

Why Training Isn't Enough

I remember entering the class disheartened; the worst salesperson in the Southeast – bottom of the totem pole. Not only was I disappointed by my sales results, but I'd also become depressed – underperformance, not meeting expectations. I'd lost confidence and was fearful of losing my job. Even my outward appearance reflected my low spirits. Then, I met Jason. He was the owner of the local Dale Carnegie franchise and sales course facilitator. I came to learn he was formally the top Dale Carnegie salesperson in the world, a former PGA tour member and local radio show host. I admired him and hung on every word he said. For some reason, he took an interest in me.

The class included 20 participants wanting to learn about the selling process. Everything Jason taught was eye-opening to me: How to open a sales call (e.g., “if there were a way to increase your sales by \$X, you'd want to know about it wouldn't you?”), how to ask probing questions, listening skills, the difference between features and benefits, providing a value proposition, how to smoke out and overcome objections, and closing techniques, all with a human relations perspective.

The course's methodology was to teach a selling principle in the classroom, apply it on the job, return the next week, and share what happened. Jason coached the participants as we practiced the principles – many times, we failed – but that's where the learning occurred. He encouraged us to get out of our comfort zones to where growth happens. And move out of my comfort zone I did – as time passed, I applied the principles, and they worked for me. My confidence started to grow. I began fearlessly opening sales calls – gaining a store owner's undivided attention, listening for customer needs, demonstrating how *Pro Plan* would benefit their business, overcoming objections, and, most of all, closing sales.

Additionally, Jason called me every few weeks during the course to see how I was doing – I appreciated his interest and mentorship. I'd tell him how I was applying the new selling principles; ask a few questions, and he'd provide some coaching.

I blossomed as my selling skills improved. I began experiencing positive results, and it showed. I had more pep in my step, and my outward appearance began to reflect how I felt on the inside. I even started attending class wearing a sports coat, dress slacks, and a button-down shirt. My newfound confidence was beaming. Jason noticed and publicly commented so.

Over the 12-week course, class members participated in a "Sales Talk" competition where everyone took turns pitching their product or service and leveraged the new skills we'd learned. When it was my turn in the first round, I passionately demonstrated how I'd grown over the previous weeks and pitched Pro Plan using all the key selling principles and techniques. Surprisingly, my peers voted me into the finals. But Michael, a professional salesperson, future CEO, and community leader, was a formidable competitor. Are you kidding? Me versus Goliath? Winning was going to take all I had and then some.

To differentiate me and take home the trophy, I decided that the key to beating Michael would be showmanship – demonstrating *Pro Plan's* real-life effect. No, I wasn't going to ask everyone to taste a kibble. However, my idea did involve a dog. I was hesitant to execute the plan, but during my preparation, I remembered a quote in Dale Carnegie's "How to Stop Worrying and Start Living." It reads, "I cannot write a work commiserate with Shakespeare, but I can write a book by me," meaning be yourself, be authentic. The quote inspired me with the confidence to become a first-rate Preston Poore and not a second-rate someone else. To take a chance and differentiate myself from the competition.

The big day came, and Michael went first. He gave a passionate and convincing talk about construction and business development – his new pitch for multi-million-dollar buildings – real estate development. Smooth. Impressive. Surely, he would win. But that didn't stop me from trying, rising to the challenge. I'd practiced my presentation and was ready to go.

I rose to present in my chalk striped gray suit, tie, and polished shoes. I conveyed confidence, filled the room with presence. In command of my presentation, I had a conversation with the audience, as if I was speaking directly to a potential store owner. After walking through my opening statement, asking questions, flushing out, and overcoming objections, it was time for the close.

I told the audience that there was no better way to believe what I was telling them, the health benefits of *Pro Plan* than to show them a living example. To the audience's surprise, my wife Carla appeared in the back of the room, holding our Dachshund, Sally. I introduced Carla and Sally. Sally's tail wagged as she recognized me. Carla put Sally down, and Sally immediately ran across the room to me. The class cheered and roared with laughter, enjoying the pleasant surprise appearance. I picked Sally up and told the audience that the "proof is in the pudding." Sally's eaten *Pro Plan* for the last year. Her coat shined, her energy level was high, and she was healthier than when we fed her grocery store-brand pet food.

I addressed the audience, "Who wouldn't want their pet to look and feel like Sally? All it takes is offering *Pro Plan* to your customers." To close, I asked, "Would you like to place the large or medium-sized rack with your first 500 lb. order?" I said thank you, and the audience stood in rousing applause. I was overwhelmed.

Then, time to vote. Jason handed out ballots and instructed the class to choose who they thought best demonstrated the sales principles. He asked them to consider passion and

creativity in their decision. After a few quiet moments, Jason gathered the ballots, counted them, and announced, "You've selected Preston as our 'Sales Talk Champion.' Congratulations, Preston!" I proudly received a plaque that I still have to this day.

The Dale Carnegie Sales course and my experience over those 12 weeks set my career on a new trajectory. I developed valuable skills I didn't have before. I stepped out of my comfort zone to apply the principles I learned. Sometimes I failed, and other times I succeeded. I learned and grew through the process. So much so that I eventually became the number one Pro Plan representative in the Southeast, opening more new accounts and increasing sales more than my peers. I grew, and my company grew. All because someone believed in me, made way for me, coached me, developed me. I intentionally leaned into the process and greatly improved my results. I benefited personally and professionally.

I learned training itself wasn't enough. The secret sauce was in what I did with the training, the new skills I developed. I didn't set them on a shelf and forget about them. If you're on a development journey and want to realize your potential, I recommend employing three fundamental principles:

Apply, Apply, Apply – It's been said that knowledge is power. Not so fast. I believe that the *application* of knowledge is power. You need to put what you learned into practice; turn thoughts and words into action. Bring things to life. There's limited value in gaining knowledge for knowledge's sake. Knowledge must inform and shape our actions. But without effort, knowledge is dead. The fuel of development is application, nothing more, nothing less. To grow, you need to employ what you've learned, test it, try it. Don't let ideas, principles, or concepts move into one ear and out the other. To make a real, substantial, material change, you must do. In doing, move out of your comfort zone to the edge where learning happens, where you gain experience. PT Barnum said,

“No man or woman has a right to expect to succeed in life unless they understand their business, and nobody can understand their business thoroughly unless they learn it by personal application and experience.” I stepped out of my comfort zone, employed the principles, gained experience, and succeeded. If you apply what you learn, you will too.

Self-Reflect – Once you’ve applied the acquired knowledge, it’s time to reflect – think deeply about your experience. Why? Peter Drucker said, “Follow effective action with quiet reflection. From the quiet reflection will come even more effective action.” By looking back thoroughly at your actions. What worked well? What were your successes? How did you see your strengths come to life, and how will you build upon them? What didn’t go well? Did you fail? That’s ok. What did you learn? What problems did you encounter? What were the root causes? What adjustments do you need to make? What are limiting self-beliefs holding me back? I recommend keeping a journal to record your thoughts. Writing helps you know what you think. Ask yourself, did I succeed or fail today? Why? How did it make me feel? How can I improve? If you journal over time, you’ll be able to return to your reflections and see growth.

Be Accountable – To achieve the results you desire, it’s good to have a coach, mentor, manager, peer, or friend to ask probing questions, give advice, and encourage you. Connect with someone you trust and share your plan with them. Be vulnerable with the person by sharing your ups and downs, where you are in your development journey. Similar to the above self-reflection questions, empower your accountability partner to ask questions like:

- **Wins:** What’s going well? What are you most proud of? What did you learn? How will you replicate or build upon it?
- **Challenges:** What’s not going well? Why? What did you learn? How will you course correct?

- **Goals:** What do you want to accomplish moving forward? By when? How do you define success? Do you anticipate any challenges? How will you overcome them?
- **Support:** How can I help you?

Training isn't enough, but it's the start of reaching your potential. If you apply what you learn, reflect, and are transparent with someone who will encourage you and hold you accountable, you will grow. You'll transform the capacity, raw talents, and abilities you have into power, influence, and positive effect. Your potential will become potency. Because of your growth, you'll grow everything around you – cultures, communities, companies, churches, schools, you name it. What are you waiting for?

Want to uplevel your skills or become a leader others will gladly follow? Visit my website, prestonpoore.com, today!

Cheers,

Preston