

SALES

The 5 Things All Great Salespeople Do

by Joseph Curtis

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The best salespeople know they're the best. They take pride in their art form. They separate themselves from the rest of the pack regardless of circumstance. So how do they do it?

What's their secret? Are you one of them?

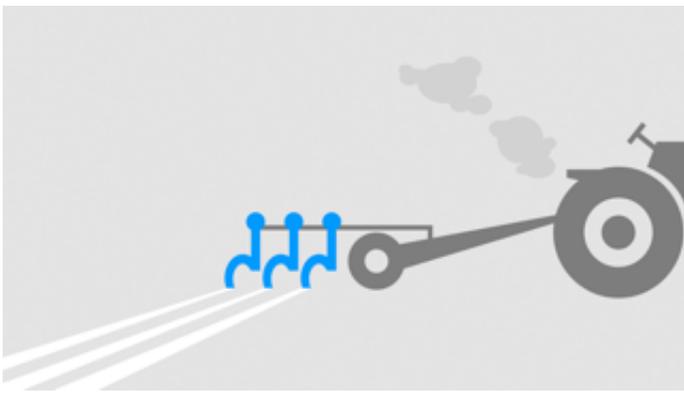
I've spent 16 years in technology sales, with most of that spent in sales leadership at Salesforce and other technology companies. I've had the luxury of observing great sales professionals in tech and beyond and have observed that the top performers share some of the same patterns, habits, and characteristics. I've distilled them down into five major categories and have begun integrating them into my work life – practicing them, honing them, teaching them. As a result, my teams have finished consistently at or near the top of the leaderboard year in and year out. Here's what I've observed:

The best salespeople own everything. I used to give a speech to new salespeople, earlier in my career, titled the “It's your fault speech.” It was very raw and full of overconfidence (chalk it up to leadership in your twenties) but the point was simple: Your success depends on you. The sales profession exists within a meritocracy. Statistically, it is not a coincidence that the same people are at the top of the leaderboard year in and year out. Some may think it's because certain people have it easier, or are given this, or fall into that. We all have our starting points. Regardless, the most significant difference between perennial top performers and everyone else is attitude. Elite salespeople approach their goals with a total ownership mindset. Anything that happens to them, whether or not it was their doing, is controlled by them. It may not be their fault, but it *is* their responsibility. In the research, psychologists call this the internal locus of control. That's a fancy way of saying that you think the power lies inside of you instead of externally. And you know what they found? Having an internal locus of control correlates with success at work, higher income, and greater health outcomes.

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Getting More Work Done

This area has been the hardest to coach in my career because it seems to be so deeply rooted in one's personality. The best way to self-assess is this: Take your current situation – your accounts, your role, your earnings – and ask yourself these questions: How did I get here? Did I build the right relationships? Did I



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put in the extra work? Did I speak up? Did I blame others for my failures but take credit for my successes?

You must own everything.

The best salespeople are resourceful.

MacGyver was a popular show when I was in fifth grade. My friends and I would try to emulate MacGyver by turning a paperclip into a knife or a key or something, but we basically just twisted it around until it broke – we weren't exactly aspiring engineers. But if you remember watching MacGyver, the premise

was that the lead character was put in an impossible situation with few to no tools or weapons or resources, with very little time, and had to get out of the situation using only his wits and whatever he could find in his pocket or laying around near him. MacGyver didn't stop and complain about how he only had a paper clip to work with, while other people had a blowtorch. He didn't lament how hard his position was. He simply assessed his strengths and resources and made something happen. Every week, he figured it out. And every week he saved the day.

The best sales people I have seen are like modern day MacGyvers, *sans* the life and death scenarios. They're often faced with difficult situations and time pressures, having to negotiate seemingly arbitrary obstacles armed with only their wits and their phones. Elite salespeople almost always figure it out. Resourcefulness is as much a mindset as it is a skill. If you don't start with the MacGyver mindset, then you will never fully develop the skills associated with being resourceful. As an exercise, seek out or fully embrace the next

ridiculous or impossible situation you find yourself in and then put your phone down, close your computer, re-focus, and apply your energy to find multiple alternative routes to your desired destination. Find a colleague and draw it all out on a whiteboard.

Embrace your inner MacGyver.

The best salespeople are experts. Sales is less about selling and more about leading, which requires high levels of confidence, which in turn requires knowledge and experience. This concept can be expressed mathematically as $\text{Knowledge} + \text{Experience} = \text{Confidence to Lead}$. You can control the first part of the equation; the second comes with time. Gaining industry knowledge and a strong point of view about the products they're selling should be the top priority for any aspiring salesperson.

Study. Learn. Form an opinion. Expertise leads to confidence, which leads to trust, which leads to sales.

The best salespeople help others. Regardless of where you are in your career, there is someone else you can help. There is something you know about a product, a process, or an industry that someone new or less tenured does not. The best salespeople I have observed regularly pass their knowledge on to less tenured or less experienced sales people with no expectation of anything in return. Coincidentally or maybe ironically, the act itself becomes a catalyst for building confidence within one's self. And others take notice as well. Shawn Achor, author of *Big Potential*, found that people who are social support providers at work ("work altruists") are a whopping 40% more likely to receive a promotion.

The best salespeople move quickly. The best salespeople don't move recklessly, but they do have a sense of urgency. I've often been amazed throughout my career when I've encountered salespeople who were slow in getting back to their clients or customers – who

delayed in delivering contracts or materials needed to make a decision. Most elite salespeople get things done, to quote Norton in *The Shawshank Redemption*, “not tomorrow, not after breakfast, now!”

Look at the top salespeople in your own company and see if they possess most if not all of these characteristics. My bet is that they do. And I also bet that they’d be willing to share their strategies with you.

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Eric Henderson 2 hours ago

The best salespeople know their customer, understand their customer's need (even if the customer does not), attend to that need, and are not satisfied until their customer is satisfied; and then, look for ways to make the customer more satisfied.

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