

15 Minutes That Will Change Your Life

by Todd Duncan

I had just returned from a trip to Australia and upon arriving at the airport in San Diego, I was greeted by Sheryl, my wife, and Jonathan, my 10-week-old son. I had not planned on seeing them as I had taken an earlier flight from Los Angeles. I was going to catch a cab and surprise them at home. Well, I guess living with a guy that teaches sales and influence skills to others has rubbed off on Sheryl. She called the airlines and "influenced" them into releasing confidential information as to my whereabouts. When she found out that I was on the earlier flight, and arriving in San Diego within the hour, she got Jonathan ready, and the two of them rushed to the airport.

Well, you can just picture my surprise when, upon exiting the plane, I approached the terminal and saw Sheryl with the stroller that Jonathan was occupying. After having been gone for two weeks, and seeing my family, especially my new son, I was frozen for a moment as I stared at his complete form and beauty. I spent the next 15 minutes looking at him, talking with him, staring at him and being completely overwhelmed by this gift of life that has been entrusted to my care for years to come. As we got in the car, I sat in the back seat with him as Sheryl took us home. I will never forget for as long as I live, those precious moments, moments I chose to experience, and will not soon forget. Moments that make a difference, forever.

As I got settled in over the next several days, I started on a few of the projects I had left behind before my trip. One of those tasks was installing a bank of electric timer switches to control our outdoor lighting. As I entered the local hardware store to purchase the equipment necessary, I heard my name called from the entrance. I turned around and one of my customers, Chuck Helsel, was standing in the aisle. He and I stood there for about five minutes, talking about the business, and his recent experience at our Sales Mastery Event in Palm Springs. He shared with me how he and his team were meeting once a week to assimilate the information they had learned into a concrete plan of action. He commented that the difficulty was finding the time to do the things he should do and avoiding the traps of the things he should not do — sound familiar?

Chuck's story reminds me of the one challenge, beyond any other, that most salespeople have — implementation. Implementation of the most important things, that if carried out, will have the greatest impact, long-term, is the missing link in most sales professionals' game plan. On that trip to Australia, I'd spoken to over 300 mortgage originators and 800 Real Estate agents and half way through my seminar, asked this question, "For how many of you, is what you just heard, new information?" Not a hand went up! Then I asked, "OK, for how many of you, could you do what you just heard, better?" Everyone's hand went up! I asked, "Why aren't you?" And I heard the one thing that I continue to hear in almost every seminar or speech I give — I don't have time!

In a telling survey of salespeople, it was found that 73% of them spend less than 31% of their time in active selling and marketing. The rest of the time, they are involved in process management — not business development but rather, business fulfillment.

Why is it that so many salespeople recognize the challenge with personal and professional productivity and yet so few have ever figured out how to deal with it once and for all? In my mind the answer is quite simple — lack of focus. Too few salespeople have the systems in place that allow them to have absolute focus on what they must and should do. Rather, the majority assume that what's urgent is also important. WRONG!

It is time for you, if you are serious about your business, to get serious about your productivity.

If you are serious about your life, get serious about your choices. It is time for you to take ownership of this issue and make some decisions as you read this article about what you will and will not accept anymore as standards for how you will run your business and your life.

It is time for you to decide if you are in sales to be profitable or to be busy!

As a speaker, it is always refreshing to see the impact your words have on people. It is not taken lightly by me as I have a responsibility to speak the truth about the issues that are crucial to professional and personal success. That is why I always try to compare what I teach to what I live — I know that if, as a business owner, I struggle with these issues there is a likelihood that you might too. Recently, I was reminded of this as I watched a large group of people, without my coaching, write down these words after I had spoken them:

"Focus Precedes Success"

It's Time To Focus

One phrase that I reflect on regularly is authored by Henry David Thoreau. He says:

"If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with success unexpected in common hours. He will pass an invisible boundary; new universal and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; and he will live with the licenses of a higher order of beings."

There is significant power in these words as they form the very platform necessary to focus. As I write this article, we are a few weeks away from the end of the year. Each year I endeavor to spend time reviewing my accomplishments in all of the areas of my life and I begin to set my sight on those things that I desire to accomplish or do better in the coming year. One key to this process is found by understanding the implication of Thoreau's words on your life and your business with regard to what you implement. Let's explore...

To "...advance confidently" in your life and your business means that you have combined faith and commitment. Thoreau says to advance confidently, "...in the direction of your dreams." The dreams he references are in the future, not present. They are things hoped for and not yet experienced — which is faith. He continues by saying, "...and endeavors to live the life." To endeavor has at its core, commitment. You cannot endeavor one day and stop the next. To endeavor is to be committed each day to doing the things that will have the greatest impact on your outcomes, personally and professionally. You must then be committed to the life you have "...imagined", or visualized having. This presupposes that you have spent time understanding what that looks like. It doesn't mean that you must once and for all arrive at a point where you have life 100% designed — that simply is impractical. It does mean that one should determine, in accordance with the laws and truth that he lives by, what he feels are the directions in which he should be going? And, as you begin to understand these directions, your focus on them becomes the vehicle that allows you to pass an, "...invisible boundary", where "universal and more liberal laws" begin to affect your accomplishments, giving you power and confidence that breed into actions that allow you to "...live with the licenses of a higher order of being." I interpret this last group of words to mean that you then arrive into the small percentage of human beings that achieve greatness by accomplishing remarkable things.

People like Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Edison, Florence Nightingale, Mary Louise Alcot, Henry Ford, and Jonas Salk used the essence of Thoreau's plan to achieve greatness.

They all...

- had a vision
- gained knowledge
- created a plan
- repeated the right steps until the goal was accomplished
- made "in-flight" corrections where necessary to stay on purpose, evaluating often
- stayed committed to their plan and their purpose, focused

COPY IT!!!!!!!!!

As you consider this new year, I would recommend that you follow this outline for getting more out of your life and your business. It is tested and it works — it will allow you to have more focus than you can ever imagine and it is the base from which all of your personal motivation will be derived.

Develop A Vision

Before you say, "Been there, done that," really take a hard look at this principle — the need for vision never ceases! One December 23rd, I was on the beach in La Jolla in my jeans and sweater, with a thermos of hot coffee, my Franklin planner, and a pen. In my planner is a tab labeled, "Life Purpose". Behind that tab are the commitments, or visions I had for the significant areas of my life this year along with the activities I had determined necessary to achieve the visions. I began my day with some personal time reflecting, as I did throughout the year, how I did in these areas. I then asked myself, "Where do I want to go?" in these areas of my life. By the end of the day, I had created a new master plan for the next year that will serve as the "tracks" for me to run on.

Vision is critical! Your vision is at the heart of everything you will ever accomplish. It is the seed that once planted, needs to be nurtured and watered and fertilized on a regular basis, in order to become a reality. Most people lack vision — not the capacity to vision — but the answer to "where am I going?" This is the first point in which focus becomes the driving force behind what you accomplish. Mostly all great accomplishment occurs AFTER you decide what you want. I have never seen a successful person who did not start the journey towards greater success without a vision. And by the way, I never saw a successful person succeed without ACTING on the vision.

For me, the areas that I develop vision for are:

- Spiritual
- Family
- Physical
- Professional
- Financial

So on that December 23rd, I spent 15 minutes in each of the 5 areas, reviewing how I did. Like the 15 minutes I spent with Jonathan upon my return from Australia, these minutes are truly focused minutes in which I am 100% honest and authentic with these situations that can have a great impact on my life. My goal is to arrive at new visions in each of these areas. In some cases, I stay with some of the visions that I have not yet accomplished but are still part of the master plan. Then I will determine where I need more knowledge, what my plan is to accumulate that knowledge, the steps necessary for the plan to be attained, and what the evaluation and focus process will be.

Gain Knowledge

Knowledge helps facilitate the speed and efficiency with which you accomplish the visions you set forth. Knowledge is power! Knowledge in sales is what separates the prosperous from the poor! Knowledge is what gives you the confidence to act! Knowledge is what increases the demand for your services! Knowledge is what allows you to remain a mentor! You must be in the business of accumulating knowledge.

This is the crucial second step to the Life Planning Process — for if you know where you want to be, but lack the knowledge, there is a good chance that when the first challenges arise, you will abandon the vision for the comfort of complacency because you don't know what to do!

Knowledge should be obtained before any major action is taken! Action without knowledge is dangerous!

Too many people take action without the knowledge necessary to insure that the outcome has the highest degree of probability of being attained.

For example,

- Pilots gain knowledge in simulators,
- Doctors gain knowledge on dead people,
- Gymnasts gain knowledge with waist harnesses and 10-inch mats,
- Aerobatic skiers gain knowledge over water rather than snow,
- Architects gain knowledge with a blueprint.

Review any of the above and ask yourself, is there a higher probability that their outcome will be more successful than if they had not engaged in the "knowledge accumulation" process. Every area of your life's visions requires you to have the knowledge or have a trusted relationship with someone who does so that your outcomes are successful. There is no exception to this rule. As you plan your upcoming year, ask yourself the question, where would additional knowledge aid me in the attainment of my visions.

Create a Plan!

One phrase that is so critically important to overall success is so old that we may have forgotten it even exists. However, its truth is more relevant today than ever. You ready?

Nice to be reminded of such simple words, isn't it? But, there really is a two-stage problem here. The first is the obvious: it's very hard to succeed, intentionally, without a plan. But second, and equally important is...A plan doesn't count unless it is followed and corrections are made where necessary! This is the heart of achievement! A simple two-stage process:

1. Decide on the plan to accomplish the vision in the major areas of your life.
2. Execute the steps or activities of the plan repeatedly, making "in-flight" corrections, and do something regularly to help you stay committed and focused on the plan.

Let's look at some examples:

- If you want to attain more spiritual fulfillment, what is the plan to accumulate the knowledge necessary and what are the steps or activities you must do regularly to get the right results?

- If you want to have more time for your spouse and children, what is the plan to accumulate the knowledge to effect other areas of your life to give you the time and what are the steps or activities you must do regularly to get the right results?
- If you want more financial freedom, what is the plan for getting debt light and investment heavy and what are the steps or activities you must do regularly to get the right results?
- If you want to be in better physical shape, what is the plan for gaining the knowledge about how the body works and how it metabolizes calories and what steps or activities do you have to be involved in regularly to make sure you are burning off more calories than you are storing?
- If you want a thriving business, what is the plan to gain the knowledge to be an expert and what steps or activities do you have to be involved in regularly to get the right results?

Too many mortgage originators have still not figured it out. If you are not prospecting new targets, marketing to existing clients, pre-qualing, or taking applications, you are doing something you should not be doing.

Success in any area of your life will take as long as you want!

Now you may be arguing, I don't have the time to do all of this. Well, that's too bad! I wonder if the guy next door, or in the next cubicle, or with that other company has more time than you and that's the reason he is successful. I doubt it. The truth is, you will fill the time you have. The problem for most is they fill it with the wrong things, the wrong activities, the wrong systems, the wrong plan, and as a result they get the wrong results! In fact, in many cases, time is filled with being busy rather than with being productive.

Try This...

Spend one week keeping track of how you use your time in 15 minute segments, taking notes, so that when you reflect at the end of the week you will see where you are highly inefficient or where you are involved in activities that have nothing to do with your vision and are simply getting in the way.

The only way to have more time to do what is truly important is to stop spending time on the things that don't count — the events that should be dropped, delayed or delegated.

Time — control it or it will control you. It is critical that you understand this before going on to the next paragraph.

Successful people have captured the disciplines, that lead to the habits, that when repeated regularly, lead to winning results!

Now, back to the beach! So, after spending 15 minutes on each of the major areas of my life, reflecting on where I am in relation to where I want to be, I will have determined if this vision still feels right. If not, I will come up with a new one. If so, I will develop new and/or improved plans for these areas by asking one simple question:

"What steps or activities do I need to do more of to get closer to what I want in this area?"

I will spend 3-4 hours on this question — really looking at where there are gaps in my performance. My goal is to arrive at 3-5 steps or activities for each area of my life that, if engaged in on a regular basis, would get me closer to accomplishing completeness in those areas. Now, this is where it gets good.

5 Steps for Maximizing Your Life, Daily

Step 1 Determine the vision you have for each of the major areas of your life in the coming year. This vision should be listed as a commitment or a vision statement. Example for FAMILY: "I am committed to a vital and healthy marriage until death do us part. I am committed to spending quality time with my kids and in transferring the right values to them that allow them to grow with pride, respect and confidence."

Step 2 Within each of the areas in number 1, determine the steps and activities that when repeated will allow you to accomplish more of that area of commitment. You should not have more than 5 key activities. Example for FAMILY ACTIVITIES:

I will be home 3 out of 5 work nights by 5:00 PM to spend time with my spouse,

Every day I will spend at least 15 quality minutes with each of my children to show my love and expand our relationship,

At least 3 times per month, I will have a date with my spouse so that our relationship can grow and remain healthy,

I will have a date with each of my children at least once a month where it is just the two of us for at least 2 hours,

I will continuously arrive at unique ideas on how I can say I love you to each of my family members.

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Step 3 Spend 15 minutes every morning reviewing number 1 and 2 for every area of your life so that you will capture the power by associating with what's truly important to you. This will allow you to develop the focus necessary to go to Step 4 and gain the advantage of "being" rather than just "doing". In other words, you will increase the significance you have in your life.

These 15 minutes are absolutely critical and while you'll find the task difficult initially, over time it will become a habit that you will value immensely. It is the single bridge between being totally reactive in your life to becoming totally proactive. When your activities match what is important to you, you will capture the discipline to do the things you know you should be doing, which until now, have only been frustrations.

Step 4 Plan it! Take it to paper! Schedule the activities in the time that you have so that you can do the things that count! These are Non-Negotiable commitments!

Do the tasks that are important and you will excel — ignore them and you will become trapped in the web of mediocrity.

Step 5 Maintain the "Singleness of Purpose" mentality; staying on purpose, blocking the time necessary to fulfill the activities you know at the end of the day will make the biggest difference. This probably is where there is significant breakdown for most people. I know that in my business, one of the things I have to constantly monitor is how much is on my plate. The same holds true in my life. I have followed the plan I have laid out for you in this article for the last 7 years. It has allowed me, I believe, to understand the true value of people, skills, relationships and money. It has afforded me the opportunity to realize that at the end of the day, being busy doesn't count. Being productive and making a difference does.

Sometimes we forget that we are human. We need constant reminding that there is only so much this body can do and remain efficient. And, the sad truth is, the things that in so many cases are really not that important occupy our time so that we can't do the things that are. The truth is, you'll never know when you might not have the chance to do what's important, ever again.

Do What Counts! You May Never Get Another Chance

It was November, 1979. I was in college and in a hurry one morning. As I got into my car, seated and ready to go, my dog Rusty wanted to play. His energy was abounding. He wanted to spend time with me. He had the ball in his mouth, waiting for me to take the time out of my schedule to do what was important to him — throw it and let him retrieve it. He'd drop the ball and jump up onto my lap, laying his paws across my left leg. I was too busy so I would push him out and try to shut my door. But Rusty was fast! He would jump back up before I could shut the door. This went on for a couple of minutes. I could have thrown the ball and then when Rusty went to get it, shut my door and left. But, I was too busy trying to adhere to my schedule to think about this. So, with both hands, I shoved him out of the car, extra hard, shutting the door and starting the car. As I looked out my window, I saw him sitting there, the ball in his mouth, with a look on his face like, "Come on, just one throw". I left for school.

I came home that afternoon to find out that as I left for school, Rusty had come up the drive too, maybe following me. Within minutes he was hit and killed instantly by a school bus. I wish I had spent 15 minutes with him that morning.