

## TWO BELIEFS THAT WILL INCREASE YOUR SALES

Behavioral scientists Charles Lee, Sally Linkenauger and three colleagues conducted a revealing psychological experiment with 41 golfers.<sup>1</sup> The golfers were randomly split into two groups. The first group was led, one at a time, to a putting matt. Each golfer was handed a golf putter and then asked to estimate the diameter of the hole at the end of the matt. Then the golfer was allowed to attempt 10 putts. The second group of golfers had a similar experience as the first group, except for the fact that as each golfer was handed the putter he was told that it had once belonged to professional golfer, Ben Curtis. Amazingly, this seemingly insignificant piece of information about the putter had an astounding affect upon the golfers. Though both groups of golfers were asked to answer the same question and used the identical putter, those golfers who believed that the putter belonged to Ben Curtis perceived that the diameter of the hole was 9% larger. Furthermore, these golfers also experienced an increase in performance as they sank 32% more putts than the golfers who had been told nothing of the golf club's history.

The findings of this experiment are consistent with the many other scientific studies that have identified that beliefs influence perception and the interpretation of reality. Beliefs have also been proven to shape behavior. As a professional sales person it is imperative that you realize that your beliefs are the source of the results that you produce. They affect how you sell and how much you sell. As Professor of Psychology at *Stanford University* Dr. Carol Dweck writes, "My work is part of a tradition in psychology that shows the power of people's beliefs. These may be beliefs we're aware of or unaware of, but they strongly affect what we want and whether we succeed in getting it. This tradition also shows how changing people's beliefs – even the simplest beliefs – can have profound effects."<sup>2</sup>

As vital as beliefs are, most sales trainers concentrate only on a sales person's behavior. This is in spite of the fact that to permanently transform a behavior the belief that is causing the behavior must be replaced. Then the sales person will be enabled to learn and implement a new, more productive behavior. In short, lasting change is birthed in your beliefs and is then manifested in your sales production.

The good news is that you are not stuck with any belief. All of your beliefs are learned and therefore they can be changed. Your beliefs are just that – *YOUR* beliefs. If a belief is not serving you then you have an obligation to replace it. I have trained sales people of varying ages, skill levels, educational backgrounds and industry affiliations. What is consistent about all top producing sales people is that they have a set of beliefs that empower them to sell. In contrast, sales people who continually struggle to escape mediocrity have beliefs that obstruct their success. The following are two such beliefs that elite sales people embrace and underperforming sales people rarely acknowledge.

## **Belief #1: I Am Responsible**

Before you read any further consider the following question, “In your current role, why are you not producing more sales?” This enlightening question will guide you in identifying what you really believe about who is responsible for your success. One characteristic of top performers is the belief that they are responsible for their success.

Frequently, sales people fall prey to avoiding responsibility for their lack of sales. They state excuses such as, “it is the leads,” “our prices are too high” or “it is the economy.” They flee responsibility as if it were a fatal disease and offer excuses that illustrate their belief that the reason for their lack of sales is anything but them. Behavioral scientists refer to this type of behavior as “self-handicapping.”<sup>3</sup>  
<sup>4</sup> Self-handicapping is when, in an effort to protect one’s self-esteem, an individual attributes the cause of failure to forces that he or she cannot control.

However, if sales people refuse to accept responsibility for their poor performance then they cannot accept praise for their success. Also, in shirking responsibility they condemn themselves to mediocrity because if they are not the problem, then they are also not the solution. In fact, if the problem is anything other than you, then you have no power to fix it. If you are not responsible for your success then you have made yourself a victim and in doing so you destroy all hope of change.

When a sales person is experiencing low sales production there is a reason. The lack of sales is a symptom, not the problem. The problem is either inherent in the sales process the sales person is following or in the execution of the process. Through taking responsibility, a sales person will begin to analyze any problems, identify the cause and implement a solution.

I have personally seen sales people transform their career by adopting this belief and then behaving in accordance with it. They become the change they want to see and as a result their sales skyrocket. So commit to taking responsibility for your success by accepting the belief that you are ultimately accountable for the level of success you achieve.

## **Belief #2: I Must Continually Improve**

There has been an enormous amount of scientific research regarding what enables a person to become a top performer. The research has revealed that one key factor in obtaining and maintaining heightened levels of performance is continual improvement. Behavioral scientists have identified that the majority of people stop improving once they reach a certain level of competency. For example, scientists K. Anders Ericsson and two colleagues led a meta-study which analyzed the scientific conclusions of decades of research regarding what creates high performers. The goal of their meta-study was to “establish scientific criteria for acceptable evidence of superior reproducible performance.”<sup>5</sup> One of their findings was that regardless of their current level of success, elite performers relentlessly strive to increase their ability. The scientists also uncovered that few people ever achieve this superior level of performance because, “many individuals in different jobs are most likely unmotivated to improve

once they reach a level of performance that is acceptable.”<sup>6</sup> This research illuminated the belief that is prevalent within the profession of selling. Most sales people work to get to a certain skill level and then stop. They become seduced by their own competence. They believe they are good enough and this belief hinders them from ever becoming great.

The necessity of continual improvement has also been validated by recent breakthroughs in the field of neuroscience. These findings have revealed that the human brain is not hardwired, as was once thought. Today, we know that new behaviors actually generate new neural pathways in the brain.<sup>7 8 9</sup> Neuroscientists use the term, “neuroplasticity” to describe the ever-changing brain. In fact, the very act of learning is dependent upon neurons connecting to one another. As neuroscientist James Zell confirms, “It seems that every fact we know, every idea we understand, and every action we take has the form of a network of neurons in our brain.”<sup>10</sup> Neuroscientists aptly describe this process with the widespread phrase, “neurons that fire together, wire together.”

Moreover, when neural connections in the brain are used repeatedly they become stronger.<sup>11</sup> For example, research published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* analyzed the brains of veteran London taxi drivers.<sup>12</sup> Researchers identified that the part of these taxi drivers’ brain, the hippocampus, which deals with spatial relationships had increased in size and had an overabundance of neural connections. Therefore, when you work to increase your knowledge and skill, you are literally rewiring your brain as new networks of neurons are formed and current networks associated with the behavior are strengthened. Although, neuroscientists also report that if neuron networks are not used, over time they will weaken and may eventually die.<sup>13</sup> This is why top performers adopt the belief that their sales ability is like a muscle that must be continually developed.

The reality is that in today’s tumultuous, hyper-competitive marketplace, if sales people are not improving, they are falling behind. Consequently, continual improvement is no longer an option, it is now a prerequisite for survival.

In summary, by embracing both of the beliefs that have been recommended, you will increase your sales effectiveness and as a result, also increase the quality of your life. In addition, resolve to scrutinize all of your beliefs and replace any that hinder your success. Every belief has a consequence. Either your beliefs are guiding you towards success or they are dragging you from it.

Do not take your beliefs lightly because though you can choose your beliefs, once chosen they exert such an influence upon you that you become their servant. So choose wisely.

## About the Author

David Hoffeld is CEO of the Hoffeld Group, a research based sales training, coaching and consulting firm that is the leader in the integration of proven science and sales. The Hoffeld Group takes the repeatable and predictable principles, which science has proven to create and enable influence, out of the laboratory and academic journals and apply them to selling. For a deeper look at the Hoffeld Group's groundbreaking research and innovative sales strategies visit HoffeldGroup.com.

## Notes

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