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# The Essence Of Being “Teachable”

by GEORGE NAPOLI

The article that follows concerns itself with the critical importance of manufacturers’ representatives exercising a willingness to learn new things and to explore how and why they should learn. Hopefully, the message that follows will prove interesting to everyone from the veteran sales agent, the customer service representative, the owner/leader, manager and office support staff. It covers everyone in the agency and should apply to all agency personnel.

**W**hen presented with an opportunity to participate in a training session or to take a business-related course, we always hear, “Who has time to learn anyway? I’m too busy making a living.” Better yet, “I’m so successful now, I don’t really need to learn anything to keep abreast of the latest methodology, concepts and techniques. I’m doing just fine.” These responses are the most common when it comes to learning in general, or taking action in particular to develop new skill sets, learn a new procedure, or understand a new body of knowledge.

With that as background, this begs the question, whose responsibility is it to motivate us to want to learn something new and/or to adopt an innovative way of doing things? What comes first, a passion to become a more avid student of learning to make better decisions, thinking strategically, being more effective in what we do, or a need to be smarter than we are in order to be more successful? Does the passion come after we get started and consumed by what we are learning?

An integral part of what we’re discussing is finding the answer to the question: What do the terms “middle of the pack” and the “concept of average” have to do with learning?

Here’s what I’ve come to learn in what has been a lifelong journey down the path of learning and growing personally and professionally. As a rule, companies are not willing to invest in improvement for the middle-of-the-pack or average 30 percent of their producers. As far as that goes, my experience has been that companies won’t invest in the middle of the pack no matter what line or factory you want to

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***In order to be fulfilled and to grow personally and professionally, we need to change our success orientation and develop a growth orientation where we constantly establish new goals and challenges for ourselves based on learning and growing.***

## **The Essence of Being**

In articles that will follow in future months, I will communicate tips on how to develop a teachable attitude. Included in those tips will be information pertaining to how to develop a learning process to:

- Become growth-oriented instead of goal-oriented.
- Overcome your success — the greatest obstacle to tomorrow's success is today's success.
- Swear off short cuts — the greatest distance between two points is a short cut.
- Quit fearing failure! The greatest fear you can overcome is the fear that you will make a mistake. Develop a system for learning how to benefit from errors.

In closing, Theodore Roosevelt said, "In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing."

take on. If you had a choice between working with the top-30-percent producers in their respective field, or just an average sales agent or agency, would you pick the former or the latter? To me, the choice is obvious.

Whether you are 30 or 60 years old, whether you're marginally successful or successful beyond your wildest dreams, for all of our lives we are taught to set goals. Short-term, long-term — goals, goals, goals is what we've always been taught. Goal-setting is the process we employ after we've traveled our respective educational paths. But what happens after you've met your goals? Normally, we just set more goals. As a result, after a while your goals become blurred and actually obscure whatever purpose you thought you had when you set them in the first place. Worse yet, after you've met your goals, you just say "Amen" and rest on your laurels and ride into the proverbial successful sunset — whatever that means. And why not — aren't you entitled to relax? You just hit your goals, didn't you? But in time you will find that doesn't work. I know because I've experienced it firsthand. What you come to learn is that success is never final, just like failure is never fatal!

Individuals only become successful by employing whatever terms and conditions they apply for themselves. Success, just as a personal lifestyle, does not have to be defended. It is what it is. If it's a boat and three houses on the coasts or a small bungalow that serves you just fine for your lifestyle, then that's great! You deserve it, you've earned it! Best of all, money may not even be an integral part of your criteria for ultimate success — though we all know it has to play a pivotal part in your foundation.

In the end, goals and orientation make up only half the equation for successful personal and business lives. I would maintain that in order to be fulfilled and to grow personally and professionally, we need to change our success orientation and develop a growth orientation where we constantly establish new goals and challenges for ourselves based on learning and growing. Once we make that transition, we can learn to develop a passion for learning and growing. I for one believe that first you take a step or two in the direction of learning something new. Then you apply what you've learned. If it works, you feel good about that. It's then that the passion for learning casts its first light. Don't wait for the passion to come first unless you're very lucky. And that's what I am. I am very lucky. Learning comes too easy for me, and I have a knack for it, a passion for it and a real talent for it.

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Now my challenge is to open others' eyes and get them to consider developing a growth orientation and mentality both personally and professionally. One thing I've learned is that the more I learn, the more I realize how much I don't know. That philosophy fuels and drives my passion to learn more.

Two years ago I championed an initiative for our company to train and develop emerging middle managers and employees to ensure our corporate vision — in order to enable greatness in our employees. That initiative was branded Insight: Personal and Professional Career Development. The vision was crafted to deliver to our employees the essence of the best methods, concepts, skills and body of knowledge available from the best universities and professional training companies. On the opposite page appears a representative list of what will appear in future articles that I hope to communicate to sales agencies and their employees. □

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

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