

# dealing with a sales slump

## HOW TO INTERRUPT THE SLUMP CYCLE

EDITORIAL | NICKI WEISS

All independent manufacturers' reps know about the deadly grip of selling slumps:

- ✓ You have a series of bad days and missed sales.
- ✓ You aren't coming close to your potential.
- ✓ You can't stop worrying about it.

Let's explore the slump cycle and discuss what you can do to interrupt it.

**What is a slump?** A slump is any decrease in performance over time. It may start innocently, when you lose a couple of sales. Somebody makes a comment that "you might be in a slump" and you start believing it. You botch a sale again, and you decide you are in an official slump. You get angry and depressed and your slump gets worse. You begin to worry about money (Ouch!), start to lose faith in yourself, and firmly believe that this period will last a long time.

**What contributes to a slump?** There can be many reasons why you're in a slump. Some are within your control — some are not. If, for example, you don't know enough about your product, or your presentation skills are poor, fess up and catch up. As my father always said, "It is easier to see a fly on someone else than to see an elephant on yourself."







*Tip# 3:*

*"It's easier to see a fly on someone else than to see an elephant on yourself."*

Here are some common causes of sales slumps for reps. If you recognize an elephant on yourself, admit it. Then, you'll know what to do.

- ✓ You talk too much and are a poor listener.
- ✓ You need to upgrade your product/industry/business knowledge.
- ✓ Your presentation skills are mediocre.
- ✓ You have fallen behind in prospecting/networking/business building activities.
- ✓ You haven't found your niche market.
- ✓ You aren't preparing enough before each call.
- ✓ You concentrate on your product, not the needs of the customer, when in a sales call.
- ✓ Your time management and organization skills need a tune up.

Sometimes the cause can be found in your rep firm's culture, and you may need to approach your manager for help:

- ✓ Your company doesn't encourage open communication about difficulties.
- ✓ You have too many administrative responsibilities.
- ✓ Your territory is not clearly defined.
- ✓ Coaching or other management support is not offered to help you out of your slump.

**When you're in the middle of Hell, keep going (it's no place to stop).** A number of strategies can minimize the downward spiral of a slump. Hopefully at least one of the following ideas will appeal to you, since just doing one thing differently can interrupt the slump cycle.

**Ask for Help.** When you're in a slump, you're often too negative or too worried to see a way out. Find ways to feel more connected to others and to gain a more positive perspective. Talk to your manager, find a coach, join a networking group and ask for referrals, or ask your clients to help you understand trends in their markets.

**Show Up.** Woody Allen once suggested that 90 percent of success comes from just showing up. One of the surest ways out of a slump is to work your way through it. Come to work on time, don't go home early, and don't make excuses for not attending networking events.

**Show Up and Serve.** Approach your clients with the intent of helping them — not just selling to them. You may find that the best help you can give is to recommend a competitor's product, or to suggest that a client deal with a problem internally. Or maybe what you have to offer is what your customer needs. Whatever the case, you have helped your clients. They will be grateful and they will trust your integrity.

**What if a slump is the perfect place to be, for now?** A slump gives you time to regroup, think, plan, meet new people, improve your skills and strategies, and learn from it (because it won't be the last time you hit a slump).

**Often just a change in routine will wake you up and give you a new perspective.**

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Don't beat yourself up because you didn't reach a goal or close a sale. It is enough to keep learning.

**Action.** Do something or start somewhere. Whatever path you choose, you need to act to correct the direction of a slump.

**Change Your Routine.** Sometimes a slump starts because you're bored, and you may not realize it. Your routine may be too predictable. Mix it up! This year I took a course in improvisation and loved it. I also changed my workday. Now I often work from 6:30–8 a.m., go to the gym until 10, and only make appointments for after 10. Often just a change in routine will wake you up and give you a new perspective.

**Stop trying so hard when you are with customers.**

Trying too hard kills your ability to authentically connect with others. Be more curious about your customer's business, relax, and try softer, not harder.

**Control Your Expenses.** Be realistic about what your income is. Too many reps keep spending during a slump as a way to make themselves feel better. Review all your expenditures, separating them into "needs" (mortgage and groceries) and "wants" (bigger TV, latest cell phone). And that review includes your \$3.<sup>50</sup> a hit coffee habit.

**Bottom Line:** Don't compare yourself with other salespeople. **You are on your own path.** as  
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