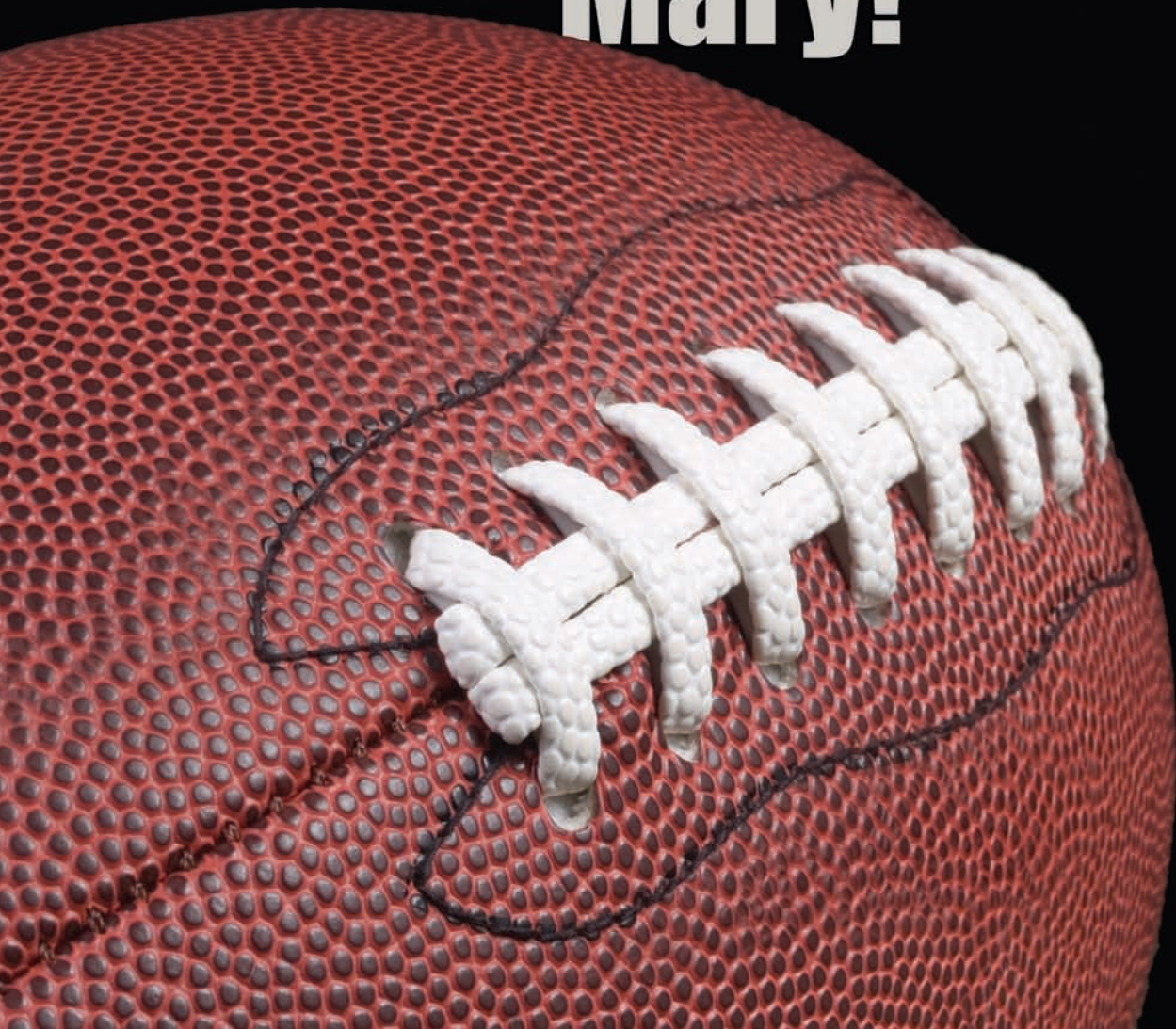


■ The *ONLY* Training Source Dedicated To Selling Seed ■

Seed *Seller*

TRAINING JOURNAL V7 | N5

The Death of the “Hail Mary!”



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The Death of the “Hail Mary!”

How many football games have you watched where one of the Teams was put into a position of having to rely on a “Hail Mary” pass into the end zone to win the game? They seldom achieve their goal. The odds of winning a game in that manner are very low. It doesn't mean that sometimes games aren't so closely fought that they come down to a last-second play. However, too many teams end up *relying* on the Hail Mary as a fix for things that should have been done earlier in the competition. Hail Marys have never worked very well as a last-second strategy for winning a football game, yet many seed sales reps have come to rely on them to achieve their goals. They don't work there either.

At an interim break during one of my training sessions last winter, I overheard one of my students addressing a small group of reps gathered in a circle near the break table. He was telling them how much more difficult it is to get a sales increase today than it was 25 years ago when he first started in the business. He said that there were a lot more farmers back then, they were more loyal and they were willing to order their seed a lot earlier. He added, “I don't care who you are, there is no way to get a sales increase before harvest. You work your butt off today but it still doesn't get you an increase. Nowadays, they all want to wait until after harvest and even into the next year before they order their seed. It is out of our hands anymore.”

The group nodded their heads in unison as the theologian continued to wax poetically about the difficulties of the seed business. He said, “The longer you're in this business, the more you realize that getting sales increases before harvest is a bunch of bull.” He said, “I have my best luck putting seed in my pickup and

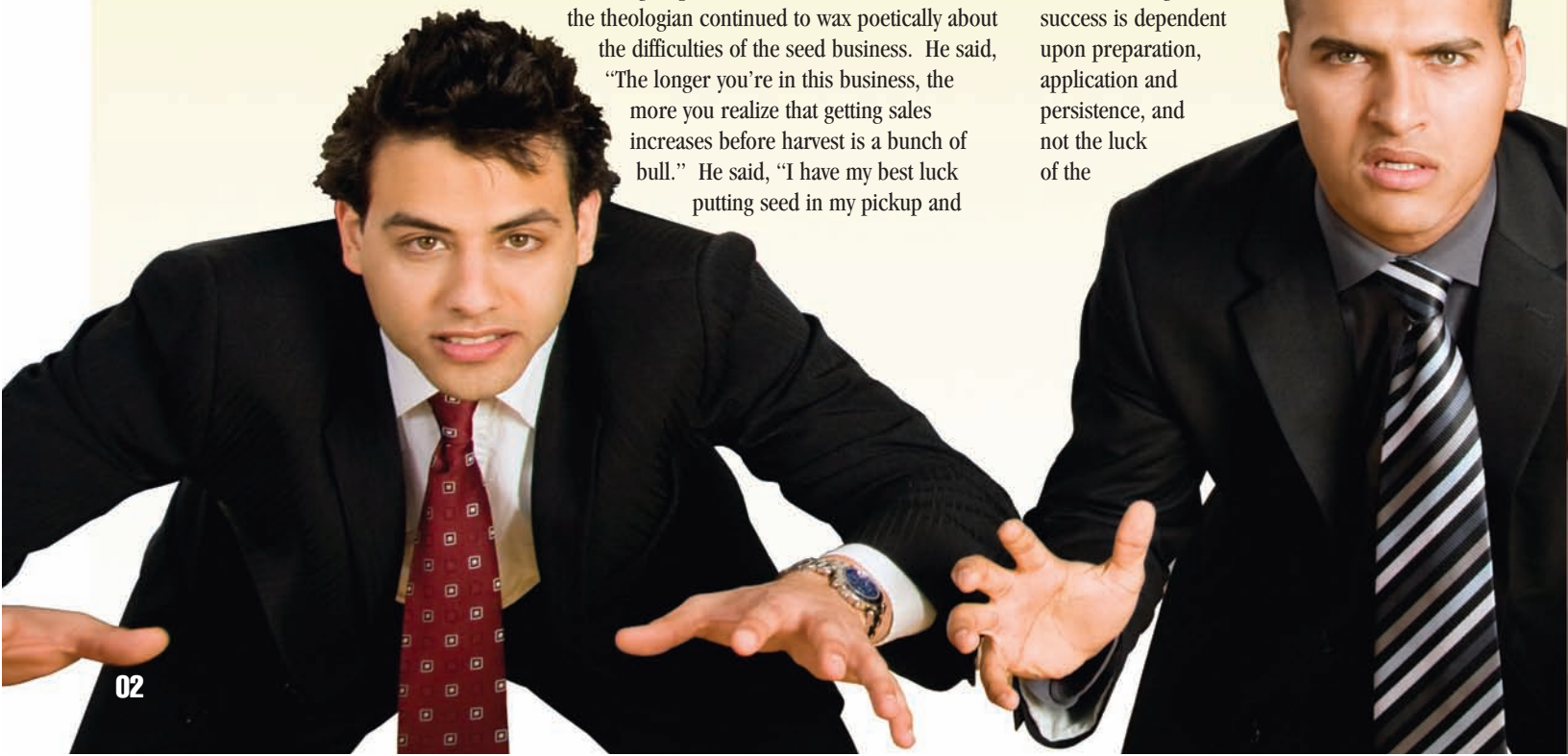
Seed selling success today is less about hard work and stress and more about preparation and planning ahead.

going around to each of my customers during planting to see if they need any extra to finish up.” He bragged how he had sold almost 300 extra units one year using this strategy.

The ole Hail Mary, I thought to myself as I walked pass them on my way to grab a coffee. This guy needs to get out of the seed business before the marketplace throws him out. Not only is he void of ideas on how to win in the new marketplace, he is guaranteeing his customer's demise, too. After all, farmers need leadership, someone to follow and not someone to follow them.

You'd think that after years of experience and watching the actions of growers, that he would have changed his thinking on how sales increases are achieved. The only thing this guy has learned is that the marketplace is in total control of his success, and that if he is going to have a good year, it is because he connects on a Hail Mary before the end of each game.

This veteran is actually right about one thing; reps are working their tails off attempting to get sales increases. Unfortunately, the strategy is not effective. Long-term success is dependent upon preparation, application and persistence, and not the luck of the



Hail Mary. Getting an increase in sales starts the day the new sales year begins—when the planters roll. Additionally, those sales increases need to be in place by the time the harvesters roll. In most cases, that gives the average sales rep four months to write a farmer's order. More time than necessary.

Being in a position to have to toss a Hail Mary at the end of the selling season, in an attempt to increase sales, is in great part the end of a self-fulfilling prophecy. We don't believe we can prevent the situation from occurring, so we cause it to happen ourselves. Comic strip writer Walt Kelly once wrote, "We have met the enemy and he is us." We create our own obstacles in getting sales increases by abdicating our duty of needing to change how we sell, even when we can see what is happening right before our eyes. Hail Marys aren't just confined to late-season attempts to get sales. I see companies and their sales reps throw Hail Marys all season long.

How long has it been since early order programs, early pay incentives and new customer programs have achieved their intended purposes? Ten, maybe 15 years or more? Yet, we continue to offer them, hoping the Hail Mary will work. How many years have we listened to growers complain about price instead of learning how to tell a better story so we can show them the values we offer that more than offset price? Instead, we toss a Hail Mary by lowering price or giving them something free. How many years have we allowed our customers to hold us hostage by leaving them in their Ag Cycles, which allowed them to tell us when they wanted to order their seed? Instead, we toss a Hail Mary by putting undue pressure on our

production, our shipping and sales departments, to be at our customer's beckon call.

Farming is a long-term business. The seed business is the same. Although, how much preparation, application and persistence goes into a last ditch effort (Hail Mary) to make a sales goal? How much preparation, application and persistence goes into a last ditch effort (Hail Mary) to control returns? How much preparation, application and persistence goes into a last ditch effort (Hail Mary) to get new customers? The answer is *none*. Why are so many reps struggling to get sales increases today? It is because they still believe that a Hail Mary is somehow a viable option for winning and if they believe that, their company obviously believes it too.

Have you ever felt the level of tension and stress leading up to a Hail Mary pass at football game? That is the same level of tension and stress seed sales reps feel every single day when they do not prepare, apply or persist. Seed selling success today is less about hard work and stress and more about preparation and planning ahead. Modern day sellers need to prepare and get their growers out of their Ag Cycles, they need to prepare and get their growers to see their value as sales reps and they need to prepare and tell their story to more growers than ever before. All of that preparation then needs to be applied persistently between planting and harvest.

When you follow that formula, you will find that long-term success requires a lot less effort and invokes a lot less stress than attempting a Hail Mary.

What Should You Be Doing Right Now?

1. Make sure every unit of extra seed is, or has been, picked up and returned to your company's warehouse.
2. Make sure any seed that was not paid for prior to planting, is paid for as of July 1st.
3. Make sure every field that was planted with your seed is inspected, as to ensure that the grower and you have the best chance of success this season.
4. Make sure you continue to remind the grower the date you set during the planter visit for you to get together with him and develop his cropping plan for next year.
5. Make sure you continue to remind the grower of your company's value, as well as the value of each and every variety from you that he planted. Get rid of both Company Bias and Varietal Bias as soon as possible in this growing season.
6. Make sure each of your customers is following the cropping plan you laid out at the start of the season and is not skipping any steps.
7. Make sure every one of your customers stays positive and focused on raising the best crop possible, regardless of the number of challenges the environment presents.

SeedSeller
TRAINING JOURNAL



Not Being Second Best

C Copying what your competition is doing just leads to being second best. (Robin Sharma, author of the #1 bestseller *The Leader Who Had No Title*)

It is always especially interesting to note what the competition is doing with your customers, but it is never worth your time worrying about it. You don't have time to worry about it because you should be busy doing your own thing. This applies to any event, trip, trade-show booth, giveaway, program and, yes, even pricing. If you put too much importance on what they are doing, you either end up copying their moves, in which case you will be labeled a copy-cat and have no credibility, or you will give yourself an ulcer.

Yes, you should be aware of the competition. Nothing gets you up and on the road in the morning like knowing that your competition is out there trying to get the same customers as you. They can motivate you better than most sales managers can! However, they cannot dictate your pace, your story or your success (nor lack of it).

It really has to be up to you to develop your own style, independent of what anybody else is doing. You also have to develop your own story and be able to present it in an interesting manner. Your competition can't do that for you. They can make fun of it or try to use it to their advantage, but that should only encourage you to make your story so good that it will be hard to disparage it.

This also applies to any toys and trinkets that your competition gives away. Note what they are doing, and instead of copying it, see if you can improve upon it or take it in a different direction. My competition gives away calendars with the company name and logo prominently featured. Every time someone looks at that calendar, that person will be hard-pressed not to think of my competition! Does this worry me? Does my company put out their own calendar? No way! Instead, we appreciate the practicality of it and try to come up with something that is equally as practical and as usable. If we came out with our own calendar, people would know we were just trying to replace theirs with ours. No new idea, no innovation—what would that say about my company as a whole?

Pricing from the competition can also drive you crazy. You should be aware of their pricing, but it should not dictate what you are doing with yours. Sure, the marketplace dictates the pricing, but your competition is just as aware of this as you are! Your profitability, your programs and your costs dictate what you can charge, unless you are completely into a generic market. Only then, should your opposition have that much say on your margins. If you are not, and if there are some differences between your product, your service and your company's, then what they do should have little bearing on what you do.

Yes, it's hard to ignore the opposition in sales, but that is exactly what you should do. Be aware, but not reactive. Take note of what they are doing and figure out a way to improve upon it so you will come out on top as the winner. Let them inspire you, but not scare you. If you worry about them that much, it will only negatively affect your own performance, as you will be constantly checking to see what they are doing, rather than doing your own thing. When you are not doing your own thing, you are not being authentic and your clients will notice and not buy. Have your own story, set your own prices, give away your own toys and trinkets and incentivize and reward with your own ideas. That way you will be a winner and not second best.

Have your own story, set your own prices, give away your own toys and trinkets and incentivize and reward with your own ideas. That way you will be a winner and not second best.



How much time do you spend preparing for the next on-season—the part of the sales year when it

comes time to write orders again?

Remember, the order-writing season (the on-season) starts when the planters roll and ends when harvest begins. That means you have at least four months to write orders to both old and new customers. Just in case you frittered away your off-season time this past year, here is a list of things you should have been doing in preparation for your on-season, which is taking place *right now*.

Planning a migration path for every one of your buyers.

There isn't a single grower who is buying seed from you today that you are, or can be, content with when it comes to his "migration" path. Even 100% customers need a migration path. That is, they need to know what path you have them on right now and how that path will lead them into the future. The migration path doesn't only deal with how much they buy, but also addresses how they view their future when working with you. You need to make sure every customer you intend to keep on your roster understands his or her migration path. They need to know how much they need to be buying from you in the future and why that level of participation is important to their future success. A migration path is the formal plan you have for each of them to succeed, beyond their own expectations, just because they are working with you. Incidentally, for some growers, that migration path may mean you decide to migrate them right out of your system. There are some growers you need not be working with.

Planning how to sell to new farms you have not yet done business with.

When you think of getting new customers, do not think about driving several miles to do it. Most new customers are within 30 miles of us in any direction, not 3 hours. How many driveways have you not yet driven into because you don't know who lives there or who farms the land? How many farmers have not had the pleasure of meeting you yet because you haven't prepared yourself enough so you would have the confidence to stop and introduce yourself? How many fields and farms do you continue to drive by during the on-season, who are planting someone else's seed but could be planting yours?

Planning to grow like an Apple.

Believe it or not, more than 60% of the seed sales reps today still operate sales territories that they can't drive across in an hour. Unless you live in an area where there is so little product potential that you require more territory, you need to get control of your territory so you can begin to grow like an Apple. Think of your sales territory as an Apple. An Apple grows from the core outward. Your approach should be to grow your sales territory from the core outward also, just like an Apple. That means you have the most business around you, the core, and as that core business grows around you, so

does the rest of the Apple. Again, too many territories don't begin to resemble an Apple when it comes to growth. They are more like a cluster of very immature grapes, each requiring its own stem and each being of a different size and shape. That is not a way to grow a sales territory.

Planning your new sales strategy.

The key to success in this business is not just about having an excited customer, it is about having an excited sales rep. It's easy to excite a grower into buying when the sales rep is super excited about the value he is offering. One of the best ways to spend your time during the off-season is preparing yourself with a new and exciting sales approach that will send chills down the backs of every prospect and customer you meet. This kind of presentation takes time to create, time to practice and time to apply. Every new sales year should bring with it a new and exciting sales strategy that you cannot wait to deliver to a grower who is just waiting to be sold.

Planning how to get all of your orders written during the four months of the on-season.

This is simply about preparation, practice and application.





O On February 12th of this year, my wife and I were blessed with a healthy and handsome baby boy

we named Logan Thomas Osthus. I had the pleasure of being involved throughout the entire birthing process, starting with Alicia's first painful contraction, to cutting the umbilical cord after he was born. After witnessing the entire event, I have become certain on two things in life. First, I realized what a real miracle the creation of a life really is—truly unbelievable. Secondly, I'm very thankful to be a man, as I now realize my wife is a lot tougher than I am or ever will be.

Following the passing of my mother in January, it is surreal to see the full circle of life happen right before me. Life is so precious. Until you have a child of your own, I think it is extremely hard for people to appreciate fully all of the things that a mother (or father) does for a child, especially in those first months. Once we have a family, we come to recognize the purpose of procreation is much more than just populating the earth. We realize that a brand new human being is completely and utterly dependent on his parents for everything. Having a child forces us to reevaluate our life goals and priorities more than anything else could ever do.

Logan has done a great job of motivating and inspiring me in so many ways. Although, the greatest surprise has been what an excellent life coach he is. He is constantly educating and reminding me how I can improve in specific areas of my life. Quite impressive for someone who has been on earth for only four short months. Below are just a few areas that he has called me out on, thus far.

Get up early and seize the day.

We've been very blessed because Logan has been a really good baby. While he loves his naps and sleeps well at night, he is not keen on sleeping-in late. Correctly of course, Logan believes the early bird gets the worm and once he's up, he does a great job of giving a motivational rally-cry to the rest of the household to make sure we are up and at 'em too. Each morning, as Alicia or I walk into his bedroom to take him out of the crib, he'll lock

eyes, drop you a great big smile and give you a look that simply says, "Good Morning, what took you so long?"

Manage your time well.

Another thing I appreciate about Logan is that he is very straightforward, upfront and honest with his approach and feelings—especially for someone who can't even talk yet. When he needs something, he doesn't seem to mind if you are in the middle of something or trying to finish a task or project that you probably should've gotten done days or weeks ago. He doesn't look kindly upon procrastination, particularly when his needs are involved. Logan has forced me to be a better time manager. To do that, I must do a better job of creating and keeping a schedule. After all, Logan is a creature of habit and putting off feeding, napping or bath time usually makes things much harder on everyone. It's astonishing to think about how much time I must have wasted in my life before he was born. I thought I was pretty organized but I can't tell you what I did with all of my spare time.

Take care of yourself first.

This may sound like some self-help tidbit, but once you have a kid you fully realize what they mean by taking care of yourself first so you can do a better job of taking care of those around you. I also

immediately realized how that is much easier said than done. It takes a lot of extra discipline, but when I *have been* eating healthy and *making* time in the day to workout, I notice that my patience, energy level and excitement to take care of Logan is at its peak. As soon as my discipline starts to slip and I neglect my body by eating junk food or skipping my workouts to sleep-in or watch television, I am aware that I'm a little more on edge and my patience, attitude and enjoyment in taking care of my crying baby



Need a Life Coach? Have a Child

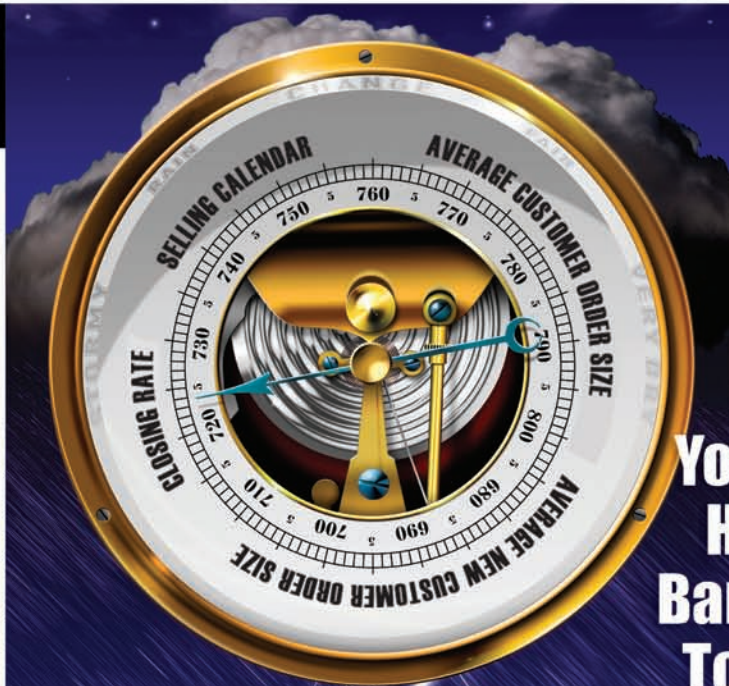
are pushed to the limits. What Logan does so well, is he'll wait for me to start slacking on my exercising or sleep schedule and then he purposely tests my patience or decides not to stick to his normal routine. Somehow, he senses that I have gotten to bed really late and seems to know I have a big meeting in the morning, so he stays up during the night to let me know that I really should have planned ahead and gotten to bed sooner. It is entirely possible that mom is feeding him inside information—I don't know how he does it!

Show more gratitude.

They are often called our "better halves" for a reason, especially in my case. It is amazing to watch a young woman's DNA and maternal instincts take over, as she becomes a mother. The transformation is something you can't explain but when you watch it happen first-hand, you are so happy that *someone* actually knows what *she* is doing. Whether it's her supersonic hearing, the most calming voice in the world or the fact

that she is fully equipped to feed our baby without ever going to the grocery store, it is truly impressive. There have been countless times when Logan is upset and I can't get him to calm down and just as I start to get frustrated, all of a sudden Alicia will walk in the room, pick him up and do what only an authentic *baby-whisperer* can do. Logan, just being a typical and normal baby, continually reminds me to show more gratitude to my wife on a daily (actually hourly) basis. And as my mom would have said, Alicia did all of the heavy lifting to get this child into the world, so how is it that I am the one reaping all the benefits?!

Logan Thomas Osthus
Photo Courtesy of Krystal Polski



You Must Have A Barometer To Chart Your Progress!

Too many sales reps make much ado about nothing. That is, they never seem to have enough time to get everything done that they need to do. The thing that seems to get left until last is the increase in sales. What should be first and foremost, often ends up at the bottom of the priority or even ability list.

Achieving sales goals is not as hard as it is made out to be, if you use a few simple barometers to help guide your path throughout the on-season. Here are a few barometers that, when followed, will help you get all of your orders written during the four month on-season, with some time left to spare.

Barometer No.1 What is the average order size of your current customer base? The goal is to raise that average order size by at least 25% this next season. That may mean firing a customer or two who drags your average down. But remember, it is not how many total customers you have, it is about how much each one is buying so they pay for the time you spend with them.

Barometer No.2 What is the average order size you are currently getting from each new buyer you sell? The goal is to stick by a strict policy of a minimum order size for anyone who buys from you the first time. You will sell fewer new customers but you won't need as many either. The ones you get will take their first experiences with you much more seriously. Why sell 20 new buyers 20 units each, when you can sell just 7 new buyers a 60 unit pallet and get believers, and not just buyers.

Barometer No.3 What is your closing rate when getting new buyers? Remember, your closing rate is not how many new prospects you will sell on the first call. Your closing rate is how many new customers you will sell, regardless of how many contacts it takes. With this definition, anything less than 70% is too low. You better go back and work on your appearance, your sale approach and your story.

Barometer No.4 Develop a selling calendar. Do you know how many actual days on average the typical seed sales rep spends selling out of over 285 possible days? Seven. That's right. Seven full days selling. Some may spend twice that, as in 14, and some don't spend any time at all. The easiest and fastest way to hit a sales goal is to spend time selling. Set aside time every day during your on-season to make at least 3 sales calls. You will be amazed at what your sales report card will look like in just 30 days.

When you monitor all of these barometers, watch your sales efficiency increase and your sales go off the charts. As I said, you won't even need the entire off-season to get all of your orders written, while having the biggest sales increase you've ever had.



Do You Have An “Off-Season”?

A Anyone working in the seed business will probably take offense to the title of this article.

They will say that there is no off-season in the seed business. Well, of course there is. In fact, in our business there is the same amount of off-season as there is on-season—four months. But don't confuse the idea of having an off-season with your daily, weekly or monthly work schedule. There is an off-season and it has nothing to do with the total number of hours you work in a year. After all, in this marketplace growers are more than happy to let you work 24/7 if you allow it to happen. The off-season in the seed business is the period of time between the beginning of harvest and the beginning of the planting season. That is the time of the year when order-writing has already

been completed and confirmation, delivery and preparation for planting take place. It also means that seed sales reps have at least four months to prepare and practice the application of their next season's sales strategy.

The off-season is the time of the year when orders are no longer being written. The only reason the order-writing period drags out across all of the months of a sales year is because we don't structure it into an on-season and an off-season. Every 21st century seed seller must have an “off-season.” It is a time when orders are no longer being written so that all other duties necessary for order fulfillment can be completed and preparation for the next “on-season” can begin.

But the question remains, what do you do during the off-season? Check out the article on page five of this issue entitled *What Do You Do During The Off-Season?*

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