

CHAPTER 6

FOCUS ON YOUR CAREER

The biggest rival I had in my career was me. -Jack Nicklaus

ALL YOU NEED IS TWENTY SECONDS OF INSANE COURAGE

It was time for our weekly family movie night and the kids picked *We Bought A Zoo*. The movie is based on a true story and features Matt Damon as a widowed dad who tries to make a fresh start by buying a broken-down zoo. To my surprise, the movie was pretty entertaining, and as a bonus, provided a quote with a real-life application for sales professionals. Matt Damon tries to connect with his onscreen son by offering the following advice: “You know, sometimes all you need is twenty seconds of insane courage. Literally, just twenty seconds of embarrassing bravery. And I promise you, something great will come of it.”

Do you remember as an account executive sitting in the parking lot of a new business prospect? You sat there staring through the windshield, relieved when you spotted the owner serving a client. “They can’t talk to me now, they’re with a client,” you justified to yourself. “Maybe I’ll swing by the car dealer and pick up a tape and then come back here to see if the owner is free.” Inevitably, when you stopped by the new business later in the day the parking lot was filled with cars. “No way the owner can see me now—too many customers,” you happily told yourself before heading back to the office.

Little did you know, the cars in the parking lot belonged to your media competition and at that very moment, in an audience with the new business owner, the competition was stealing your potential commission. You were the victim of a classic case of call reluctance.

Be honest with yourself. Doesn’t call reluctance rear its ugly head at every level of your career? As a sales manager, we have all felt the split-second hesitation before calling a key client to work through the wrongs of a rogue AE. As a general manager, you have caught yourself taking a deep breath before addressing the upset, big-spending auto dealer and his complaint over your station’s news coverage. Even today, I’m feeling a bit of call reluctance over a few diagnosis phone calls with group

heads taking place this afternoon. Are they happy? Do they like the service we're providing?

The root of call reluctance begins with the "what if's?" Nine times out of ten the "what if's" never show their ugly head and we end the visit feeling positive. However, to get to the call we need a breakthrough—something to push us beyond the voice in our head telling us that we "can't." In these instances, all you need is twenty seconds of insane courage. Try it sometime. And I promise you, something great will come of it.

BATTLING THROUGH A SLUMP

Have you ever seen an interview where a professional athlete explains in frustration the reality of career peaks and valleys? For some reason, the planets stop aligning and the athlete temporarily loses their "mojo." In sports terms, the athlete is in a "slump." Typically, the interview with a sports star in a slump ends with the athlete committing to re-dedicate themselves to a few small details that are seemingly responsible for holding back peak performance.

The same scenario applies to media sales managers. Many anticipate and recognize that performance valleys are inevitable. How quickly a manager responds to correcting the slump helps separate a star manager from a mediocre manager.

Throughout my management career, when battling through a slump, I have found it useful to re-dedicate my personal accountability in five key areas:

- 1. Yourself.** Apply yourself and develop your talent to the fullest capacity—without excuses. Are you making an honest daily effort to see as many clients as possible? Are you positioning yourself and your media for the order? Are you the example by always asking for the client investment? Do you encourage local direct business as the foundation of your revenue plans? Keep your focus in check by asking, "Is my effort at this very second making money?"
- 2. Your Talent.** Do not waste talent. Put it to great use in the service of something outside of yourself. Doing so can bring immense personal fulfillment and helps to create a positive environment. Watch how your goals are achieved when you apply your talent to help those around you to achieve their goals.
- 3. Your Career.** Act "as if" you have been to the peak before. Your actions should reflect the highest standards, especially in the face of opposition. Differentiate to separate and make yourself memorable among the mass of media managers and sellers.
- 4. Your Clients.** Show respect to those who come to you with need. Clients are depending on you to show them the "way" to marketing success. That's a huge responsibility that if handled correctly and professionally will reward you with

unsolicited referrals. Never forget that success creates luck.

5. Your Team. Act as a mentor to those who sincerely seek your leadership. Share with them the voice of your experience. Remind them that one individual does not make a team. In stressful situations, avoid the verbal negatives. Teach the team that an honest reflection of personal accountability comes before team accountability.

A SOLUTION FOR YOUR LACK OF SLEEP

Before there were smartphones and tablets, I used to end the night lying in bed next to the dim glow of a night light reading either a John Grisham legal thriller or a business book. Reading helped calm my thoughts from the day's management issues and always seemed to add weight to my eyelids making going to sleep and staying asleep fairly easy tasks.

Then, through the advent of technology, I was able to leave the books with paper on the shelf and enjoy reading electronically from an iPad. The dim glow of a night light was replaced by the glow of the tablet screen. Likewise, electronic books soon gave way to surfing the Internet for more important worldly information such as background information on *Survivor* contestants or what happened to the 3rd place finisher in season 4 of *American Idol*?

Shortly thereafter, a habit began to form that had a dramatic negative effect on my ability to get a good night's rest. The last thing I did before turning off my iPad and closing my sleepy eyes was check email. My nights of blissful slumber came to a screeching halt. Why? Inevitably, in the final evening emails there would be one or two "sticky" issues that had to be addressed. Maybe the email was an unhappy client or an employee request for help. Regardless, it was these kinds of emails that got the brain excited to pull a "fretting over the issues" all-nighter while the rest of my body was fighting to stop staring at the ceiling from 2 to 5 a.m.!

Is this relatable? If so, and you long for the past nights of restful slumber, I have a solution for you. Don't check email before you go to sleep!

Managing sales teams can be hard mental work. It's the kind of work that can sometimes make it difficult to quiet one's brain. It would make sense then that the last thing you should be doing is thinking about work while you're trying to go to sleep to rest and forget about work! So, don't check your email before you go to sleep.

For you naysayers, I have an astounding surprise. Like you, I was skeptical when I considered the thought of going to sleep without checking email. To my amazement, the very next morning, and every morning thereafter upon waking and taking a quick glance at my smartphone, all of the previous night's emails were sitting right there in the inbox. Wow. This discovery was kind of like when we were kids trying to

determine if the light stayed on when we shut the refrigerator door.

If you still aren't convinced, consider this. When was the last time your station engineer emailed you to tell you the station is off the air? Hopefully never. News like that should be handled with an emergency phone call. My point? If it's important enough—absolutely urgent—people will call you and get you out of bed.

The nice thing about waiting until the next morning to check email is that with a quiet brain you'll be more relaxed, well rested, and much better prepared to respond to any issues that may have been sent your way the night before.