



Using Discipline Instead of Desperation

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Great sales people know the importance of discipline. They know that to make their sales targets they have to continually make calls, meet with prospects, write proposals, and maintain relationships. They have to habitually do that which leads to great sales results. It is no different than authors who write every day to publish a book, programmers who code every day to create a new program, and contractors who work every day to construct a building. Success requires a steady habit of working diligently toward your goals.

This is in contrast to lower performing sales people, programmers, contractors, and others who work without discipline. People without discipline work inconsistently. They work in spurts rather than in steady steps. They give their work sporadic focus. They procrastinate, often deferring the important for the convenient, fun, easy, or urgent. Then they try desperate measures to make up for their lack of progress by working all night to meet a deadline, making all their calls in one afternoon, or offering their prospect a deep discount to buy before the quarter ends that Friday.

Inconsistent and unfocused effort isn't efficient or effective. Like the fabled hare that lost the race to the slow but steady tortoise, when you are not steadily moving forward, you are falling behind. You may think you can make up for a lack of steady effort, but you can't. Other distractions come up. Life happens. What might initially be only a minor inconvenience leads to a major delay. What starts out as a missed appointment turns into two missed appointments. Hours of delays becomes days which becomes weeks.

A lack of disciplined progress causes people to become desperate. When sales people wait until the end of the month or quarter to close their sales, they work through desperation rather than discipline. They exchange good requirements gathering and account management for product discounts. They exchange targeted prospecting for unfocused promotions. Similarly, consultants who wait until their project is due sacrifice important research and the quality of their deliverables. Contractors pay overtime and cut corners. As a result, they not only lose out but so do their customers. Customers see the desperation and know they are not getting the steady level of service that they deserve. They either come to expect discounts to offset it, or they find someone else more dependable.

To make your sales target, write a great book, win a race, or complete a project on schedule, to budget, and to specification, replace desperation with discipline. Replace fits with focus. Replace working in erratic spurts with working in steady steps. Here are a dozen tips to keep in mind:

1. Break your plans and milestones down into specific tasks that you work on every day. Take it one day at a time.
2. Review your day's tasks the evening before to ensure you plan for the day ahead.
3. Schedule a reasonable amount of work for the day. Don't try to pack more work in a day than you can realistically complete.
4. Defer or delegate urgent requests that are low priority. Stay focused on your high priority activities.
5. Minimize your distractions. Remove annoyances, or yourself from them.
6. Complete your most difficult and high energy tasks at the beginning of the day when you have the most energy.
7. Focus on one task at a time, particularly any task that requires concentrated thinking. Your attention is a finite resource.



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8. Start your day early. Get a head start. Coming into the office late after requests have piled up puts you in a react mode that is difficult to overcome.
9. When you take a break from your work, stop at a place that is easy to start back from. Stop at a place you'll look forward to coming back to.
10. Don't let frustrations, inconveniences, or obstacles get you down. Don't give up. Don't make excuses. Get your work done despite what others might do to frustrate you.
11. Adapt when you need to adapt. Persistence is only a good quality when it is properly channeled. If what you are doing isn't working, change your approach.
12. Finish your day's work before turning your attention to other activities. Don't put off until tomorrow what you need to finish today.

Stay disciplined, work intentionally, and your results will take care of themselves.

Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* (www.activatingyourambition.com), and president of Alpine Link Corporation (www.alpinelink.com), a consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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