

Turn “Losers” into Winners

For successful salespeople, there’s no passing the buck.

One of my heroes is the great Lou Holtz. After a distinguished coaching career—perhaps most notably at Minnesota and Notre Dame—Holtz put another feather in his cap when he turned around the South Carolina Gamecocks, a team that won only one game in 1998 and no games in 1999.

In 2000, however, Holtz led the Gamecocks to an 8-4 record, earning the team a trip to the Outback Bowl, where they whipped Ohio State 24-7.

At several colleges where Holtz has coached, he has turned a losing team into a winning team. All of the really great coaches seem to have the special talent to motivate ordinary people to produce extraordinary results.

In the selling profession, salespeople often tell me that they feel pretty much on their own. They frequently complain that they don’t have the benefit of a dedicated coach. They feel as if they’ve been “thrown to the wolves.”

However, salespeople who are doing well, who are exceeding even the loftiest of their goals, almost never complain.

One such sales person came up to me following a sales seminar and said, “I couldn’t help but feel sorry for some of those people in the seminar today. They seem to have a lot more problems than I do. My biggest problem is managing my time more effectively. Of course, I also know that I need to become more comfortable dealing with pricing objections, and that’s my big project for this year.”

In my experience, salespeople who struggle, and those who never seem to be able to break out of the pack, always seem to blame external forces beyond their control. They say things like:

- My prices never seem to be competitive.
- My No. 1 prospect is still mad at our company for something that happened before I even came to work here.
- The contractors in this area are so resistant to change that they won’t even consider switching suppliers.

I believe the key to successful sales is finding a way to turn those excuses around and in accepting personal accountability: You want your salespeople to say things like:

- I *must* learn how to sell the value that my company represents.
- I *must* figure out how to get the prospect to put the “past sins” my company committed years ago behind him and think about what we’re like today.
- As a salesperson, it’s *my* job to convince, persuade—sell—my prospects so that they give my company a shot at their business.

Life hasn’t always been all roses for Lou Holtz either, but he only blames himself; he doesn’t point fingers.

His tenure as head coach for the New York Jets only lasted for 13 games in 1976. He didn’t do well. “No problem with the Jets, no problem with professional football,” Holtz has said. “The problem was with me!

“I had the wrong attitude.

“I wasn’t committed.

“There’s a lesson for salespeople in that story,” Holtz says, “I was doing everything that I tell salespeople not to do. I gave my word—and didn’t keep it. I backed out of a commitment to [Jets owner] Leon Hess. I walked into something I hadn’t thought through. I went somewhere [New York] I shouldn’t have gone. So I brought a bad attitude with me.”

Whether we are managers or salespeople, success begins when we realize that getting results is not just our responsibility; it’s our job! ■



BILL LEE has nearly 40 years of experience in the construction supply industry. A consultant and seminar leader, he is the author of two books: *Gross Margin* and *30 Ways Managers Shoot Themselves in the Foot*. www.BillLeeOnLine.com, 800.277.7888.