

SALES LESSONS LEARNT FROM TRACKING LIONS

BY IAN THOMAS

TRACKING IS AN ANCIENT SKILL THAT ALLOWED OUR ANCESTORS TO GREATLY IMPROVE THEIR HUNTING SUCCESS. THE REMNANTS OF THIS SKILL ARE STILL USED IN THE MODERN VERSION OF HUNTING. AS IN ALL PROFESSIONS THERE ARE TRACKERS THAT ARE HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL AND OTHERS THAT STRUGGLE TO FIND ANYTHING.

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I strongly believe that there are lessons from these elite trackers that could greatly help sales people achieve success. In this article I will use the example of trackers that have found fresh tracks of a single, adult, male lion and are keen to follow the tracks on foot and find it. Once they have located it, they will return to the vehicle to fetch the guests and drive them to the sighting to view and photograph the huge cat.

Tracking skill number one

Before you even start to follow the tracks of the lion make certain that your guests want to see it. In this case your guests are keen to see lions, but they are also fanatical birders or 'twitchers' who have come all the way to Africa to photograph birds. They are especially eager to photograph eagles. As birding and digital photography flourish, this situation is not as uncommon as you might think. What's more, you know where there is a crowned eagle nest. It is possible to park the vehicle on a nearby ridge and from this position there are exceptional views of the nest and nearby trees. A male lion is an awesome sight, but so is a crowned eagle. Ideally, you can track and find the lion this morning and then go to the eagle's nest in the afternoon when the light is perfect for photography. Once you have explained this 'win-win' to your delighted guests; go after the lion with confidence. More often than not you have limited time to find it and if you are not bold, you are unlikely to succeed – trust in your ability.

Sales skill: Have confidence in both your product and your ability. Make sure that you use all your skill and knowledge to give the customer the best result possible. Secondly, believe that you have the ability to close the deal. If you do not radiate confidence you are unlikely to succeed.

Tracking skill number two

Have an extensive knowledge of the animal that you are tracking. It is substantially easier to follow the tracks of a lion when you understand his habits and hunting methods. Skilled trackers are able to identify an individual lion from the unique shape and size of their tracks. Now not only do you know how lions in general behave, but you have an intimate insight into the specific behaviour of the individual lion that you are following: a significant advantage.

Sales skill: Know the specific needs and behaviours of the individual to whom you are selling.

Tracking skill number three

When you are following the tracks of a lion you must use all of your senses to decipher a multitude of subtle signs that allow you to follow and find the animal. In most bushveld conditions the ability to listen is your most powerful sense. Some distance before you are able to see the lion it is possible to hear the alarm calls of animals that he is hunting or that see him as he moves through the area. Occasionally, the lion will roar, this is a territorial call that can be heard from some distance. A skilled tracker knows this and uses it to his advantage. Walking carefully on soft-soled shoes he is able to move silently. This allows him to practice 'active listening'. When he hears a relevant sound he will freeze in mid stride - and listen. When he has interpreted the sound and understands its meaning, he will use the information to help him locate the lion.

Sales skill: Practice active listening. Clear your mind of all thoughts and distractions. Make certain that there are no external distractions i.e. noise or people walking in and out of the meeting area. Listen carefully and make an effort to grasp what it is that your customer needs.





Tracking skill number four

Successful trackers are in constant learning mode. The most obscure tracks fascinate them; they practice imitating bird alarm calls. Each day brings new tracking discoveries and lessons. This relentless accumulation of knowledge is extremely powerful. If you manage to improve by 1% every day, then at the end of the year you are 365 % better, even if you improve by 1% a week you have advanced by 52 %. There is a Japanese expression for this call 'kaizen' meaning constant improvement.

Sales skill: Relentlessly accumulate sales skills. Attend sales skills courses, read books, watch DVD's, listen to CD's. Practise what you have learnt.

Tracking skill number five

The sign of an excellent lion tracker is his ability to consistently track and find lions without the animal seeing him. Besides being the ethical way to track – the animal is

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not disturbed. It is also the safe way to track – a lion can not attack you when he can not see you. This requires two very different skills. The most important being the ability to interpret from the various signs where the animal is even though you can not see it. Sometimes it may be necessary to confirm visually that it is where you think it is. To do this you must have the ability to stalk and find him from a hidden position. This requires a fluid and supple approach, using stealth, silence, and camouflage. Once you have established his position, retreat silently to the vehicle and drive your guests to see a wild, adult male lion - one of the most magnificent creatures on the planet.

Sales skill: Customers are put off by an obvious sales pitch. Your technique needs to be supple, ethical and skilled, and your mission, "I am here to help". **se**



IAN IS A RARE PERSON, A BUSINESS GRADUATE WHO HAS STUDIED LIONS AT CLOSE QUARTERS DURING 40 YEARS AS A GAME RANGER IN AFRICA. HE NOW GIVES INSPIRING AND EDUCATIONAL TALKS ON HOW LESSONS FROM LIONS CAN HELP YOU TO CREATE POWERFUL BUSINESS TEAMS. HE ALSO DRAWS ON THE LESSONS LEARNT FROM TRACKING AN EXTREMELY AGGRESSIVE LION TO HELP PEOPLE AND

ORGANISATIONS TO OVERCOME DAUNTING CHALLENGES. A DYNAMIC AND STIMULATING PRESENTER, IAN BELIEVES PEOPLE, AND ESPECIALLY BUSINESS PEOPLE, CAN ABSORB AND LEARN FROM THE ANIMAL KINGDOM. SOUND BUSINESS SENSE IS INTERLACED WITH HUMOUR AND AN ABILITY TO TELL STORIES. THE AUDIENCE LEAVE ENTHRALLED AND REPEAT THE STORIES TO FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES RESULTING IN IMMENSE "TAKE HOME BUSINESS VALUE". HE HAS WRITTEN A BESTSELLING BOOK ENTITLED 'THE POWER OF THE PRIDE'. HE CAN BE CONTACTED AT 011 883-2088 INFO@IANTHOMAS.NET AND WWW.IANTHOMAS.NET.