

THE BIGGEST FACTORS SEPARATING GOOD AND GREAT SALESPEOPLE

by Chris Peterson



The biggest factors separating good and great salespeople: Idea #1

Over the last four weeks, I've attended two events (NSCA's Pivot to Profit in Chicago and PSA Convention in Hilton Head) and spent several days preparing for and cleaning up after Hurricane Ian (we live in Orlando). Combining dozens of conversations with other professionals and time hunkered down pondering the core of all things, I've concluded that there is one primary factor that separates good salespeople from great salespeople. There are a million things that separate the good and the bad, but this one thing truly dominates the reason great salespeople are great and good salespeople are not great. To be fair, some salespeople generating great results simply have a golden goose as one of their customers, but it only takes a year or two until they slip back to non-greatness because of this one type of action.

I think of all my conversations and pondering over the last few weeks, the one statement that sums up this missing ingredient was made by Brad Malone, VP of Consulting at Navigate Management Consulting, when we were chatting over a beer in Hilton Head. I'm paraphrasing, but as we were talking about delivering different ideas to our clients, he said: "But they've got to do it." And that's it. The great ones are proactive and do the things that make them great.



The biggest factors separating good and great salespeople: Idea #1

The good ones don't. They respond. They're polite. They work hard. They do whatever their customers want them to do. They're good, but they're only good because the market is booming. The great ones are always great. They are proactive in creating ideas that will challenge their customers. The great ones find new customers through smart, consistent, and targeted prospecting efforts. The great ones spend time getting better – they read and attend professional development events. They're great because they're proactive. The others are good because they respond well. Period.

And by the way, that's the biggest challenge we face at Vector Firm. My consulting and training peers (not Brad) advise me to not get too close. "All you can do is provide your insights and ideas, and teach them. If they don't take your advice, that's on them." I think that's bullshit, and I hope I will always think that's bullshit. Our purpose is to positively impact professional lives, not deliver ideas and run. So ... we get a bit wrapped around the axle about how to get our clients and members of Academy to use what we teach – to proactively do things that make them great. So, here you go: a five-part series on how to be more proactive in your week-to-week activity.

Idea #1: Start small and understand the value of consistency.

About 13 years ago, a coworker of mine was not hitting his numbers. I left the company shortly after he was put on the hot seat but kept up with many people that still worked there. Although I didn't talk to this particular guy, I heard through my other conversations that he was steadily improving and out of the doghouse. Within a year, he was a superstar. When I saw him a year or two later at ISC West, I made a big deal out of his turnaround and asked him what he had done. His answer? "Nothing. I've been doing the same thing this year that I was doing in year one. The only difference is that it's been another year."

The biggest factors separating good and great salespeople: Part 1 of 5

To become great, you don't have to commit twenty hours per week to proactive actions. You just have to consistently do it. How about doing two hours? Seriously, commit two hours per week to prospecting or deep thinking about ideas for your customers or professional development. If you mix it up, do one hour of deep thinking, half hour of training and a half hour of prospecting. Whatever. But do it every single week. In a year, that's 48 hours (assuming vacation and holidays) of deep thinking, 24 hours of prospecting and 24 hours of training. If you're thinking "I can't prospect 200 accounts in 30 minutes per week." Ok, then identify the top thirty and do it right. Just do it because you're probably doing zero now.



Here's the magic. Once you do these things for two hours per week, you'll start to find more time and then you're doing them for six hours and then committing Monday as your proactive day, etc. You'll probably never get past eight or twelve hours per week of proactive work, but that's ok. You can change the world with eight hours per week of proactive work! Start small. Two hours per week.

Idea #2: Block off “Proactive Time” on your calendar and treat it like a client meeting.

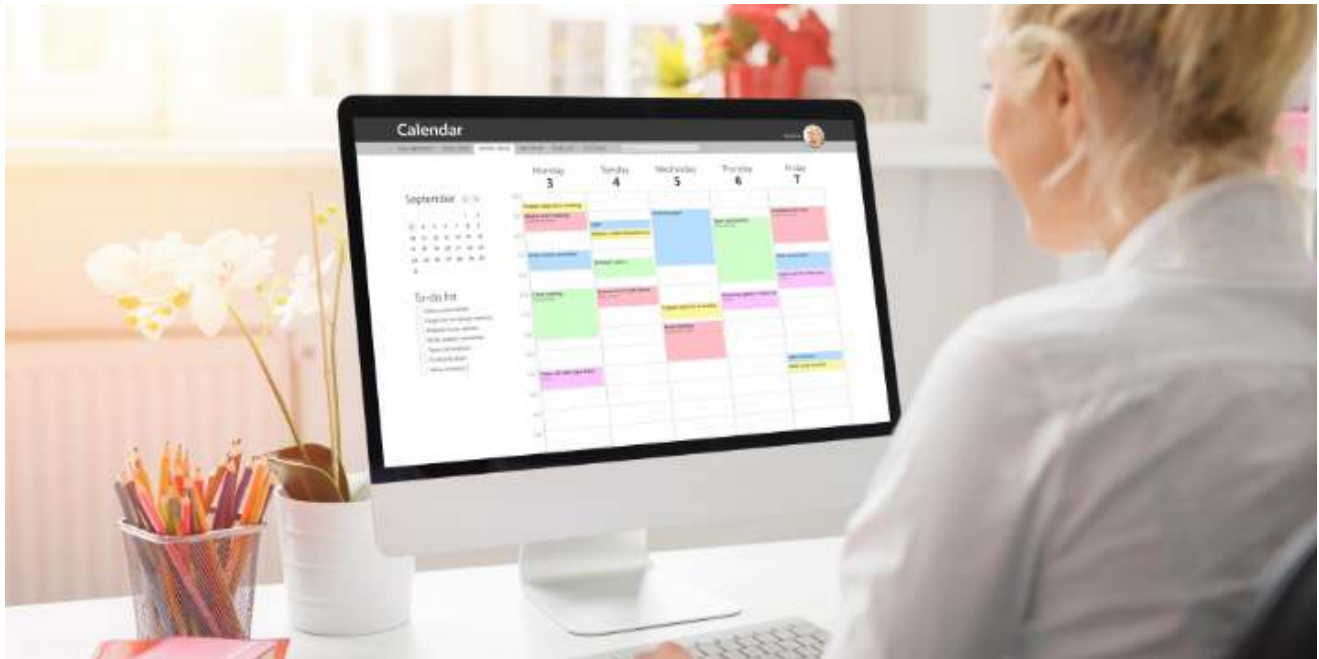
I’m a calendar geek. It keeps me organize for the future and helps me track data from the past. Before I go to bed on Sunday, I have every hour of the week planned, including buffer time that will undoubtedly arise. Do you know the first things I add to my calendar every week? See below, in this exact order...

1. Workouts (Five days that are planned through the weekend)
2. Meditation time (Twenty minutes per day)
3. Professional Development (One hour per week)
4. Outbound Prospecting Work (Ninety-minute block)

Ok, that’s easy. Everyone can add a two-hour block that says “Prospecting”, right? Yes, but do you? I suggest adding these things as recurring appointments at the same time every week. You can move it, but you can’t delete it. For example, I have outbound prospecting in my calendar every Tuesday between 8:30 and 10:00, but about a third of the time I must move it because of travel or unavoidable appointments. That’s ok – as long as I move it and do it.

These are activities that I must proactively do in order to live the life I want to live. No one is going to make me do these things – only I can make myself workout or call prospective customers. Everything else comes next. Preparation and debriefing of meetings, proposal development, email responses, etc. I also commit Mondays and Fridays to Strategic Initiatives and Content Development, with the goal of doing eight total hours toward those two areas every week (understanding that other things will arise during those days).

The biggest factors separating good and great salespeople: Idea #2



Now's the hard part: doing it. There's not really a silver bullet to this one ... you must have the right mindset. Right now, I'm in the Delta Sky Club in the NY LaGuardia airport writing this post. It's in my calendar and I'm treating this appointment just like a client call. Email is off, ringer is off, and I'm focused on this one task. This mindset takes months to really stick, but once it does, you're unstoppable.

Looking forward to presenting our next idea ... it dovetails beautifully with this idea.

Idea #3: Do it early.

I've been waking up before 5:00 am since I graduated from college. The exact time has moved between 4:30 and 4:55 over the years (today it's 4:40), but my time is pre 5:00 am. There are many reasons I do this: I have a ton of energy (after waking up), it's quiet, and the gym and the roads are empty.

However, the most impactful reason that I wake up early and perform my proactive tasks is that no one distracts me that early. I can do whatever I want at 4:50 or 5:30 or 6:15 in the morning. No one is emailing me. No one is calling me. Issues haven't had a chance to occur yet. Nothing happens that early, so that's when I work out, run, meditate, send prospecting emails, read and study professional development topics, and anything else that is important but not urgent. By 7:30, I'm done. I take my daughter to school or start my reactionary workday if I'm traveling. By 7:30, I've done much of my proactive work.

Don't think that you have to wake up at 4:40 to be proactive. You don't. However, you must schedule your proactive work before the chaos begins. If you want to prospect for 30 minutes every day, then start at 8:30. If you want to engage in self-paced training, block off an hour every Wednesday between 8:00 and 9:00.

Remember, start small, block off time on your calendar, and make sure it's early in the day.

Idea #4: Turn off all notifications.

Our mind is wired for survival. Period. End of story. Every reaction is stimulated by the urge to not starve, not freeze to death, and not get eaten by a predator. Even though we don't have those challenges in our society anymore, nor have most of our ancestors had any of these fears for centuries, our minds are still wired to keep us from those dire situations.

One of the outcomes of the human mind protecting us from death is our inability to tolerate boredom. We can't be bored. As humans evolved, the ones that were content with relaxing and enjoying the peace that boredom brought starved, froze, or were eaten – some probably had all three tragedies happen to them. Since these people died early, they didn't reproduce. Only the anxious survived and reproduced ... and here we are ... almost eight billion people with complete inability to sit in a quiet room by ourselves for more than ten minutes.

While our minds helped our bloodlines survive, they don't do a very good job helping us focus. Our gadget makers and advertising executives have known this for decades. All those beeps and lights grab the attention of our antsy minds and keep us from the deep thinking that can really make a difference in your career and life. The deep thought where brilliance and creativity and joy are born.

Ok, I think you get it. Turn off the stupid phone, email, watch, doorbell, beeper, whatever. Turn them off. Focus on the task at hand. Think deeply. Develop great ideas for your customers. Be great and remember ... greatness doesn't happen between text messages.

Idea #5: Plan for potential obstacles.

When I was elected president of my fraternity at the University of Florida, I was immediately engrossed into a ton of leadership training (some of the best training I've ever received, by the way). One of the first topics was risk management. At that point, I thought risk management was the guy that gave out the wrist bands at parties to guests who were over 21 years old. I had no idea about the power of managing risk. Not only did this practice help us avoid mistakes, but it also gave me a calm feeling because I knew that whatever incident might occur, we had a plan. Calmness combined with ambition and a hard work ethic can be a dangerous recipe to massive success – especially as a sales professional.

So, how can you plan for potential obstacles?

1. Identify potential obstacles. Some examples: phone calls, emails, temptations to check your social media accounts, coworkers popping in, and the most powerful of all ... one's inability to focus on one and only one task!
2. Develop ideas to minimize or eliminate those potential obstacles. Using the examples above, some ideas are turning off your phone and email (you can keep email on, but go offline), remove the social media apps from your phone so you're forced to type in the URL, close your office door, tell your coworkers when you're in deep thinking mode, work outside the office, and to combat the never-ending racing mind ... learn to focus by using one of several practices.

Meditation, focused attention, deep breathing, etc. are among dozens of exercises that will help you master your wandering mind.

3. Do it.

4. Accept imperfection. Don't beat up yourself if you roamed off to Instagram for five minutes or engaged in a conversation with a neighbor while working at Starbucks. Just bring yourself back to the task and start again. It's that simple.

No one keeps from being distracted. The great ones simply return to the task. Do this a trillion times in your life and you'll get better every time.

I hope you enjoyed these five ideas in this series and more importantly, I hope that you're putting them into practice!

[Click here for a worksheet to organize your Obstacle Management Process.](#)

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