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**Viewpoint (Web Exclusive)**

**Being 'a Born Salesperson' Isn't Enough**

*Removing the constraints that prevent salespeople from becoming exceptional.*

by [Flip Flippen, founder and president of The Flippen Group](#)  
Friday, August 03, 2007



Baseball pitchers are a lot like salespeople.

(I know--not an obvious parallel. After all, it's a completely different skill

set. Probably the only thing you need a good right arm for in sales is to sign on the dotted line.)

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But it occurred to me when I was working with a group of pitchers from a professional baseball team recently that some of the objectives are the same. More important, the personal characteristics necessary to be successful are very similar.

In baseball, there are great starting pitchers. These are the guys you open with--they set a pace and tone right from the get-go. In sales, there are also great openers--masters at networking, hooking a buyer, and knowing how to make the "ask."

Then there are great closers. In baseball, these are the guys who can seal the deal. They are focused, and throw the ball like they were born to do nothing else. They know what pitch works—and, more importantly—when. Similarly, great closers in sales are able to capitalize on momentum and protect the lead. You can count on them to execute a game plan and finalize the sale.

So what makes a pitcher great? Is it just something he's born with? Is he

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just "a natural"?

Probably. At least, to a certain extent. However, what makes a great pitcher is not just a great pitching arm. You may be born with the ability to throw the world's most elusive curve ball, but if you cave under pressure, your pitching career will undoubtedly be short-lived.

In the same way, if you're "a natural" opener in the sales arena, you may be outgoing, assertive, and funny. But when it comes to closing a sale, if you are not focused, detail-oriented, and able to guide a customer through the process, you may end up losing the deal.

So why are some salespeople unable to hook a buyer as masterfully as they seal a deal? And why do many salespeople struggle to do both?

Two words: Personal constraints.

Personal constraints are those things that limit us as individuals--that hold us back.

For example, Nolan Ryan had a great pitching arm--a natural ability. But if that gifted arm of his had been permanently tied behind his back, I'd venture to say no ball clubs would have beat down his door waving multimillion-dollar contracts. That's because his natural ability would have been constrained, in this case by a rope.

Similarly, a salesperson may have the natural ability to be assertive and outgoing, but he or she is constrained by a lack of self-confidence. In this case, lack of self-confidence becomes his or her "rope."

Do personal constraints make them poor salespeople? Not necessarily. It may just be that these constraints are keeping them from becoming exceptional salespeople.

### Key Qualities of a Great Salesperson

So what does a great salesperson look like? While this varies across industries and even across salespeople in the same organization, the following are the most common traits:

- **Driven**--Has a sense of urgency and a need to accomplish the task at hand
- **Confident**--Believes in own abilities and can handle rejection
- **Outgoing**--Projects a great first impression and is energized by social interactions
- **Assertive**--Effectively controls interactions and doesn't cave-in easily
- **Funny**--Engages customer emotions, is likeable and memorable
- **Structured**--Leads the customer through the process, is organized and follows through
- **Relational**--Cares about the person, not just the sale, effectively identifies customer needs
- **Focused**--Doesn't get sidetracked, knows the final destination

Notice that openers and closers are both driven and confident. However, successful openers must also be outgoing, assertive, and funny, while closers must be structured, relational, and focused.

In working with hundreds of salespeople over the years, I have discovered that the following Killer Constraints seem to be the most damaging for salespeople:

- Low passion and drive (*Flatliners*)
- Resistant to change (*Turtles*)
- Low self-image, can't handle rejection (*Ostriches*)
- Overly dominant, pushy or abrasive (*Bulldozers*)

The key question is, can a more insecure or reserved salesperson eliminate the constraints that keep him or her from becoming more outgoing and assertive? Is it possible for them to slay the ostrich? The answer is absolutely. While some constraints may be more difficult to overcome than

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others--change is always possible.

For example, an Ostrich might make a list of 10 of his or her greatest strengths and review them every day. In addition, he or she might commit to avoiding self-deprecating language, or not publicly expressing disappointment in his or her performance.

However, before eliminating a constraint, it must first be identified. Once the constraint is identified, it is necessary to create and execute a plan to break it. This plan requires commitment to specific, measurable behavioral steps, with an established timeline for the completion of each step.

While the task may appear daunting at first, there's nothing big and scary about it. It just requires a little thought and the commitment to completing a few easy steps. You may just find yourself with an entire team of "naturals!"

### About the Author

*Flip Flippen, author of the recent New York Times Bestseller, The Flip Side, is founder and president of the The Flippen Group, the largest educator training and one of the fastest-growing leadership development organizations in North America.*

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