



Corsini's Point of the Week™

MAY 10, 2010

Rainmakers: Are They Born or Made?

Last week, I had the opportunity to speak at a conference for commercial real estate professionals. Because I coach a lot of commercial-minded real estate people, this group invited me along for their annual beach trip to be a speaker.

After giving some initial comments, I opened my presentation with this question: **"Are rainmakers born or made?"** It's an age-old question with proponents on both sides of the issue. **I first asked for a show of hands for the "born" identity, and then I asked those who think rainmakers are "self-made" to raise their hands.** As usual, the audience was pretty much divided. Also, **a few people raised their hands both times to advocate a dual approach.**

If you believe that the most successful salespeople are "born with it" ("it" being the power to persuade people; build solid business relationships; and share a sense of trust, respect and admiration with clients), you might also believe in luck. The thought pattern with this approach is that if you don't have "the right stuff" then all the training in the world won't make much of a difference in your performance. **If, on the other hand, you believe rainmakers are "made," then training, coaching, observing and taking appropriate action do make a difference. They make all the difference.**

My almost 20 years of coaching has shown me that, yes, you do have to have a certain amount of talent, intelligence, education, memory skills and the willingness to work hard in order to be a successful rainmaker in any business. But then, we all know at least one person who is terrifically talented but who underperforms. We might know others who are intellectually smart—with college degrees and all kinds of industry recognition, yet they fail to reach the successes they should. I've coached salespeople who worked hard—sometimes even very hard—but still came up short.

You can take 10 people with the same degree of talent, education and the other ingredients for success and you'll get about 10% to 20% who become rainmakers. Another 50% will manage an average performance, and 10% to 20% will be underachievers.

So what separates the elite from the rest? For one thing, **rainmakers continuously improve their performance.** (That squares with the idea of success being "made.") **But what's inside a person to make him push so hard in the first place? What has been there all along?** Geoff Colvin, in his book *Talent is Overrated*, talks about **"deliberate practice," which is the model of continuously pushing yourself beyond your capabilities.** His idea is based on constant efforts at improvement guided by constant feedback. The Japanese call it "Kaizen," meaning "improvement" or "change for the better." **I call it getting uncomfortable until it's comfortable and then getting uncomfortable again. For that, you have to work smart and be willing to work.**

Quote of the Week

"Elite performers use competition to hone their skills, and they reinvent themselves continually to stay ahead of the pack."

— Graham Jones,
sports psychologist
& executive coach

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Salespeople, in general, are not born with the skills they need to succeed. In most cases, it isn't an issue of DNA—of going into the game with everything you need to be successful. I'll agree, if you are painfully shy and find it almost impossible to talk to strangers, you shouldn't choose a new-customer sales job. But for most people, becoming a rainmaker in any profession is about continuous improvement in performance. It's about regularly assessing your efforts (perhaps even on a daily basis) and making the changes that it takes to get better. It's about actively seeking out feedback from others and being thick-skinned enough to accept it as constructive coaching rather than simply criticism. This is key no matter what you do. Just look at how much better the *American Idol* finalists are today versus six months ago. They've improved beyond their wildest dreams—and so can you.

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