



# Always be ready for another lesson learned



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As a sales manager I am constantly learning new lessons. Regardless of age or experience we all always have opportunities to expand our skills, and sometimes this comes through lessons that may be personally painful.

From a product manager’s weekly call reports, which I read over the weekend, I noticed that he had only been making one joint call with sales reps per day. Each day the reps I manage are tasked with properly establishing a calendar of appointments between the product manager and the corresponding rep. Both parties are responsible for lining up multiple calls and confirming customer availability one day prior to each appointment.

In addition, I observed in the product manager’s report that on one particular day he had traveled to a site most distant from our corporate headquarters only to have the customer cancel the appointment. He made no other calls that day. My analysis — a day to our most remote branch store and no customer contact is a very expensive and

non-productive day.

As a sales manager of a corporate office, how should you react to reports like — **“Office all day, 1/2 way to branch store to meet salesman, customer canceled on us so spent the day in the office”**? My aggravated response to this, copied to the rep and his sales manager, was. **“So, you went all the way to [branch store location] and [salesman] only had one call lined up when you have five prospects (highly qualified with “confirmed next step”) on your Action Plan? Come on guys, let’s get focused.”**

The salesman responded, **“This was a meeting that was specific to this one customer. [product manager] and I worked earlier in the week where we made all the calls on this list minus one. I explained on more than one occasion to [product manager] that a couple of these customers needed to be taken off the list, as they were no longer a prospect. I have never been accused of not being focused when it comes to my customers.”**

BAM! His response hit me right between the eyes. My personal philosophy is that you should never use email to communicate negative or

constructive criticism. I had broken my own rule. Call reports are summaries of actions and in no way tell a complete story. Face-to-face communications provide a better opportunity to question behavior, ensuring that you have all the facts before engaging in possible corrective actions. Had I asked the proper questions and known the mitigating circumstances I probably still would have commented, but in a much more consolatory manner.

My response to the rep, with a copy to the product manager and his sales manager: **“After reflection, I have violated the GA principle to not send negative emails. [salesman] and [product name], I was wrong to have sent this email and I’m sorry, please forgive. Would you both please accept my apology?”**

The rep’s immediate response was: **“Absolutely Art, I also apologize for maybe being quick to respond and a little too sensitive. Please forgive me.”**

If you find yourself in a situation like the one described above, and need to grow from it, practice these steps of sincere renewal.

1. Express responsibility: **“I am Sorry”**
2. Accept responsibility: **“I was wrong”**
3. Make restitution: **“What can I do to make it right?”**
4. Genuinely repent: **“I’ll try not to do it again”**
5. Request forgiveness: **“Will you please forgive me?”**

In personal relationships, when you make an error, cut your losses. Confess your blunder with exacting words, apologize, and ask for forgiveness. If the offended party is virtuous, he will generally share in any possible over-reaction to your error and ask you to forgive him as well. 

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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