I’ve noticed most often. How many do you have?

**James Lorenzen** founded, built, and sold businesses of his own in the publishing industry. Since those days he has trained more than 10,000 salespeople and has been the headline speaker at more than 500 conventions throughout the United States, Canada and the U.K. Learn more at (805)265-5418 or visit [www.jameslorenzen.com](http://www.jameslorenzen.com)