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CHUCK TALK: Personal accountability or victim, it's your choice

BY CHUCK MACHE

I was in a meeting with an executive last week discussing the company's expansion of its sales team when he posed the following question, "Chuck, where are all the hungry people?" He was referring to a lack of seemingly passionate, motivated potential sales prospects among those he had interviewed.

About as quick as he said it, I replied, "How hungry are you?" After I got the don't-cross-the-line look, which I blew off immediately, I went on to explain my question to him. It turned out that it was a perfect opportunity to emphasize the point that he and his company had been struggling with. The culture had been experiencing a lot of finger-pointing, blaming and procrastination. In my view, his question tied directly to a challenging problem: a lack of personal accountability.

I'm talking about taking personal responsibility for achieving goals that aren't that easily achieved. The above example shows a clear lack of personal accountability. While I would agree that it is very difficult to find great salespeople, they are certainly out there.

I would also say that if you use the traditional Craigslist/Monster.com bottom-fishing approach, odds are you aren't going to find great salespeople. The point is how much real work was going into recruiting top-notch people? An ad or two and wait for the phone to ring. As a result, I get the "victim" question, "Where are all the hungry people?" Give me a break.

Here's another example. A sales rep for one of my clients recently lost a sale that she had been working on for the past three months. Instead of saying "I was outsold," I heard about the poor pricing, the product flaws and the lack of inside support in getting the deal done. If I had stayed to listen long enough, I would have heard that she lost the deal because the other company gave it away for free, and that's what her company should have done. She was outsold, period. It would have been mildly uplifting to have heard, "Darn, I got beat. Here's how I'm going to avoid that next time." Finger-pointing is a choice, just as is personal accountability.

Yesterday I had coffee with a friend who told me absolutely everything that was wrong with his current career. So I made a simple suggestion. "Get a new job in the same career or switch careers." What I heard back was all of the reasons why those options weren't possible and not one reason why they were viable. And so the coffee session became an hour of all the unfair things that the universe is doing to him. Hello! Think maybe he has some part in all of it?

Just so we're clear, I'm not finger-pointing here. In fact, let me turn the finger 180 degrees and point it at myself. I recently lost a keynote speaking opportunity in Las Vegas. The association chose ex-football player and NFL color man Joe Theismann instead of me. What were some of my first thoughts? Joe Theismann? Come on, he's just a name. How much substance will he bring to the party?

The bottom line is I lost. I didn't articulate my brand well enough to win the job. I didn't tie my message to their association in a manner that solves some real issues for them. Actually, I really didn't do anything. Had a couple conversations, got in the final running and then got smoked by Joe Theismann. I wasn't good enough, and I need to get better. These are the real questions I need to ask myself:

--What could I have done differently?

--What do I need to improve so that next time I put myself in a better position to win?

--What actions can I take right now to make myself better?

The next time I point the finger at someone or something else, I'm going to make my index finger do a 180-degree turn and point it right at my own chest. Then I'm going to ask myself the above three questions.

Personal accountability is about avoiding the victim thinking that so many of us have a tendency to fall back on. It's about taking a stand and saying "No excuses!" It's about a mindset that avoids procrastination and focuses on problem-solving, forward momentum, self-improvement and absolutely killing the "victim" that human nature has planted inside many of us.

By the way, there is an easy answer to, "Chuck, where are all the hungry people?" The answer is, "They're working. So let's go find them!"

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Chuck Mache, President of Chuck Mache Communications, is a speaker, executive coach and consultant. His work is dedicated to helping companies and individuals break through to their next level. He is also the best-selling author of the "The Four Kinds of Sales People: How and Why They Excel and How You Can Too." Learn more and sign up for Chuck's complimentary monthly newsletter at www.ChuckMache.com.