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Editorial Staff

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Tethered to Work: How Mobile Devices Impact Family Conflict, Work Commitment and Turnover

Merideth Ferguson, PhD, Dawn Carlson, PhD, Wendy Boswell, PhD, Dwayne Whitten, DBA, Marcus Butts, PhD, and K. Michele Kacmar, PhD

The technology of yesteryear is a distant memory for many. Back in the 1990s, cell phone could only make calls and cell service billed by the minute. Internet usage "swamped" telephone lines and conversations focus on the limits of bandwidth. Today, technology has infiltrated nearly every aspect of our lives. Living in the *digital world* means we always have our cell phones close-at-hand and we find high-tech wearable devices incorporated into our daily activities.

For sales professionals in real estate and other industries, life in the digital world presents numerous challenges. Since mobile devices are the norm, work extends far outside the boundaries of the office and expectations are high for immediate response. Indeed, the Pew Research Foundation reported that 45% of *networked workers* (i.e., those technologically connected while at work and who possess a mobile device) report working in the family domain during evenings and weekends using a mobile device.

Our Study

The current study considered the concept of mWork or using a smartphone or a tablet with Internet access to engage in work tasks during family time, to answer two major questions. First, what is the fallout on organizational attachment when the employee engages in mWork? Second, how does mWork relate to the employee's spouse and his or her reactions towards the employee's organization?

In gathering data, 344 pairs of job incumbents and their spouses were recruited with the assistance of a data management service firm. All participants were married, worked full-time, and both the job incumbent and spouse used mobile devices. Job incumbents completed surveys via an emailed link. After completion, a link was emailed to spouses who completed a separate confidential survey.

In total, 13 hypotheses were tested centering around mWork and its impact on employees, their spouses, and the employer. The hypotheses addressed mWork's relationship to various factors including burnout, turnover intentions, spousal resentment, and spousal commitment.

This research is important to real estate professionals as it considers the relatively new phenomenon of mWork and its impact on both family and the employer. As technology continues to evolve and the work-life relationship continues to blurr, real estate professionals must remain ever-conscious of mWork's potential impact on their lives and careers.

mWork Impacts

There is no question that working from home can have a major impact on an employee's relationships and motivation. Our study found that mWork increases three types of work-family conflicts for employees, those work-family conflicts that are time-based, strain-based, and behaviorally-based. Additionally, employee burnout also increases with increasing strain-based work-family conflict; however, burnout does not correlate with time-based or behavior-based work-family conflict.

This research demonstrated that as employees experienced greater strain based conflict from always being tethered to work (mWork), they subsequently had greater employee burnout. This burnout contributed to lower employee commitment to the organization which it turn related to higher turnover intention.

Our study also found that all three dimensions of work-family conflict (this is, time-based, strain-based and behavior-based) relate positively to spousal resentment towards the employee's organization. Additionally, if people resent their spouses' employers, those people (the spouses in this case) are also likely to be less committed to that organization. When people are less committed to their spouses' organization, higher levels of turnover are also evident among the employees.

The mWork story is not all negative though as we considered potential feedback loops as well. mWork can provide a level of automony and control that employees may view as a resource. Additionally, those who are more committed to their organizations may be more likely to engage in mWork with greater frequency.

Simply stated, our study found that mWork's relationship with the family system is harmful and that mWork associates positively with turnover intentions. So, it is in the employer's best interest to remain cognizant of mWork's impact and seek to alleviate strain and pressure if at all possible.

Implications for Real Estate Sales Professionals

What does this mean for real estate professionals? As an agent, your clients are going to have high expectations. While the home-buying process may seem routine to you, the process is daunting for your clients and will no doubt be a significant dinner-time conversation topic.

Conversely, in order to provide quality service, a real estate professional often shares personal contact information with the client. While many clients may refrain from calling their agent outside of business hours, many other clients will simply call, text or email their agents at all hours of the day or night.

Considering that nearly all sales professionals carry some sort of mobile device, the potential for mWork is growing at an alarming rate. Responding to emails and taking phone calls well after working hours is a slippery slope. What was “just one email” or “just one returned call” can quickly become a barrage of work that runs right into the next day. Without adequate rest outside of work, you cannot recharge and refuel for another day of work. You’ll quickly find yourself burned out, unmotivated by the challenges each day brings.

The same must be said for employees you oversee. As a leader, employees will model your behaviors – both good and bad. If you constantly send emails or make phone calls outside of work, your employees will believe you expect similar activity from them as well. As an effective leader, it is essential that you seek to promote good work-life balance for your employees so they can be productive, motivated, and committed to their jobs.

Regardless of whether you have a spouse or significant other, mWork can have a powerful influence on your career and personal life. Our study showed that all three forms of work-family conflict relate to spousal resentment. Because spouses play a significant role in an employee’s job satisfaction, spousal support cannot be underestimated.

So, the question becomes – how does one prevent their mobile device from creeping in and taking over? You may want to start easy by setting a time such as 9 PM after which you don’t respond until the next morning or putting your phone away during dedicated family times such as child events or dinner time. Another option would be to participate in the National Day of Unplugging on the first Friday of March and put away your mobile device for 24 hours. Simple. If you can’t go a whole day (or can’t wait until the next event), try simple steps like putting away your phone during meals – and refuse to touch it again until after the meal concludes. A cell phone sleeping bag (available online) may help keep your device just out of reach.

Needing extra resources? A simple Google search will lead you to *mobile phone detox plans* and countless studies regarding mobile usage. Trouble with self-control? Popular apps, like Moment for iOS, allow you to track your daily phone usage, set usage limits, and send you notifications when you exceed designated limits. Or, download the Friday app and be reminded to unplug each Friday evening.

If putting away your smartphone scares you, a digital detox trip may be necessary. Travelling to off-the-grid locations, participants give up technology for a multi-day period of recharging and reconnecting.

Reducing your dependence on technology may be tough at first, but it's not impossible. Small steps in the right direction can lead to big changes that will impact you and your loved ones.

As real estate professionals, dependence upon technology is not likely to decrease anytime soon. By remaining well aware of the impacts technology can have on both you and your family, negative effects can be minimized and avoided.

Conclusion

Mobile devices are a double-edged sword. While devices have made working away from the office more convenient than ever before, they open up an entirely new set of issues, namely the question of work-life balance and what is to be expected of employees outside of working hours. Research shows that employees who set aside time fully away from work are less likely to experience work-family conflict and be more committed to the organization. Similarly, the negative impacts on family are reduced for those who set aside time away from work. Developing self-control to put away mobile devices is difficult but the payoffs are immeasurable.

Recommended Reading

Ferguson, Merideth, Dawn Carlson, Wendy Boswell, Dwayne Whitten, Marcus M. Butts, and K. Michele Kacmar (2016), "Tethered to Work: A Family Systems Approach Linking Mobile Device Use to Turnover Intentions," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Online First.

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Dr. Merideth Ferguson (PhD – Vanderbilt University) has research interests in two main areas: toxic employee behavior and the work-family interface. She is particularly interested in how abusive supervision and workplace incivility cross over to affect an employee's family experiences. Ferguson's current research also investigates the impact of toxic workplaces on

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Bringing in the Buyers: Leveraging Entrepreneurs' and Executives' Venture Location Decisions

Matthew Wood, PhD, Jeffery McMullen, PhD, and Alexander Kier, PhD

It is well documented that real-estate markets fluctuate over time, but since the financial crisis, real-estate markets have begun to fluctuate across geographic regions as well. One leading contributor to this disparity is public policy that seeks to encourage entrepreneurs and business leaders to locate in a state, or a specific community within a state, over another. Caught up in this contagion, government officials have infectiously engaged in the widespread implementation of incentive structures designed to attract new business to their region, and now find themselves in an incentive war (Forman 1997). A 2015 Council for Community and Economic Research (C2ER) report, for instance, documents that the total number of state-incentive programs targeted at businesses has more than doubled to nearly two thousand in the last 15 years (Gutschow et al. 2015). The vast majority of these programs offer tax credits and exemptions as business incentives.

This article suggests that rapid growth in incentive programs oversimplifies the issue of attracting business to a specific region. First, the socio-political attributes of an area are likely to involve more than corporate and real-estate tax rates, including among other factors: the cost of living, the aesthetics of the community, the amount of regulation, etc. These socio-political attributes provide the choice architecture that business leaders confront in their decision making about where to locate. Must we assume that these attributes resonate with all business leaders in the same way or might there be systematic differences? If such differences exist, then what we know about how executives make decisions regarding business-location decisions may inform the extent to which a community can attract new businesses to the area. This may be especially important to real-estate professionals because the business represents a commercial buyer whose employees become residential market players once the business chooses to locate in a given community.

Attributes of Location Decisions and Executive Characteristics

Our recent study published in *Academy of Management Perspectives* studied location decisions via an experiment with 329 executives indicating preferences about where to locate a new venture (McMullen, Wood, and Kier 2016). Following cognitive science research on belief formation, we proposed that executives use the socio-political attributes of the environment to develop beliefs about circumstances and what actions can profitably be taken in those circumstances. Looking to academic research and anecdotal evidence, they identified five attributes as important to new venture location decisions, including regulation, cost of living, business support services, natural and cultural amenities and whether the executive would be required to relocate with the new venture. Their focus, however, was not on the main effects of these attributes; instead, they examined whether variations in these location attributes affect location decisions differently depending on the individual characteristics such as managerial position (corporate executive or entrepreneur), political party identification (Democrat or Republican) or political values (importance of law and order, free enterprise, etc.). Individual characteristics, we reasoned, influence how location attributes are interpreted.

Key Findings

We discovered that individual difference characteristics such as managerial position, political party identification, and some political values influence interpretations of socio-political attributes of a region. First, our research uncovered that that new venture location decisions are clearly affected differently by managerial position. Increases in support services and natural and cultural amenities make locations more appealing to all, but corporate executives experience these positive effects more strongly than entrepreneurs. Conversely, the need to relocate permanently is unappealing to everyone, but it has an even more dissuasive effect on corporate executives.

Second, our study found that managerial politics shape interpretations of socio-political attributes of a region. Members affiliated with both the Democratic and Republican parties considered regulation to be a disincentive and business support services to be an incentive for locating a venture in a particular region. The disincentive of regulation, however, significantly weakened as managers identified more heavily with the Democratic Party, whereas the incentive of support services weakened for managers who identified more heavily with the Republican Party. We interpreted these findings as evidence that regulation and support services may be politically polarizing location decision attributes. This suggests that individual subscription to the ideals or platform advanced by the Democratic Party may evoke greater tolerance of regulation whereas the Republican platform may encourage skepticism of business support services among members of its ranks.

Finally, our study considered business leaders' political values of free enterprise, civil liberties, law and order, and equality. Free enterprise and civil liberties each affected only a single socio-political attribute – relocation and cost of living – respectively, while law and order affected both regulation and amenities significantly. Equality was the only political value that influenced the multiple attributes of the location. It significantly affected both regulation and regulation's interaction with cost of living while marginally affecting cost of living, amenities, and need to relocate.

Implications for Bringing in Buyers

We believe there are important lessons to be learned by real estate professionals from our 2016 study. Specifically, the fact that two socio-political attributes (support services and natural and cultural amenities) positively charge executives' location decisions indicates that, all else equal, executives prefer locations that have robust support services as well as attractive natural and cultural amenities. For real-estate professionals, this suggests that an effective strategy for attracting buyers would be to emphasize the presence of business support services and the availability of natural or cultural resources within the community. One could, for example, develop marketing materials that promote the opportunities an area offers executives and employees of the firm to enjoy natural amenities such as biking trails or cultural amenities such as strong theatre arts or musical offerings.

Another lesson that comes from the study is that - while this strategy might work well for corporate executives considering relocating existing firms - it may be less effective when targeting entrepreneurs who are considering a start-up in a specific community. In the latter case, agents might wish to develop messaging and advertising tailored to this audience. For instance, if vacant commercial property is more likely to be attractive to a start-up entrepreneur, marketing efforts should focus on the attributes that entrepreneurs highly value, such as business support service. Given that location decisions affect the performance of entrepreneurial ventures (Dahl and Sorenson 2012) and that such ventures are an engine for economic growth (Holcombe 1998), this is especially important to developing a pipeline of new customers for years to come.

A final takeaway from our 2016 study is that real estate professionals may want to examine which political values tend to have consistent effects on location decisions. For example, agents who are seeking to attract executives to an area burdened by a high cost-of-living may want to avoid promotional messages that tap into the more libertarian-inclined value of civil liberties and instead accentuate the social justice sympathies of equality. Equality weakens the negative effect of high cost of living, making it less important in the location decision, whereas civil liberties enhance executives' concerns over high cost of living, making the attribute an even bigger disincentive in the location decision. In contrast, equality appears to encourage location decisions in much the same way that law and order does. For instance, regulation is less of a disincentive for those ascribing to either law and order or equality as a political value. The lesson here is that real estate professionals with a clear understanding of the profile of the decision maker will be better positioned to bring in the buyer.

Conclusion

Concern about entrepreneurs' and corporate executives' venture location decisions has traditionally been considered the domain of public officials. However, our research suggests that there may be clear advantages for real estate professionals who understand more deeply the location decision process. By providing clients with valuable information about the socio-political attributes of the region and coupling them with an understanding of the values and characteristics of the individual decision maker, agents can establish themselves as advisors in the location decision process, thereby increasing the value created for all stakeholders.

Recommended Reading

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Absolute versus Relative Sales Failure

Jeff S. Johnson, PhD, Scott B. Friend, PhD, Brian N. Rutherford, PhD, and G. Alexander Hamwi, PhD

Everyone loves being on the winning side. It makes them feel accomplished, empowered, and confident, almost invincible. In fact, the stories that inspire us the most are focused on someone overcoming adversity or defeat and finding success again. We are attracted to the failure-followed-by-success pattern in life as well as in the professional selling field. Sales professionals may feel great about their jobs and their lives when successful, but completely different when failure enters the picture. Whether failure is experienced for the first time or the thousandth time, a sales professional's view of the job can change quickly. Therefore, sales professionals' views about failures will determine how they view their jobs, their commitment to their companies, and their potential to leave sales altogether.

Failure can have a profound impact on a salesperson's effectiveness. Research has shown that failure affects a company's bottom line through salesperson performance and turnover. Additionally, research has shown sales turnover is almost two times that of other careers. Failure is an inherent part of the sales process. However, the type of failure rather than failure itself may impact a salesperson's performance. In our study, we focused on two types of failure: absolute failure and relative failure. Absolute failure is an individual salesperson's percentage of calls or sales proposals resulting in failure. Relative failure is the amount of failure an individual salesperson experiences in relation to his or her peers. We commonly see absolute versus relative comparisons have differential effects in other walks of life, such as a person's self-esteem after thinking about their wealth in absolute terms (e.g., I made good money this year) versus relative terms (e.g., I made less money than my friend), thus similar effects may happen when we compare absolute and relative failure. In this study, our purpose is to understand the effects of absolute failure and relative failure on job satisfaction, commitment of the sales professional to his/her company, and the potential to leave their organization.

Previous research has defined failure as *a salesperson bidding for a sale s/he did not get*. There is a lot of variability in that interpretation of a sales failure. Due to the nature of some industries, failure is a normal part of the sales experience. A large portion of how a sales professional defines failure is based on the unique lens through which the sales professional views a specific set of circumstances. Therefore, the skill to know what the salesperson can control and cannot control can enhance or minimize the effect of failure in sales. Moreover, difficulty in defining failure may be partly due to the way in which a sales professional's company or organization defines and assesses failure. As companies and supervisors have a large impact on the factors influencing failure (e.g., training, territory, and supervision), perceived organizational support can enhance or minimize the effect of failure. As a result, we propose that the familiarity of knowing what a sales professional can control and the perceived organizational support can minimize the adverse effects of sales failure on job satisfaction, commitment to the salesperson's company and the potential to leave their organization decreases.

Absolute Failure Poses Stronger Impact Than Relative Failure on Turnover

Our findings show that absolute failure experienced by a salesperson has a comparably stronger impact than relative failure on job satisfaction and potential to leave employment. As absolute failure implies lack of control, its effect on sales professionals will push them to consider whether success can ever be achieved in their specific position. However, no clear pattern is shown that absolute or relative failure has a significant impact of salespeople's commitment to their organizations. As job satisfaction and turnover intentions tap into a person's feeling of fulfillment, organizational commitment taps into a salesperson's sense of attachment and belonging. As failure increases, salespeople may feel they are not contributing as much to the organization and thus begin to psychologically distance themselves from the organization. As salespeople distance themselves from their organizations and coworkers, the differences in impact of absolute and relative failure are negated. Therefore, absolute failure has a much stronger impact on turnover than relative failure.

Furthermore, when a sales professional believes s/he is supported by his or her organization, the negative effects of absolute failure are diminished and s/he has the motivation to push past the failure. Additionally, the sales professional's experience reduces the impact of relative failure on commitment to his/her company and potential to leave the organization. As experience grows, a salesperson will begin to see what is under his/her control and what is not. As the knowledge of what is controllable increases, a salesperson will develop the know-how to affect future outcomes, regardless of how often s/he is failing.

Implications for Real Estate Sales Professionals

Failure within sales and the real estate profession is a normal part of the job. Our research was conducted in the context of the general sales profession, which offers many similarities to the real estate professional's job. Knowing how failure can affect real estate professionals on the individual-level can help them push through failure.

1. Reframe the Definition of Failure

The goal of a real estate professional is to complete the sale of a property for a client or to connect a client with the best property that fits the client's needs and constraints. Failing to accomplish that goal can leave a real estate professional feeling disappointed. However, if real estate agents reframe their definition of failure to a relative evaluation of the event (e.g., I fail about the same percentage as my peers) as opposed to an absolute evaluation (e.g., I failed 10 times this month), then this reframe can minimize the adverse effects. Additionally, *learning something new in the selling process*, or reframing goals and opportunities can also lessen the impact of failure. When real estate professionals include learning something new and when they have not closed the sale, they will have met at least one of their goals, eliminating absolute failure. Therefore, real estate professionals should identify new areas for learning – areas which make them better sales professionals. Learning how to explain key home features differently during the walk-through or learning how to better follow-up on leads will pay dividends in the future and helps lessen the impact of failing. Reframing goals can help redefine failure so each encounter can lead to some success, even if completing the sale is not met.

2. Analyze Events Leading up to Failure

The old adage, "It's not how you fail, but what you learn from your failure that matters" is no exception to real estate. When professionals are in the middle of success, they are not forced to stop and ask questions about why they are successful. Failure provides opportunities to stop and ask what led to the failure. These moments can help redefine how real estate professionals approach their jobs.

We suggest three questions to ask after experiencing failure:

1. What did I learn from this situation?
2. How can I grow as a person and real estate professional from this experience?
3. Was there anything I could have done before the failure that could have helped?

These three questions provide a learning framework for real estate professionals after experiencing failure. Answers to these questions may signal the minor adjustments needed in order to succeed again.

3. Interview Veteran Real Estate Professionals about Their Perspectives on Failure

Although it may feel like there is no way around failure, others have succeeded in the face of failure. Therefore, take the opportunity to seek out veteran real estate agents to ask them questions about how they handled failure. Not everyone will have the same failures or respond in the same ways, but taking the opportunity to learn from others how they handled failures can provide invaluable insights. Even Warren Buffet had a mentor, Benjamin Graham, and sought his help in the midst of failure. For those managing real estate agents, facilitating this process may serve as a form of organizational support, which we also show can mitigate the adverse effects of sales failures.

Here are five questions to ask real estate veterans about how they handled failure:

1. What did you learn about failing?
2. What did you change after your failure?
3. How did you define success or failure before failing and did that change?
4. How many times have you experienced failure to get where you are now?
5. What was the most difficult aspect of failure for you?

4. Recognize There will be Seasons of Failure

Real estate falls prey to seasons of great success and seasons of limited success. Spring and summer are traditionally seasons of abundance -- with more sellers and buyers in the market. As a result, spring and summer are seasons where the challenge may well be finding enough time for each client. Recognize that these seasons provide increased opportunity to provide repetitive practice of selling skills. Conversely, winter is traditionally a season with fewer homes and fewer buyers on the market. The slower pace of winter makes this an ideal time to experiment with new strategies and new skills. Take a class on negotiating or learn how to better stage a home. Recognizing that seasons having varying degrees of success and failure will help real estate professionals think through each season strategically and prepare themselves to capitalize best on each season.

Conclusion

Failure can have profound effects on real estate professionals, affecting their job enjoyment, commitment to their companies, and even potentially commitment to their real estate career. Although absolute failure has a larger negative impact on job satisfaction and commitment to real estate, the real estate professional can take control to mitigate the effects of relative failure and put into motion new methods to help mitigate the effects of absolute failure.

About Our Study

In order to study the effects of absolute and relative sales failure, we distributed a survey across multiple organizations (a research firm distributed an undefined number of emails to potential respondents working in sales). After reaching our goal of 750 respondents, the survey was closed. Participants in part-time sales or those with excessive data missing were removed, yielding 626 usable surveys. The average age of salespeople who responded was 46.1 years and the average sales experience was 14.5 years representing both business-to-consumer and business-to-business sectors. A roughly equal representation of both genders was captured (52.5% being female).

Recommended Reading

Johnson, Jeff S., Scott B. Friend, Brian N. Rutherford, & G. Alexander Hamwi (2016), "Absolute versus Relative Sales Failure," *Journal of Business Research*, 69 (2016), 596-603.

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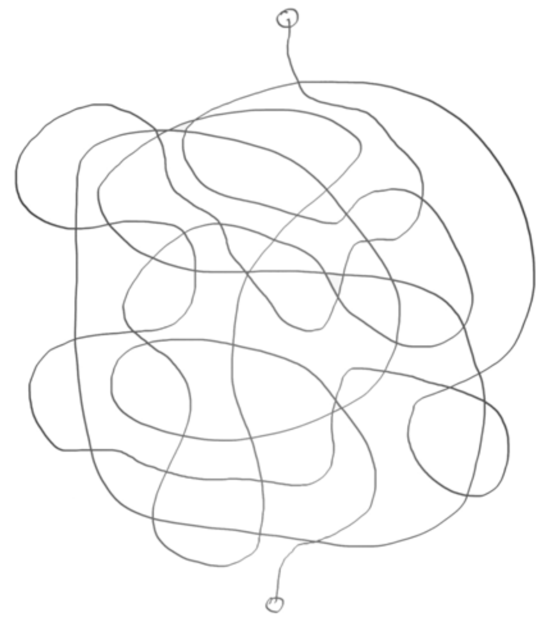
Can You *Beat Around the Bush* and Still Get the Sale?

Barbara Bickart, PhD, Maureen Morrin, PhD, and S. (Ratti) Ratneshwar, PhD

Customers can pose challenging questions, for which salespeople (despite their best intentions) may not know the answer. In these situations, a salesperson has several options. First, the salesperson could admit to not knowing the answer to the question, with the downside of damaging perceptions of expertise. Second, the salesperson could lie with a false answer. In addition to the ethical issues raised with this approach, in the long run lying is likely to harm the salesperson's credibility. Finally, the salesperson could obfuscate or "beat around the bush." We define obfuscation as a providing a response that dodges the actual question and provides a pseudo-answer with irrelevant, tangential or vague information. Obfuscation could buy the salesperson some time, and could potentially limit damage to perceptions of expertise and credibility.



In our research, we survey consumers to determine the extent to which they perceive obfuscation occurs in their interactions with salespeople as well as the situations in which they feel that salespeople are most likely to use this approach. In addition, we conduct experiments to examine if and when obfuscation is most likely to affect a salesperson's persuasiveness. We find that consumers encounter obfuscation in their interactions with salespeople, and that they believe obfuscation is most likely to occur when the salesperson works on commission. Further, in situations where consumers trust the salesperson, obfuscation can be as persuasive as an honest admission of a lack of knowledge.

Marketplace Beliefs about Obfuscation

In a survey of 300 individuals recruited from an online panel, we find that over two-thirds of participants (70%) have had an experience with a salesperson who "beats around the bush" or has been very vague or longwinded in answering a question. Examples of obfuscatory responses provided by participants fell into two general categories. First, participants described situations where the salesperson talked a lot but did not provide an answer to the consumer's question. Second, participants provided examples in which the salesperson was asked a very specific (yes/no) question but did not give a direct answer. Consumers felt that salespeople obfuscated primarily because they were trying to get more money (38%) or were not knowledgeable (28%).

We also asked participants to rate the likelihood that fifteen different types of sales professionals would obfuscate in response to a consumer's question. Perceptions of obfuscation varied significantly across the professions. Consistent with the finding that consumers perceive monetary motives as a key driver of obfuscatory responses, obfuscation was seen as more likely for salespeople who worked on commission. Of the fifteen professionals evaluated, real estate agents were high on the list in terms of likelihood to obfuscate, just after telemarketers and car salespersons. These perceptions are driven by the strong monetary motives associated with real estate sales.

When is Obfuscation Effective?

To follow up the results of the survey, we conducted a series of experiments examining how obfuscation affects a salesperson's persuasiveness. In these studies, participants read a hypothetical conversation between a salesperson and a consumer. The conversation included a question from the consumer for which we varied the salesperson's response. In some conditions, the salesperson admitted to not knowing the answer to the question, while in other conditions the salesperson gave an obfuscatory response. We then asked participants to rate their trust in the salesperson and their likelihood to purchase the product in question. Across several sales contexts (i.e., electronics and insurance sales), we find that prior expectations of a dishonest response affect the impact of an obfuscatory response (relative to an honest "don't know") on both trust in the salesperson and purchase intentions. Specifically, when consumers' expectations of an obfuscatory response are high, either due to the presence of a monetary motive (e.g., commission) or because the participant is more focused on honesty, an obfuscatory response results in lower perceptions of trust and lower purchase intentions than a "don't know" response. In contrast, when expectations of a dishonest response are low, obfuscation does not affect trust in the salesperson or purchase intentions. In other words, when the consumer's radar is down, salespeople can "get away with" an obfuscatory response without damaging perceptions of trust or purchase intentions.

Implications for Real Estate Agents

Our work has several important implications for real estate agents. First, obfuscation can be tempting when a salesperson does not know the answer to a question. It can help the salesperson avoid a loss of credibility associated with admitting a lack of knowledge and also avoids the risk of an outright bluff. Salespeople must understand that when buyers are aware that there is a monetary motive—for example, the salesperson will gain a commission on a sale--consumers are more vigilant and obfuscation is likely to backfire. In those situations, salespeople are much more likely to be successful if they are direct and admit to not knowing the answer to a question than to obfuscate.

Further, because consumers in general expect obfuscatory responses from salespeople who work on commission, real estate agents will need to be particularly careful about the use of obfuscation, as this response strategy is likely to hurt their effectiveness. Although our work does not specifically address the length or nature of the sales relationship, it seems likely that these concerns are greatest at the beginning of the relationship. As the sense of connection between the agent and the consumer increases, consumer awareness of the monetary motive could be diminished and consumers may be less vigilant in their response to obfuscation.

Prior research has shown that extrinsic monetary incentives can undermine prosocial behavior and that commission-based salespersons may be more prone to unethical selling tactics (e.g., Ariely, Bracha, & Meier, 2009; Honeycutt, Glassman, Zugelder & Karande, 2001). Our findings suggest that consumers hold beliefs or have schemas about such types of motivated behavior and adjust their expectations accordingly. Thus, salespeople who work on commission are likely at a disadvantage simply due to the nature of their firm's compensation structure. These salespeople will need to work hard to earn their customers' trust.

More generally, consumer perceptions about obfuscation can feed into the stereotypes that exist about salespeople who work on commission and thus can potentially harm the profession. Our work suggests that consumers believe that salespeople resort to obfuscatory responses to questions when they are motivated to earn money on the sale or lack knowledge on a topic. These beliefs have a negative impact on consumer decision-making. Thus, the profession may want to consider steps to discourage this behavior, including training on effective communication and establishing a code of conduct that delineate examples of unacceptable response strategies.

Conclusion

Consumers believe that salespeople obfuscate or beat around the bush in response to their questions, particularly when the salesperson works on commission. From the salesperson's perspective, obfuscation is most likely to damage perceptions of trust and purchase intentions when a monetary motive is salient. The findings highlight the importance of building strong relationships with clients and establishing training procedures and professional guidelines that discourage the use of obfuscation in response to customers' questions.

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Transformational Relationship Events

Colleen M. Harmeling, PhD, Robert W. Palmatier, PhD, Mark B. Houston, PhD, Mark J. Arnold, PhD, and Stephen A. Samaha, PhD

Every relationship has moments that define the expectations and feelings of the individuals in that relationship. Business relationships are no different. Specific events act as fundamental building blocks of those business relationships and are essential in shaping the relationship development. These events can be positive and bolster the business relationship or they can be negative and hinder development. Yet determining which of these events will pass unnoticed and which will dramatically impact the relationship is challenging.

In our research, we set out to improve the understanding of the role of these dramatic events in relationship development and exchange performance by proposing a theory of transformational relationship events (TREs). A TRE is an encounter between exchange partners that significantly disconfirms relational expectations (positively or negatively) and results in dramatic, discontinuous change to the relationship's trajectory.

TREs: Research and Results

The theory of TREs is based on the following two foundational assumptions: (1) product expectations and relational expectations have different effects on a person's interpretation of exchange events; and (2) relational expectations are dynamic, continuously evolving in ways that alter each person's perceptions of disconfirming events and the subsequent effect on the relationship.

Exchange events, customer interactions with a seller's personnel, products, services, or technology, help form the relationship and each person's expectations for that relationship. We find that people form two distinct types of expectations regarding an encounter, product and relational. Product expectations are what agents typically focus on (e.g., service satisfaction). They are what a customer expects to get from their exchange for what they give (money, time) – the core aspects of the transaction (Fiske and Tetlock 1997). However, people are naturally inclined to form relational expectations in any social encounter (i.e., interaction with an agent). These expectations are less focused on the transaction and are framed more in terms of friendship, trust, interpersonal sharing, and solidarity (Lewicki and Bunker 1996).

While everyone has a zone of indifference or a range of minimum to maximum "acceptable" events around their expectations, falling outside of this zone and breaking a relational expectation triggers intense social emotions (betrayal, gratitude) that cause clients to redefine the entire relationship and change their future course. Compared to feeling disappointment (as when a service is less-than-expected), betrayal sparks a much more visceral reaction (a desire for retaliation, distance, etc.); on the positive side, gratitude is similarly more intense than general satisfaction.

Additionally, client relational expectations evolve as they repeatedly interact with an agent. At the beginning of the relationship, expectations are low and range from very positive to very negative. With each successful encounter, trust grows and expectations become more narrowly defined. Resulting in higher and more firmly defined standards for evaluating future events, this evolution had two relevant repercussions in the relationships we studied. First, customers who are earlier in their relationship were more likely to experience dramatic positive change in response to a generous act compared to customers who received that same generosity in more fully developed relationships. Second, although we observed that strong relationships insulated the firm from negative customer response to product failure, in the face of relational failure, these same strong relationships amplified the effect (highlighting a potential risk to strong relationships).

We find that TREs can dramatically influence the definition of a relationship as well as its financial performance (i.e., percentage change in sales for the year after the TRE). When customers feel that they have been betrayed, they begin to redefine the exchange relationship, and many times will retaliate against that betrayal. The primary way for customers to retaliate is to reduce the amount of purchases they make from that salesperson. For a real estate agent that may mean the client not doing business with the agent in the future, ending the relationship with the agent, or even retaliating against the agent through negative word of mouth. Conversely, if a customer feels a sense of gratitude toward the salesperson, the customer also reassesses the relationship, and the primary means of repayment for that sense of gratitude is through increasing purchases from the salesperson. A positive TRE may result in the client referring others to the real estate agent, or doing additional business with the agent in the future.

Because negative TREs are potentially devastating and, by definition, unexpected, we tested a number of reactive strategies for mitigating their negative effects. We find an apology more than compensation or collaborative repair (working with the customer to come to a solution) can help guide relational sensemaking (thoughts of redefining the relationship) and insulate the salesperson from the detrimental effects of betrayal in negative TREs.

In summary, a noticeable proportion of business relationships do not follow that normal life cycle trajectory, and TREs help us understand why. A single event can disrupt gradual relationship development and serve as a defining moment in a relationship's history, which can cause a dramatic change in the relationship's trajectory due to transformational emotions and cognitions that stem from that event. TREs are distinct from other similar constructs (e.g., service failure, delight) in their underlying nature (relational vs. product) and operations in that they can unleash relationship-altering emotions and cognitions that reshape exchange performance. Therefore, TREs have significant implications for business relationships and firm performance and it is essential for business people to go beyond measuring product or service expectations and be vigilant about recognizing disconfirmations of relational expectations.

Real Estate Perspective

Like every other relationship, the relationships between real estate agents and their clients are marked by events that will cause significant emotional reactions causing clients to reassess their relationship with their agents. These events can be positive, such as getting an offer accepted for when buying one's dream home, or the events can be negative, such as having to tell the buyer that a dream house with the accepted offer is outside of the preferred school district, something the agent overlooked. Understanding the state of the relationship and the client's expectations for the relationship before these TREs can help the real estate agent mitigate the negative reactions or capitalize on the positive results of these TREs.

Real estate agents dedicate time, energy, and resources to forming strong relationships with their clients. This relationship building fuels recurring business and referrals from clients and can insulate the agent from the unavoidable service failures. However, our research suggests these strong relationships can also come with certain risks. Those same strong relationships can also bring about stronger negative reactions by the clients after a relational failure. Key to managers and leaders, our research suggests a new form of customer health checkup that not only assesses service quality, but also provides an assessment of how a client views the relationship. In our study, we offer a metric for capturing relational expectations that can complement current metrics used for service quality checkups. The key to these metrics is to ensure alignment between the way *the agent* views the relationship with a client and the way *the client* views the relationship with the agent; misalignments can be the root of negative TREs.

Our research also offers insight on delivering positive events. While it is customary to reward the most “loyal” clients, our research finds this might not be the best investment. Instead, our research suggests that generous acts are significantly more impactful early in the customer relationship when expectations are still pliable. This window of opportunity suggests an onboarding stage where interactions with new clients can evoke more gratitude and more thoughts about their role in the relationship (relational sensemaking), dramatically impacting the future trajectory the relationship. However, our research also found that events that were considered “too good to be true” prompted suspicion. Thus, it is key to calibrate relationship-building initiatives to identify the ideal window in which they exceed the customer’s expectations, but do not go so far as to trigger undesired responses.

Our research provides insights into managing TREs as well. We found that communication, or timely sharing of meaningful information, can help leverage the effects of a positive TRE. Communication facilitates the customer’s discovery of potential opportunities for reciprocation and other actions to reinforce the relationship. Unfortunately, not all of the events in the client/agent relationship are positive. Negative TREs can cause clients to drastically redefine their perceptions of the client/agent relationship, and thereby threaten the long-term viability of a relationship. Communication can also help insulate the agent from negative TREs. In addition, our research showed that a seller apology suppresses the negative effects that redefining a relationship has on sales performance and partner identification. Therefore, it can be effective for a salesperson to quickly respond to betrayals and other relational violations by managing the client’s initial response to a negative TRE. Real estate agents should not cower from sharing bad news with their clients, even if that bad news was caused by the agent. Get in front of the message, be direct, and apologize to the client for any mistake or error that led to the negative result. However, in order to actually mitigate the negative impact, the apology must include remorse, taking responsibility without qualifying or justifying that responsibility, a willingness to make the matter right, and a promise to change in the future. If a real estate agent overlooked a fact, or even misstated a fact (e.g., client’s dream home with an accepted offer isn’t actually in the school district that the buyer preferred), the agent can mitigate the negative impacts of this TRE if she or he comes forward with a sincere apology and a willingness or a plan to make the issue right.

The relationship between real estate agents and their clients lasts over a length of time during the sale or purchase process. Throughout that process, real estate agents develop and strengthen their relationships with their clients. Further, while research identifies “pleasant surprise” as a desirable outcome of relationship-building efforts, our research suggests that the type of surprise (e.g., product versus relational) is critical to the longevity of its effects. Thus, investing in experiential (e.g., dinners, trips) rather than monetary (e.g., discounts, cash) rewards for clients, can have greater impact on the relationship, thus, warranting the investment. Strong relationships are important to build, but a real estate agent must also realize that with the strong relationship comes the higher relational expectations the client has for the agent and the greater fall if the agent does not meet the client's relational expectations.

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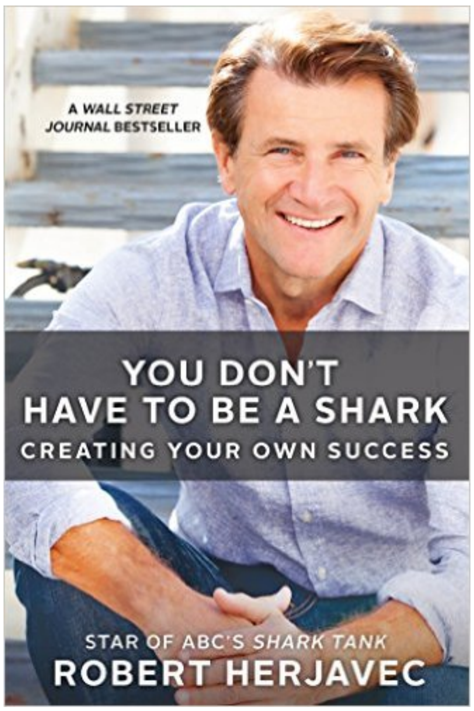
INSIDER: You Don't Have to be a Shark

Luke Smith, MBA Candidate

Salesperson. To some, the word invokes thoughts of horror – high-pressure trickery, long-winded conversations, and flashy showrooms. For others, the thought of a salesperson is desirable – a welcome friend while making a difficult decision encompassing many variables. Yet one fact rings true, no matter the perception – sales is as much about the experience as it is about the price and performance of the product being sold.



Noted *Idea Man* Bob Hooey said it well: "If you are not taking care of your customer, your competitor will." Sales isn't a one-and-done profession. It's a continual building of relationships with customers, a constant gleaning of knowledge, and a concerted effort each day in order to be successful. But, despite popular opinion, sales doesn't require a unique personality or an aggressive attitude.

In his book *You Don't Have to Be a Shark, Shark Tank*'s "nice shark" Robert Herjavec seeks to provide techniques for salespeople to sell themselves effectively, leveraging their greatest asset (themselves) in their daily life. For Robert, his self-described challenging past confirmed that "great salespeople are made, not born, and no one achieve success in life without knowing how to sell."

THINK POINT #1: Everybody is Selling Something

If you stop and think about it, sales involves two key actions – understanding the customer's need and ensuring that the customer considers your side of things before taking appropriate action. Every day, salespeople twist this concept, relying upon coercion and manipulation to make sales. This not only perpetuates the bad "salespeople" stereotype but is also much less effective.

In 1936, Dale Carnegie published a book entitled *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Even today, the book remains in print and has sold more than 20 million copies. The book – containing chapters such as "Fundamental Techniques for Handling People" among other people-focused titles – explored an interesting idea. According to Carnegie, it's possible to "change other people's behavior by changing one's behavior toward them."

When meeting a client for the first time, a real estate professional must take the time to explore the client's needs and desires. Asking clear, thoughtful questions can make a big difference in forming the relationship. The questions, however, must revolve around the buyer, not the seller. Consider the following questions:

> *How do you plan to use your new house?*
> *How many bedrooms would you like the house to include? Bathrooms?*
> *Do you prefer to live in the city or in a suburb?*

While simple, these questions will trigger new questions and eventually allow the seller to locate a home that meets the needs of the client, along with some extra features that may prove to be the "selling point" of the home.

Ultimately, by taking advantage of a qualifying session, real estate professionals can create exceptional buyer-seller experiences and ultimately prove more successful in their sales pursuits.

THINK POINT #2: Be Honest. Your Clients Will Thank You

For Robert Herjavec, finding a career was a struggle. After studying accounting in high school, Robert dropped his accounting major after only one semester. Instead, he studied English literature with a minor in political science – a far cry from the business major where he began.

Following college, Robert's first job was with a collection agency. Seeing his colleagues struggle with collecting bad debts through pressure techniques, Robert experimented with his sales knowledge to great success. Robert sold his "clients" on the idea of paying even a portion of their debt. After all, 20 percent collected was better than nothing. Building relationships in the process, Robert eventually became one of the most successful collectors in the company's history.

Of course, as a real estate professional, you won't be calling clients to collect bad debts. However, you will be spending countless hours preparing for meetings with your clients and showing them homes. Telling the truth at all times is essential. You may be tempted to *let your clients down easy* (when their dream house deal falls through) or to show them an expensive home (that's outside their price range in pursuit of higher commissions). However, in the process, you rob your clients of their time and tarnish your reputation.

As Robert describes, agents must avoid "happy ears" – hearing what you want your client to say when they mean the opposite. Clear, honest communication is key to successful relationships.

THINK POINT #3: Continually Work to Develop Your Best Traits

Some may argue that successful salespeople are born, that it's in their DNA. For Robert, this idea is flawed for many reasons. Instead, training and enthusiasm play a major role in the accomplishments one may reach.

Far from being a dancer, Robert chose to join *Dancing with the Stars* and promised himself he would work hard, learn something new, and enjoy himself. Ultimately, he learned basic steps that eventually led to much larger, more advanced steps.

Whether you're hiring a new agent for your office or reflecting upon your experiences, Robert identifies four important traits found in good salespeople:

1. *They believe in what they do.* No matter the organization, top salespeople are valuable. Without them, the organization loses its ability to reach customers. Real estate professionals play an invaluable role in helping clients find homes and turn a very complicated process into a much more bearable experience.

2. *They enjoy the company of people*. Sales is not an individual sport. More often than not, salespeople find themselves relying upon others for knowledge and connections. Similarly, real estate professionals spend an exorbitant amount of time with people and build close relationships throughout the process. Without a love for the company of others, agents will likely fall short.

3. *They spend more time listening than talking*. The cliché is true: we are born with two ears and one mouth for a reason. For agents, listening is essential. However, agents must be careful to listen to *how* things are said and what is *not* being said. In some cases, these intricacies can say more than what the words alone demonstrate.

4. *They make the connection between selling skills and life*. Robert reminds readers that *the most important thing you will ever sell is yourself*. Fitting for real estate professionals, this advice should remind agents of a key idea. No matter how much detail clients try to absorb before making a buying decision, their ultimate choice will be made based upon a combination of their heart and mind. Emotion will always tip the scales.

No matter the challenge, successful salespeople put their best feet forward and seek to hone their skills constantly.

THINK POINT #4: Employ the 80/20 Rule

You may have heard of the Pareto Principle named appropriately after Vilfredo Pareto. While researching property ownership in Italy, Pareto discovered than 20 percent of the population owned 80 percent of the country's land. Just a few days later, Pareto noticed that 20 percent of the pea pods in his garden produced 80 percent of the peas. Digging further, Pareto found that the 80/20 ratio appeared in economics, biology, politics, and other unexpected locations. Ultimately, he calculated a formula stating the following:

> *"Eighty percent of the effects of any activity comes from 20 percent of the cause"*

In other words, eighty percent of a company's business is made from 20 percent of its customers.

Armed with this tool, real estate professionals can determine how best to maximize their productivity – and their profits. For example, instead of spreading yourself so thin that you are unable to provide personalized attention to all of your clients, consider seeking out the 20% who are most likely to purchase a home. Spend 80% of your time on those clients and the payoffs will likely be great.

THINK POINT #5: Close the Sale... Carefully

For most people, purchasing a home is the single largest purchase they will make in a lifetime. Rightly so, it isn't uncommon to experience anxiety, ask many questions, and get cold feet, possibly. Closing a sale properly becomes essential to calming those concerns as an agent – and can lead to future business and referrals.

As Robert notes, "people want to buy; they don't want to be sold." While salespeople and customers know their roles, there's no doubt that customers prefer to buy from people they can relate to and trust. Thus, when closing the sale, it becomes essential that agents tread carefully and avoid pushing too hard. Injecting a closing line into the conversation too early can lead to an abrupt halt to the process. Too late and you may lose the sale completely.

The experience of a skilled salesperson is much like that of a parent. No matter how many parenting books you read or child psychologists you encounter, in the end being a good parent comes down to knowing your child and using your instincts to reach your goals.

For first- or second-time homebuyers, the idea of picking a house can be daunting. As an agent, suggesting "What happens next?" may be the simplest way to encourage movement in the direction of signing a contract. This technique turns the closing situation back to the buyer.

Subsequent follow-up questions can organically flow from that starting question – "When would that decision be made?"

Successful closing is a skill and it comes with practice. However, the most successful closers are those who control the direction of the process while allowing buyers to think they came up with the idea all along.

Conclusion

From humble beginnings, Robert Herjavec became an extremely successful businessman. His success, however, was not because of an innate sales genius but instead grew out of a willingness to try new things and never give up. For real estate professionals, daily challenges can be met with confidence knowing their work is beneficial to their clients. By remembering they are their greatest asset, a real estate professional can propel his or herself to new heights and open up new opportunities.

Recommended Reading

Herjavec, Robert (2016), *You Don't Have to be a Shark: Creating Your Own Success,* New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.

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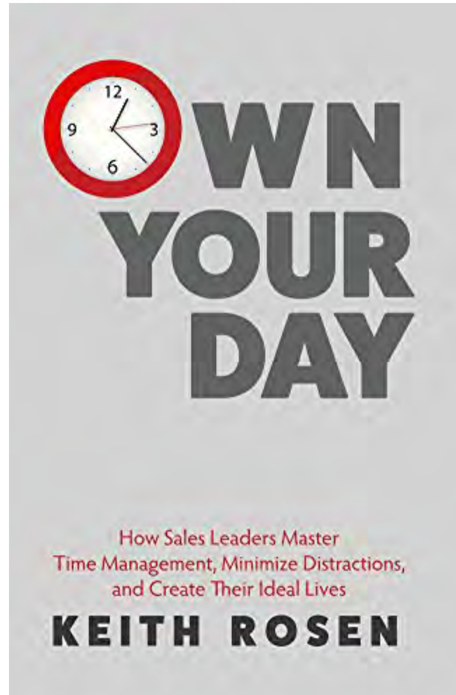
Luke is a graduate student from St. Louis, Missouri. He earned a Bachelor of Business Administration degree in Economics from Baylor University in 2014. Before beginning graduate school, Luke served as Special Assistant to the President at Baylor University. Luke is seeking an MBA degree with a concentration in healthcare administration and currently works as an Administrative Resident for Kaiser Permanente Health System in San Francisco, California.

INSIDER: Own Your Day

Amanda Rodriguez, MBA



Imagine for a moment, you are finishing up a contract that was due 10 minutes ago. Your to-do list is out of control, and your email, well, that's another story altogether. A new agent knocks on your door requesting input on a home he's listing, and the phone rings while a text comes through from a client asking if you can push this evening's showing up an hour. How do you respond?

In today's adrenaline-driven, overcommitted society, many real-estate professionals may respond with "yes." "Yes, I can crank out that contract in 10, maybe 15 minutes. Yes, I'll stay a little late to get through the email. Yes, I can give you feedback on your listing as soon as I send the contract, and, while we're at it, sure, let me see about moving up that showing. I can always just come back to the office tonight, or finish up the to-do list when my kids go to bed."

As you can imagine, the scenario above paints a picture of someone who is stressed, exhausted and whose work product and personal life may soon deteriorate and spiral out of control.

In *Own Your Day*, author and sales coach Keith Rosen examines how sales leaders can put a dent in the stress and exhaustion. Rosen outlines strategies on how to refocus, minimize distractions, properly manage the precious little time we all have and create an ideal life.

THINK POINT #1: Create Your Personal Navigation System

Driving cross country without a map or any GPS system isn't a good idea. You'll get *somewhere*, but you won't arrive at the specific location you set out for in the first place. For this trip, a navigation system is an excellent tool to get to your preferred destination. Your real-estate career, and your life for that matter, can be summed up in the same manner. In order to refocus, you must first consider that specific location or end-result every single day of your journey. Where are you going, i.e., what is your professional and personal vision?

Rather than "I want to make more money," or "I want less stress," a vision statement must be specific and measurable. How much more money must you save for retirement, and by when must you reach that goal? Rosen encourages readers to dream big. Envisioning your ideal life will help as you schedule your priorities and day-to-day tasks with the ultimate end-result of living your vision.

Step two in creating your personal navigation system is to identify your core values and priorities. This isn't *what* you do, but rather, *who* you are and what is important to you as you make this journey. Each day revolves around personal values, which determine priorities. For example, if you value connections, your day-to-day priorities are most likely family and close friends. As you refocus, carefully consider what values you're unwilling to sacrifice.

Step three to creating your personal navigation system is to set specific and measurable goals with a deadline. Rosen recommends setting 12-month goals and staying away from goals you define as *shoulds*. If you set a goal because you *should* do it, it's an old goal or possibly stems from someone else's agenda. *Should* goals do not support your priorities.

Once goals are clearly defined, you must create a strategy of how you'll meet each goal. A further subset of your strategies are action plans, or the steps you'll take to accomplish each strategy. For example, if you are in the field selling homes on a daily basis, your personal goal, strategy and action steps may look like the following:

1. **Goal**
   a. Sell 30 homes during the 3rd quarter
2. **Strategy:**
   a. Increase marketing in surrounding locations to reach potential buyers
   b. Obtain referrals from current and former clients
   c. Increase social media presence for additional reach to potential buyers
   d. Create specific checklist for sellers to complete to ensure all homes are market-ready prior to listing
   e. Network with other agents in community
3. **Action Plan** (for strategy item a – increase advertising in surrounding locations):
   a. Set budget for increased marketing
   b. Complete analysis of type of marketing best suited for area (billboards, local advertisements, flyers, mailers, etc.)
   c. Obtain quotes for preferred marketing method
   d. If sending mailers, flyers, etc., select distribution list
   e. Select and purchase preferred marketing materials
   f. If mailing, send materials to distribution list

Action plans must be created for each strategy item, and it is imperative to then block time to complete action items on your calendar. As your calendar fills, you may need to reconsider and rank goals in order of importance.

As you begin to block time for your action items, you are building your routine. While the term *routine* often garners an image of a rigid, non-changing environment, think of your routine as adaptable and organic. In real-estate sales, as in most professions, externalities, or the unexpected, are constantly in play and are a predicable source of unpredictable interruptions. Multiple clients call, a new listing becomes available in a client's desired and hard-to-find neighborhood, etc. By scheduling your day with specific, measurable activities and allowing time blocks for externalities, your routine becomes flexible *and* realistic.

If you have agents working for you, you have a unique opportunity to set your own priorities, goals and action plans for your work while also coaching agents in your office to identify and set their own priorities. When these steps are followed throughout the organization, your firm's associates may experience better work-life balance, team cohesion and a positive shift in organization culture.

THINK POINT #2: Take Charge of Your Day

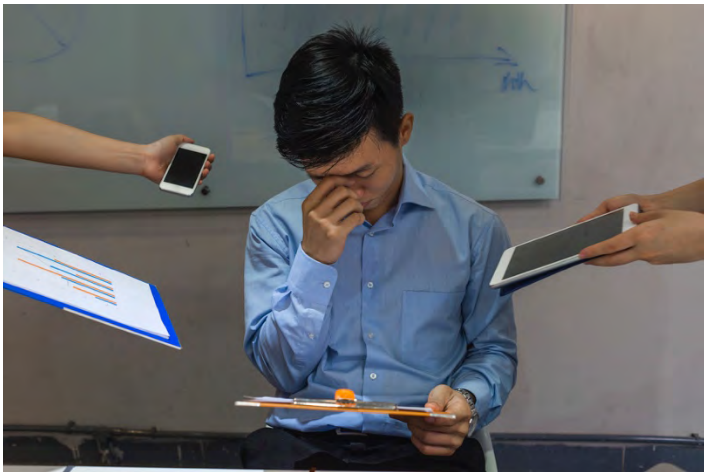
As you block time for your action items, you may begin to see that you're essentially doing it all when you should be delegating. Assign a dollar value to your time and determine which activities are most valuable to your schedule and increase your effectiveness in the long run.

Once you've determined your worth – do what you're good at by developing your strengths and delegating your weaknesses. It can be difficult to delegate a (i.e., let go of control), but for those of you who are managing a team of agents, if you hire the right team and *trust* your team, you can empower these individuals with the right tools and knowledge to properly complete the tasks at hand. While delegating helps leverage your time, it also builds accountability, trust and confidence within your firm. For those working in the field, rather than spending hours driving from listing to listing, snapping photos that don't accurately highlight your listings, hire a real-estate photographer who can properly light and edit and produce professional photos to make your listings stand out from the rest. You save time that can be focused on your strengths, and you may, for example, reach new potential buyers with better listing photos.

In order to take charge of your day, you must also make a list of your *non-negotiables*, or, the activities that you simply cannot remove from your routine, such as commute time and client showings. Self-care, such as exercise, time for self-reflection, *me* time or even *do nothing* time is a critical non-negotiable. If you aren't taking proper care of yourself to unwind and process the day, you can't effectively take care of your family, clients and team in the long run. From your self-care to weekly standing meetings to your *have-to* items that you may not particularly like to do (but that cannot be delegated), all non-negotiables must be scheduled.

Any *diversionary tactics* that appear in your routine should also be carefully evaluated. Diversionary tasks are comfortable to-do items, but just not priorities. Cleaning your office, checking emails, getting your presentation materials *just* right are a few examples of this busy work that takes valuable time away from completing action items that could propel your success.

As you continue to build your routine, treat every action like an appointment. Getting ready in the morning is an appointment. Reviewing the daily updates on the MLS is an appointment. Self-care activities are appointments, and so on. If your calendar runs out of time for your action items, you are overcommitted and need to carefully consider that you are a) not being realistic about the length of time certain tasks or projects may take; 2) not planning for externalities, or the unplanned; or 3) not being realistic with what is already on your schedule, like your morning routine, commute to work, etc.



The key to your day is to schedule everything, while still being realistic. Your calendar is a puzzle and must have the fluidity to move tasks around, planning the worst-case scenario. If you are meeting a client for a showing 15 miles away and know you can make the drive in 20 minutes, don't simply block 20 minutes for travel time! What happens when you hit traffic or receive an urgent phone call that requires you to pull your car over for five minutes? You must be honest with your colleagues, your clients, and *yourself* about what you can and simply cannot accomplish in a day. While it can be uncomfortable at first, it's better to under-promise so that you can set realistic expectations on your schedule rather than overcommit and under-deliver.

While organizing your appointments, schedule priority tasks at your peak performance times. During your peak performance time, resist the urge to open your phone when you are alerted to a new tweet or open your email with each incoming message. Rosen suggests scheduling phone calls and processing email every four hours. Email or phone interruptions can disrupt focus and work flow and cause wasted seconds and minutes, which compound over time to equal hours and even days of missed opportunities.

Finally, while scheduling your day, know your *stop time* each day. By scheduling specific and measurable action steps, you allow yourself to embrace the principle of *enoughness* in your workday. Each activity has a designated time on your schedule, and you are then able to fully focus on your personal goals and action plans outside of work when you leave the office.

THINK POINT #3: LIVE, and Live Each Day Responsibly

As previously mentioned, you must be honest with yourself about expectations. The more overcommitted your schedule is, the more tempted you may be to multitask. While you may consider multitasking a great opportunity to quickly complete multiple tasks, consider how much attention each tasks receives. More often than not, you're not fully engaged or fully present for either. In order to build trust with every person with whom you work, schedule tasks independent of each other.

If an externality or interruption occurs, for example, if a new agent stops in your office and requests input on a new listing (and you oblige), put down your cell phone, turn away from the computer, and give him your full attention. You may have to rearrange your schedule to allow for your 100% attention to the conversation at hand, but you are building trust and confidence. If you simply must complete the task at hand, ask the agent if you can schedule a time with him to discuss his listing. Your routine is ultimately your decision, and you must honor your own boundaries.

Managing your daily routine is much different than crossing items off your to-do list. Cut the cord with any lists which do not produce the focus, structure, accountability or deadlines that your scheduled routine provides. In most cases, daily to-do lists turn into lists of what didn't get done.

In order to live fully, you must also get off of the *adrenaline train*. Adrenaline is good in small doses, but when every day and every task becomes an adrenaline rush (often because you're on a tight deadline or unprepared), you may feel overwhelmed, develop anxiety, lose your peace-of-mind or experience dips in performance. Rather than thriving on adrenaline, build your momentum, which produces consistency and long-lasting results.

Finally, learn to say no. The *yes-aholic* is often stressed, overcommitted and struggles to keep promises, in turn, letting others down. To be true to yourself and those around you, it is critical to step back and carefully consider any requests before saying yes to a request. Acknowledge the importance of these requests, but set an appointment to evaluate the request before making the commitment.

Conclusion

As you press forward and create successes, stop focusing solely on results. Celebrate the journey and the small everyday accomplishments along the way. The result is a by-product of your efforts and how strategies have been executed. Be mindful of the future while being engaged in the moment, and model this process for all around you at the office *and* at home.

Your routine will evolve as long as you are flexible and open to change. Honoring this routine is an empowering activity you can do each day to maximize your success, helping you reach your greatest potential and ultimately lead the lifestyle you desire.

Recommended Reading

Rosen, Keith (2016), *Own Your Day: How Sales Leaders Master Time Management, Minimize Distractions and Create Their Ideal Lives,* Lexington, KY: Ember Publishing.

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