

Set — And If Necessary, Reset — Your Goals For Success

When I first started speaking to audiences of quick printers more than ten years ago, everyone in the industry was a stranger. It amazes me now how many people I know in this industry...and how many of you have come to hear me speak more than once. It really amazes me—and flatters me—how many of you have come out to hear me speak as many as four or five times!

I had the man who must be my all-time champion seminar attendee in the audience at a program for one of the franchises a couple of weeks ago. We chatted for a while after the seminar, and as near as we could figure out, he's come out to hear me speak 11 times. He's heard me give seminars on outside sales, inside sales, sales management, hiring and training, team building, and two or three different seminars on marketing and management.

I asked him if there's any one thing he's heard me say that really sticks out, and has contributed to his success. He mentioned a couple of things, most of them having something to do with goalsetting. He even reminded me of a story I haven't told for quite a while, about a business forms salesperson I knew who set the goal of owning seven Mercedes Benzes—one for each day of the week—and who achieved that goal!

A Key Part Of Success

That got me thinking about the whole issue of goalsetting, and of course, there's no doubt that goalsetting is an important part of success at selling. But you can take that a step farther. Goalsetting is an important part of success at the overall business of running a printing company.

There's a difference between setting goals that will help you succeed, though, and just setting goals for the sake of setting goals. Good and helpful goalsetting requires two things...your goals must be reasonable and they have to be measurable. Let's look at the measurable part first.

I tell another story in seminars about a client who once told me that her goal was to become the best printer in town. "That's a worthy goal," I told her, "but how are you going to know when you've achieved it?" Honestly, I don't think that's something you *can* know.

I thought she'd be a lot better off—and I think you'd be a lot better off—setting a goal to increase sales by some specific dollar amount over some specific timeframe. I think that represents the same purpose as being the best printer in town, because ultimately, I think her originally stated goal was about building sales and making more money.

Increasing sales by a specific dollar amount over a specific timeframe is measurable, though, and you'll know at the end of the time period if you've achieved your goal. Maybe more importantly, you'll be able to keep track of your progress throughout that timeframe. And maybe even more importantly than that, you'll be able to set your goal at the start of the time period and put a plan in place to achieve it.

A Key Point

This is a point that many quick printers don't understand. I think I was fortunate that I learned some things about forecasting and setting goals very early on in my career. In fact, I remember the first time my job required me to come up with a forecast for the next year's sales, and I had no idea how to do it.

I asked my boss what to do. "Do I add 10% to this year's sales," I asked, "or just take a guess at what I think I might be able to do?"

"Oh no," he said, "you're not even close on how to do this kind of thing. Forecasting starts with goalsetting, and goalsetting starts with one question...where do you *want to be* in term of sales at the end of next year?"

That's where your own goalsetting should start. How much of a sales increase do you want? How much of a profit increase do you want? How much money do you want to make next month or next quarter or next year?

The sum of these basic question identifies your master goal. Then you ask yourself this question: "What will I have to do to make my master goal happen?" The answers to that question will provide you with a set of "component goals," and those component goals really outline your programs for achieving your master goal.

Say your goal is to increase sales by \$125,000 over the next 12 months. How many customers do you have to add to make that happen? That's a component goal. How many cold calls, sales letters, and face-to-face calls will it take you to develop that many customers? How much of the new business will come in the first month of the year, and in all of the rest of the months? Do you have to advertise more? Buy a new press? Hire a salesperson?

As I said earlier, your goals have to be measurable, and you establish measurement benchmarks by working backwards into this series of component goals. And then you measure your progress, and you use that progress as a motivator in getting the whole thing done.

You may say to yourself, “I need to make fifteen cold calls and see three new prospects face-to-face each week in order to add the two new high quality customers I need to add each month to reach my goal.” And you have to be able to use that knowledge to be sure that you get out of the shop and make those calls. You have to stick to the plan, even when you’re having one of those days when everybody seems to want to say “no” to you...when making sales calls isn’t fun...when you’re thinking about letting yourself get sucked back into the shop rather than go out and make the calls you know you have to make. That’s what motivation is really all about!

Reasonable Goals

Your goals also have to be reasonable, though, otherwise they won’t motivate you. They’ll do exactly the opposite and de-motivate you. And that’s true if the goals you set for yourself are too easy or too hard.

If your goals are too easy—not challenging enough—that’s exactly the same situation as leaving money on the table when you could have sold a particular job for a lot more money. If your goals are too easy, yes you’ll accomplish them, but they won’t necessarily motivate you to go out and absolutely *fracture* them—to get all of the money that’s out there for you to earn.

And by the same token, if your goals are set too high—unreasonably high—you’ll never accomplish them no matter how hard you try.

I’ve always said that really good goalsetting gets you up every day at about 95% of where you need to be. You know you’re within reach of your objectives if you stretch yourself, if you challenge some of your assumptions and find a way to make an extra call or two, or do an especially good job with one of the people you’ll be seeing that day. That’s the kind of goalsetting that gets you—or your salesperson—up out of bed at the crack of dawn every day.

The worst thing that can happen—to a salesperson or a business owner—is to be saddled with an unreasonable goal. For example, the alarm goes off on a morning in October and your salesperson is at about 65% of where he/she is supposed to be. With very little chance of reaching his/her goal, is that salesperson going to jump right out of bed and attack the day? No, more likely he/she is going to hit the snooze alarm and wait till next year to start over again.

Live With It

There are times when you have to live with unreasonable goals or objectives. When I worked for Moore Business Forms, we had an incentive program called the Sales Achievement Club, and at the beginning of each year, each salesperson and sales manager was assigned an Achievement Club quota. Quotas and goals aren’t quite the same thing, by the way. The biggest difference is that you don’t get to set a quota, they’re set for you.

Of course, they still work best as motivators if they’re reasonable and attainable, but in a program like this one, because the rewards were very substantial, the sales quotas were extremely high. The whole program was designed so that only the real achievers and producers in the salesforce were going to make it into the Achievement Club. You could still have a good year and make good money without getting into the Achievement Club, but the club became sort of a super-goal. It’s like the difference between a pro football team having a good winning season and winning the Super Bowl.

The point I want to make is that these quotas may have been reasonable in terms of the incentive program and the magnitude of the rewards, but they were not always reasonable as performance goals for individuals. The salespeople had to live with these quotas, though, and the quotas didn’t change even if business fell off, for whatever reason.

You don’t necessarily face that same situation. As business owners, certainly, many of you are the ones who set the goals and objectives. That means you have full control over the opportunity to make your goals and objectives perform to the maximum as motivating factors. The bottom line is this...if your goals turn out to be unreasonable, change them!

And that means up or down! Say you started out the year with a goal to increase sales by \$125,000. You might have been comfortable with that goal back then, because you had a strong base of business and some real hot prospects. Then in May or June, your biggest customer stopped sending in orders, maybe because of something that was absolutely not your fault. That sort of thing happens, and it can shoot your well-intentioned goal all to pieces in a hurry!

I think the best thing to do in that situation would be to change your goal. Don’t let the goal itself become a demotivator! Look at yourself in the mirror and say, “OK, at the beginning of this year, this was a reasonable goal, but now it’s not. Based on what I know, something more modest would be a more reasonable goal...maybe \$95,000 in growth.” Then you set yourself to work toward making it happen.

This a lot like the closing stage of the face-to-face sales call. A talented salesperson will go in with a goal of gaining a certain level of commitment, but sometimes he/she learns through the experience—through the

questioning process and the handling of any objections—that the original goal is simply not going to happen. The best salespeople then change their immediate goal to reflect the highest level of commitment they're going to be able to get that day. I think the same should hold true when you work with your overall business goals.

Upward Adjustment

I think you should also be quick to make adjustments when your goals turn out to be too low! Let's say that you set a goal of \$125,000 in new business for this year, and you're 75% of the way there by the beginning of July. I'd like to see you hold a staff meeting and congratulate everyone for their performance so far—maybe even reward them in some way—and tell them that you're proud to be able to raise your sales goal for the year. Tell them that you're not going to be satisfied just to reach your original goal, and you're not going to allow yourself to sit and relax on a plateau for the rest of the year. You're going to keep on trying to maximize the performance of your business!

New goals that reflect that attitude can be a big part of making it all happen, just as the original goal probably had a lot to do with performance so far.

I don't know what your personal and business goals are—whether you'd like to hit \$1,000,000 in sales, own seven Mercedes Benzes, achieve something more modest, or own something of even greater value! I do know that a big part of reaching whatever level of success you have in mind is to set reasonable and measurable goals—including the component goals that are all part of your master plan—and use all of those goals as motivators!