

Creating Open Field Success



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A sales person claiming to be the top annual producer at his company approached me with his concern that he had “hit the wall.” In his analysis of his current schedule, he did not see a pathway for continued growth. As a long-time salesman, I empathized with him. This feeling of having exhausted all channels is common among highly driven people. The best sales reps often experience this angst.

Have you ever wondered why, during major televised sporting events, the cameramen pan away from the playing field to the coaches’ box in the upper stands at critical times? They are zooming in on key play calls being made on the sidelines. In these “away from the game” strategy sessions, coaches are looking at previous plays for reoccurring open field opportunities for their team. Sales people looking for their next great play can learn from strategy.

If you are caught in the “too much to do, not enough time to do it” trap, examine your playbook. How much time do you spend planning your week and month? Review your previous months’ activity and look for open fields/white times on your calendar. These will help you address the seeming paradox of trying to accomplish more, by finding the time to do less. Like the coaches stepping away from the drama of the game to look for a winning strategy, sales people have to find open fields in their calendars

that perhaps they missed or couldn’t see while “in the game.” Here is an open field weekly action plan that includes some “off the field” considerations that can help you accomplish more in less time:

1. Maximize use of your weekly calendar – Microsoft Outlook has a nice solution of “place holders” for activity related to the 4Ps: People, Places, Projects, and Personal things-to-do. For each activity, check your calendar entries with the people involved and secure your next dates. I find more time is wasted arranging appointments than any other daily activity.
2. Categorize all current projects – Whatever software you prefer, all high achieving sales reps maintain an active project list including: contracts, gas conversion analyses, new account opportunities, existing account penetration, etc. I suggest a format with categories similar to those in Figure 1.
3. Set priorities – The best way to reduce stress when looking at your schedule is to determine the sense of urgency for each project. Although you may need to spend time on projects that aren’t top priorities in the ensuing week, keeping these events on track is still important. Before the start of each week, review which projects are urgent and those that need attention.
4. Maintain a daily journal – List all activities you need to accomplish in a daily journal, regardless of their level of importance. Records should include the people you are committed to meeting and the related activity. For example, if a customer asks for a product literature specification sheet, record this in your journal and then

move on to your important projects. Between projects/events on your calendar, review your daily journal, complete your actions, and check them off. By all means, eliminate sticky notes. They are time and attention grabbers!

5. Update Weekly TOP 5 – Before the start of each week, update your TOP 5 projects. For each event create a new step-action and date. Add the dates to your calendar, sending appointment reminders to anyone required to complete the activity.
6. Review your calendar – Fill in the open field/white spaces with appointments not already allocated to the completion of your Top 5 projects.

The concerned top salesman mentioned above implemented these steps. He found that with proper time allocation to his Top 5 projects, he was able to greatly reduce stress. He also found that by using a daily journal, he wasn’t wasting time trying to find and catch up on the unimportant commitments he had forgotten.

The stress-free feeling he received from checking off his completed projects was another noted and appreciated benefit.

If you want to bring a fast-paced and busy lifestyle under control, you must eliminate the unnecessary. To be successful, concentrate on the necessary.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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