

Competing Against Yourself: Hospitality Sales Professionals - Lesson #13 from Olympic Gold Medalist Phelps - By David M. Brudney, ISHC, July 2008

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'Do you think you'll have any competition in London in 2012?' asked NBC sportscaster Bob Costas of Olympic Gold Medalist Michael Phelps. 'I never concern myself much with competition,' said Phelps, winner of eight Gold Medals. 'I'm always competing with myself. My goal is always the same. I'm always working on getting better, on improving.'

While very few of us may even come close to achieving what U.S.A. swimmer Phelps did during the XXIX Summer Olympic Games in China, the message we can take from him resonates within us all: raising the bar on our own performance, our personal expectations, no matter what vocation, what activity, what endeavor, so that we are always improving, always getting better.

Kaizen - - Japanese word meaning 'continuous improvement'

The very best hospitality sales professionals I have known over the past four decades have always competed with themselves first. They didn't need monthly or quarterly bonus plans to measure personal performance. Nor did they need corporate or G.M. oversight. I suspect that each had a little voice inside that said, 'I know I can do better here' or 'I should have done better there' or 'Hey, I know I'm better than that.'

With Michael Phelps it may be working on getting off the swimmer blocks quicker or maybe on shaving tenths of a second off on his turns. For hospitality sales pros it could be something as simple as booking more group room nights or more revenue per group room night. Maybe it's just more room nights booked over hard-to-sell periods? How about quicker selling cycles? Improved contracts, faster turnaround time, reducing cancellations or room block erosions?

Just a few tips to get you started

Here's a few suggestions on some areas for you to consider:

1. Selling cycle
2. Sweet spot(s)
3. Self-Monitoring.

Selling cycle. The 'selling cycle' represents a period of time from when you first engage the prospect/client until there is closure on the piece of business (you book it, you lose it, a decision is deferred or you simply stop pursuing). The very best sales pros are always looking for those groups they can book in the shortest time period possible. Historically, corporate meetings are usually booked within a shorter cycle than associations or SMERFs. And some of the largest, highest yielding association conventions can take more than a year or two. Knowing the difference between the short and long-term booking cycle is very important and should be factored into every decision a new sales pro makes regarding which accounts to pursue.

The very best are always challenging themselves to shorten the cycle, to do whatever they can to close as much business as quickly as possible so they can move on to the next account, the next solicitation. It makes good sense to set up your own timetable for your own selling cycle to revisit on a monthly basis to see how you've done - - and to learn from that.

Sweet spot(s). The term, 'sweet spot' comes from a sports analogy - - I'll use baseball and tennis here. A batter in baseball knows there is a spot on the bat that when contact is made with a pitch either a line drive or a ball driven high over the outfield fence typically follows. In tennis, there is a special spot in the center of the racquet that when contact is made with the ball, it can result in a difficult-to-return, point-winning shot. A sweet spot in selling can be the outside personal sales calls you make. It could be a high-yielding vertical market or even a geographical location. For whatever reason, my 'selling sweet spot' was Chicago. While representing mostly larger, upscale, group-driven properties on the West Coast, I had a tremendous amount of success making very good sales calls and booking lots of groups - - corporate and association - - out of Chicagoland.

Where is your sweet spot? Maybe you are a 'morning' person? Do you find that you have your greatest selling success from making telephone calls first thing in the morning? Maybe you have found your greatest success from those personal sales calls made outside your office?

Track your selling activities so you can be aware of what is it you do, where and when, that has provided you with your greatest productivity. Ask yourself, 'Am I getting all I can out of my sweet spot?' What can you do to get more and what can you learn from your sweet spots that you may be able to transfer over to areas where you are least productive?

Nothing ever stays the same. You're either getting better or getting worse

Self-Monitoring. This is all about your taking personal ownership for your own performance measurement. With telephone calls, personal outside sales calls, appointments made, and site inspections, there is a direct correlation with your production numbers end-of-day. You should begin to monitor those numbers closely and see if by increasing those numbers, your production will improve.

Number of telephone calls made per day, per week - - am I making enough calls?

Number of telephone calls completed per day, per week - - am I completing enough?

Number of appointments made - - what goals have I set, one a day, three a day?

Number of site inspections - - one a week? Six a month? More?

Number of (outside) personal sales calls made - - Five a week? More? Less?

Number of proposals delivered - - how many tentatives are you converting?

Number of referrals received - - and acted upon quickly?

John Marckx, a dear friend and now retired IBM sales professional, tells me that during his long and very successful sales and sales management career IBM used a formula for sales success:

Calls

Demo (demonstration)

Sale

I tell John that during my hospitality sales career, our 'formula for production' was this:

Telephone call

Appointment set (and kept)

Site inspection (if necessary)

Contract presented

Sale

Closing reminders:

1. Selling cycle - - always look for ways to reduce the amount of time required
2. Sweet spot(s) - - learn from where, when and how you've enjoyed your best results
3. Self-Monitoring - - track all the selling activities you do to determine which ones need to be increased in order for you to experience greater results. There is a direct correlation between each of those activities - - how often, when and where - - and increased sales

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