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The One with the Least Baggage Wins

If you were asked what one thing determines your sales reps' level of ultimate success, what would your answer be? Their skills? Their innate talent for selling? Their ability to forge relationships with clients? Their past experience? Actually, you'd have to look on the opposite end of the spectrum. According to Flip Flippen, head of the Flippen Group, one of the fastest growing corporate training companies in the U.S., it is not our talents and abilities that define how far we go, it is our constraints.

When your reps learn how to identify and fix the invisible tethers that hold them back, their level of performance will soar. It will peak even further when you, as a manager, address your constraints because as Flippen observes, "The greater the personal constraints of the leaders, the greater the impact on the organization." In his new book, *The Flip Side: Break Free of the Behaviors That Hold You Back* (Springboard, 2007), Flippen discusses in depth the 10 most common constraints and offers a plan for fixing each one. Here's a brief look at five of the constraints most likely to rear their heads in the sales profession.

- 1. Bulletproof (overconfidence):** You feel there are few others who can perform at your level; you're not concerned with how others view you; you rarely accept blame but instead focus on the other person's failings. *The fix:* when discussing a topic on which you disagree with someone, make a point to listen and try to understand the other side. Start being proactive about seeking opinions from others who will see things differently from you.
- 2. Critics (too demanding or harsh):** You notice things that aren't right or aren't as good as they could be; others often fail to live up to your high expectations; you've been accused of being a skeptic; you've been known to give feedback that wasn't asked for. *The fix:* resolve to go a full day without a single complaint; stop expecting too much from people; watch your body language – stop crossing your arms or furrowing your eyebrows; stop taking subtle jabs at people or using sarcasm.
- 3. Icebergs (low nurturing):** You feel people can and should solve their own problems; you don't compliment people as much as others do; you feel awkward showing nurturing behaviors; you believe it's not your responsibility to help others feel good about themselves. *The fix:* Every day, do at least one of the following: send an encouraging email, call to affirm someone, or give someone a compliment; find out more about the people with whom you work closely – know about their families and what's important to them.
- 4. Bulldozers (overly dominant):** You often finish other people's sentences; when you disagree with others, it's okay to interrupt to correct them; you feel that being strong-willed enables you to accomplish more than others; when others are talking, you are already thinking of what to say next and looking for an opportunity to win them to your way of thinking. *The fix:* start taking a step back in group interactions at times; focus on asking more reserved people what their thoughts are; check in during conversations with questions like, "Am I answering your question?" or, "Have I understood you correctly?" Get buy-in from those around you rather than pushing your agenda every time.
- 5. Volcanoes (aggressive, angry):** When you're stressed or under pressure, your frustration is obvious; you have a strong will to win and don't ever play to lose; it's hard for you to say you're sorry; if someone pushes you, of course you're going to push back; you can get quite angry if pushed too far. *The fix:* stop using win-lose phrases in discussions like "Again...", "Like I said earlier...", and "No, what you said was...." Recognize that when you're defensive, it is not someone else's fault. Stop trying to get the last word in a disagreement.

The bottom line is that we all have personal constraints and in the end, the one with the least constraints will go the furthest. It all boils down to physics, says Flippen: "The lighter the load you carry, the further you can go." For more information, visit www.flippengroup.com.


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