

The golf season is in full swing and I thought I would share this article re-printed from Training magazine. Sometimes sales people feel that formal professional sales training is not worth the investment and that learning from experience is the best way to improve results. I suggest having your sales people read this article and discussing it at your next sales meeting. You may come up with some new ideas for skills development that can enhance future sales results.

1. Sales Pros vs. Golf Pros

A Tip from the Trenches

Salespeople like examples of "big earnings" and "big accomplishments," says Paul Greer, a sales training manager at BP Australia. That's why he often refers to the chart below—which depicts leading Professional Golfers' Association (PGA) money winners—as a way to jump-start his sales-training courses.

Golf's Leading Money Winners

2003 Rank: #1
Player: Vijay Singh
2003 (Millions): \$7.6
Avg. Score: 68.65

2003 Rank: #10
Player: Retief Goosen
2003 (Millions): \$3.6
Avg. Score: 69.20
Score Difference: +0.55

2003 Rank: #50
Player: Peter Lonard
2003 (Millions): \$1.3
Avg. Score: 70.29
Score Difference: +1.64

2003 Rank: #100
Player: Craig Barlow
2003 (Millions): \$0.6
Avg. Score: 71.21
Score Difference: +2.56

"I compare the leading PGA money winners to top salespeople," Greer says. Here's how:

- The No. 1 money winner, Singh, earned more than twice as much as the No. 10 earner (\$7.6 million, compared to Goosen's \$3.6 million) in 2003.
- Based on average scoring per round, Singh was 1 percent better than his competition and earned \$4 million more than, arguably, the 10th best golfer in the world.

- Singh drove 1 percent better, chipped 1 percent better, played long and short irons 1 percent better, putted 1 percent better, took the club away 1 percent better, and had a 1 percent better shoulder turn and 1 percent better grip. In short, he probably did 100 things 1 percent better.
- Singh also has that little bit of extra “something.” What is it? Will to win? Heart? What he has is a repeatable process, a proven method and a systems approach to the game, Greer says. “These are the same approaches practiced by top salespeople—the guys and gals who receive the lion’s share of big commissions and big incentives.” What do they do? Greer says successful sales pros prepare 1 percent better, open the call 1 percent better, question and listen 1 percent better, provide feedback 1 percent better, and close and follow up 1 percent better.
- The top golf pros practice daily and invest heavily in coaching. Top sales pros do the same—but in a different way.
- Barlow made \$0.6 million but took only two-and-a-half strokes more per round. After travel expenses and coaching costs are taken into consideration, Barlow likely had very little money left over. “That’s hardly a fair outcome for, arguably, the hundredth best golfer in the world,” Greer says.
- Weekend “hackers” can eventually get the ball in the hole. This allows them to claim to be golfers—just not very good ones. “Similarly,” Greer says, “some companies send new and/or unprepared salespeople into the field. That makes them ‘salespeople’—just not very good ones.”

Above all, perhaps the biggest difference between sales pros and golf pros is that golf pros invest heavily in coaching. Sales pros, by and large, however, are self-taught, Greer says.

Selling, he says, is learned by sitting across a desk from decision-makers and crafting a persuasive argument for change. Over time, the best sales pros learn what works and what doesn't. Then, they hone the skills that prove to be most effective to such an extent that they set themselves apart from other salespeople—just like golf pros.

“I finish by telling the salespeople in attendance that I can't help them with their business problems or pricing,” Greer says, “but that they can call me anytime, day or night, and I will try to help them with their ‘swing.’”