

"Learned Optimism" and how it can improve your sales.

I highly suggest the book, "Learned Optimism, How to Change Your Mind and Your Life" by Dr. Martin E.P. Seligman, Ph.D., he made some incredible discoveries that helped change the outlook of many physiologists and people in the world. In his years of study, he found that many depressed people got that way because they were pessimists and he also found that they were relieved of this depression when they changed the way they were thinking.

At some point back in the 80's he then turned his focus from the study of the depressed, the pessimists, to include the study of successful people. What he discovered is that almost all successful people were optimists. One population of people he studied were sales people, a group he felt were up against tough odds every day. What his research discovered was that optimists do better in school, win more elections, and succeed more at work than pessimists do. They even seem to lead longer and healthier lives.

The encouraging news for any of you who feel you might fall into the pessimist category (and he has a test for that in his book) your thoughts and outlook can be changed; dramatically by changing the way you think.

It's a very interesting topic. When I reflect over the 86 sales people I have had the pleasure with whom to work, there are about ten that have been stellar performers year after year and who were incredibly fun people. I would have to say that of those ten, if you judged optimism on a scale of 1-10, nine of them were 10's. Think about those who get up and win awards every year. They are the same faces, aside from one or two, each and every year. Do you remember any of them to have a pessimistic outlook? Sure, one or two slip in for one year who might be complainers or pessimists, but those that are consistently at the top always seem to have the brightest outlook on life. I would have to say that the one top rep who didn't seem to be a 10 on the optimism scale somehow managed to do it by sheer hard work and determination. I believe it was his fear of failure that drove him so hard.

In working with one rep for two years, if anyone had a reason to be negative, it would be this rep. Now, while he and I have discussed the challenges in his territory, and we have talked about way to get around them, I have never heard him speak words of pessimism or words of defeat. Sure, he's mentioned he has had a tough day here or there, but they were always words of a temporary setback. In fact, at least once a week, I'd get a phone call from him, or a voicemail, to tell me how good things are going, the opportunities that are looking good and how bright the future looks. Never once have I heard him say that there just aren't enough opportunities going on in his territory. Never has he thrown up his hands and said that the competitive reps just has too many relationships that he just won't be able to ever break or at least get a piece of the customer's friendship himself. I believe that all this rep sees is opportunity. I also admire that he seems to have a good sense of all the blessings he has in his life.

I'm not saying that we all shouldn't be realists. I'm not saying that these market conditions don't exist. I just believe that with the right attitude, these challenges can be overcome. I just see that with only 20% of the mechanical valve market, there is 80% to be had regardless as to what is happening with tissue. I'm just saying that it has been fun to watch a man with quite a few challenges turn them into opportunity. As they say, "He is turning lemons into lemonade everyday".

So, the next time you want to make excuses or blame someone or something, remind yourself that 1) pessimism won't lead to success 2) and think about all the opportunity you have in your territory. Think about all the new customers and friends in your territory you have yet to develop.