



Olympic-sized dreams

How setting specific goals can increase your sales

by Phil Sasso

It was my turn. They announced my name. I approached the center of the stadium. All eyes were on me. I kept telling myself to pretend this was just another practice. I took a deep breath to calm my nerves and I lifted the heavy metal ball to my right ear.

I blocked out everything possible, focusing my attention on my target and began my spin. Everything moved in slow motion. I released the ball, hurling it through space and watched it pound the earth several yards away leaving a dimple where it hit the ground.

Time hung as I awaited the verdict.

"Ladies and gentlemen a new world's record ..." The announcer's voice was drowned out by the crowd's wild cheers.

My eyes welled up with tears as I turned and saw my coach running out to meet me ...

And then I woke up.

O.K., so I never competed in the Olympics. I wasn't even in track and field in high school. And I don't have tickets to see the Olympics in China this summer. But I can dream, can't I?

Research shows that successful salespeople are more than just dreamers, they're intensely goal-centered. They know what they want and are willing to go for it. Much like world-class athletes, they draw a certain mental toughness from envisioning a goal and setting their mind to reaching it.

I'm not just talking about Olympiads or over-achievers. I'm talking about average Joes and Janes, like you and me, stretching our self-expectations slightly. I believe you and I really can do more by setting and reaching for bigger goals.

I don't think the power of goal setting is "drawing strength from the cosmos" or "the universe answering our demands." There's no secret in how goal setting works. By setting challenging, yet realistic goals, we set a target that drives us to accomplish it.

Writing down your goals makes them tangible and increases their effectiveness.

More than a decade ago, I was dating a girl who attended a day-long seminar on personal goal setting. When we met for dinner that night she was all fired up. Her eyes sparkled as she gushed about goal setting and goal getting. She encouraged me to confidentially write down my goals and objectives for the next year in several key areas: personal, spiritual, social, career, etc. Then, she told me to refer to this list regularly and to develop specific action steps to make those dreams a reality.

Maybe it was her excitement. Maybe it was my attraction to her. But, that night, I wrote down about a dozen personal goals for that year. Goal No. 1: Marry this smart, pretty girl.

In less than a year, Beth and I were married.

My marriage may or may not have been the result of written goals. But, I also achieved many other goals on that list that I'm convinced I never would have achieved without the process of committing them to paper.

Imagine what would happen if you decided to set written goals for 2008?

You may already have set written sales goals back in December or January. Or you may think you did. Perhaps you and/or your district manager determined a sales target. That's not really sales goals. That's more like a

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financial projection. The series of objectives you need to achieve to hit that sales target — those are sales goals.

For instance, say your 2008 sales goal is to beat 2007 sales by 10 percent. That's a great target. Now, how are you going to get there?

Raise your prices by 10 percent? (Not likely!)

See 10 percent more new customers? (You barely have time to see everyone now.)

Sell 10 percent more stuff to existing customers? (Which stuff?)

That's where goal setting comes in.


Like an Olympic runner striving for his personal best, you need to break down your main goal, "increase sales by 10 percent," into smaller, manageable objectives. Our runner might work on "starting blocks" or "corners" to enhance his performance. You, on the other hand, might choose to "demo more equipment," "handout more flyers" or "see unprofitable stops less often." In either case, it takes a lot of hard work and discipline.

You can't expect a radical change in sales without a radical change in your actions. The idea is simple: Don't just want to sell more this year. Decide what you need to do to sell more. As I often say: "Strategic thinking is more productive than wishful thinking."

If having specific, written goals is important, even more important is referring back to those goals often. An Olympiad invests hundreds of hours in rigorous conditioning and training. He carefully tracks his performance in practice, trials and other competitions pushing for continued improvements.

Come summer, as you watch the world's finest athletes striving for gold, remind yourself that you, too, are a competitor. Let it remind you of your goals and inspire you. You may not win gold, silver

or bronze, but you can bring home more green.

And in Summer 2016, if Chicago wins its Olympic bid, look for me. I'll be among the U.S. spectators. That's on my long-term goal list. 

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