

## ARTICLE REPRINT

### Talent Is Common

Having watched several events at the Summer Olympics, it became apparent to me that competition among the world's finest athletes reveals just how common talent is at that level. I think it's the same for salespeople and selling organizations. So, what separates the winners from the also-rans? For athletes it's usually *practice*, and for salespeople it's *preparation*.

As gifted a golfer as he is, how many tournaments do you suppose Tiger Woods would win if the only golf he played was on the weekends, at tournaments? You can bet that as the other professional golfers spent countless hours practicing their tee shots and their short game, it wouldn't be more than a matter of weeks before Tiger started failing to make the cut at tournaments.

While it's true that sometimes luck plays a part in winning, most successful athletes will tell you that they make their own luck. Wayne Gretsky was lucky because during his playing career he spent more time practicing on the ice than he spent on terra firma. Michael Jordan's luck came from his legendary devotion to practice in the gym between NBA games.

For salespeople, preparation is the equivalent of athletic practice. Just like great tennis players practice baseline shots until making these shots becomes second nature for them, preparing a plan for each sales call and for the management of every customer relationship becomes second nature for the great salesperson. In very much the same way great athletes practice their sport, great salespeople prepare for managing their sales activities.

I once heard someone ask a gathering of salespeople these questions: "To be successful, how many books will you read? How many educational seminars will you attend? How much time will you spend with your mentors seeking their advice and counsel?" He was really asking the group how much time and effort they were willing to spend learning to become the best at their craft.

For salespeople, great success usually springs from good old fashioned *preparation*, which for the salesperson is the equivalent of athletic *practice*. Talent is common, and just like dedication to good practice habits distinguish world-class athletes from all others, dedication to good preparation distinguishes great salespeople from merely talented ones.

Look around in your own selling organization. It's likely you'll see lots of innately talented people. It's also likely that you'll notice that not many perform at the top of their game. Maybe it is because they don't spend enough time preparing to sell.

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