

RESULTS BEGIN WITH GOALS

By Wayne Outlaw

With Labor Day behind us it is time to stop and take stock of what we have accomplished in 2009, despite the economy. Reflecting back can help us measure what we have accomplished, but can also provide a foundation for future results. We have 1/2 of the year ahead to build on our success or rebuild our results if they haven't been what we would like them to be.

Take the time to examine what results have been accomplished. Don't just look at sales volume or percent of achievement of budget or quota. Especially this year, look for the victories where you really excelled and accomplished something that gave you satisfaction and happiness. Also, look for areas your expectations or accomplishments weren't met and find out why.

Ask what more you could have accomplished if: 1) you taken more positive action earlier, 2) applied yourself more, or 3) developed greater skills. A careful, objective assessment will point out the opportunities for growth and potential increases of results for 2010.

Examine your business and personal situations carefully and identify what, if achieved, would not only be a significant accomplishment, but would also provide motivation for your time and effort to make a meaningful change. What, if accomplished, would make your professional or personal situation significantly better? What would it mean if you increased your number of accounts? Do you need to eliminate your dependency on too few accounts? Do you need to increase penetration of your current accounts? Are competitors getting too much business and are you getting too little? Will an increase in sales and profit, an increase in income, or even a promotion make your personal situation better? Identify the areas you are committed to improving.

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Identify the goals in these areas that will energize you and cause you to expend the effort to perform at a much higher level for the balance of 2009 and position yourself for success in 2010. Visualize what you would really like to accomplish. What will it mean to you when it is accomplished? Describe your payoff or benefits from achieving your goal.

Verify that the results are worth the effort. This visualization will increase your commitment.

Now commit the goals and their benefits to paper and tell others. Once it is written and committed to publicly, it is hard to back away and change your mind. Setting a goal and committing it to paper and to others is only the beginning.

Be sure the goal is clear and concrete. A goal must be clearly defined, measurable, and have a time frame or deadline for accomplishment. It must also be believable. You must believe this goal is possible, but there must be some stretch to make it worthwhile and to create internal motivation. Remember, if there is little challenge, there is little motivation.

The human mind is a remarkable mechanism. Once committed to a goal, it will work to find ways to make it become reality. It is important, however, not to simply set a goal and just wait to see if it will happen. Begin the process of achievement by breaking the goal into bite-size pieces. These sub-goals (or objectives) are the building blocks of success. If objectives are properly set and accomplished, the goal is assured. If the goal is to increase sales by a specific percent, it can be broken down into specific monthly objectives based on normal business patterns. You can even set targets for types of results from existing accounts and new business. Once the goal is broken down into monthly and weekly objectives (or even targets by account type), it must be translated into activities that will ensure it is accomplished.

In challenging times we have to go back to what is proven to work. Activities, such as new business calls, initial presentations, needs analysis, proposals, and accounts opened or orders

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closed, are key activities contributing to the accomplishment of sales objectives regardless of conditions. Many people (especially those who succeed easily in less challenging times, find it difficult to set specific activity targets. The best way to set realistic and productive activity targets is to look at the past several months and determine your current level of activity and the results it produced. Once you can discern the connection between activities, such as prospecting and results, you can determine a target activity level to assure the goal is accomplished.

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Some people diligently analyze and attempt to set very finite targets. Others simply set reasonable targets and begin measuring their results against them. It is much easier to set a realistic target and begin tracking your efforts against them rather than spend an inordinate amount of time in research. Activities are not the end result, but the means to accomplishing the goal. Once you determine your activity level required at each step of the sales cycle to achieve a specific result, such as opening a new account, you can adjust each target up or down as needed.

It is important to keep your eyes on your goal and the benefits for accomplishing it. With the goal in mind, track your level of activities and accomplishment of each objective. It is best to set regular times to monitor your activities and results. Many Sales Managers normally meet with salespeople at a regularly scheduled time, such as month-end, to evaluate the previous month's performance, set objectives for the coming month, and plan the activities and actions needed to ensure success. Salespeople should hold their own month-end evaluations and planning sessions themselves even if Sales Managers do not. Even when working on a personal task, such as improving health, setting clearly defined goals and measuring progress against them (at specific intervals), will increase your results. If your results have to be reported to someone else, this increases the accountability and will increase the probability of successfully reaching a goal.

Set challenging, exciting, and rewarding goals. Let's end 2009 in a very powerful and productive way! Even if 2009 hasn't been what you want, it is very important to end strong to enable a good start to 2010. Don't wait until everything is better to make your situation better!