

# *Successes & Strategies - November 2009*

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## **Impatient Cows**

My favorite "knock knock" joke goes something like...

"Knock knock?"

"Who's there?"

"Impatient Cow."

"Impatient Co..."

"MOOOOOOOO!"

I cannot say that I have ever seen an impatient cow, nor would I even know the difference between an impatient cow and a patient cow by sight. I imagine a farmer could tell, assuming that it matters. I see that I am already channeling my inner Andy Rooney which is not a good thing. Let's get serious.

Let's talk about patience. What do we know about patience? We know that 'patience is a virtue.' Indeed it is. When we observe patient people, we usually compare our own likely irrational reactions if we were placed in whatever their patience-requiring situation happens to be. Then we will say to ourselves, or whomever we're with:

"If that was me, I'd have had a meltdown on the spot;"

"I couldn't have stayed calm like that!" or

"Clearly that person is on anxiety medication."

Number 5 of Stephen Covey's "7 Habits of Highly Effective People" is:

*"Seek first to understand and then to be understood®"*

This habit speaks directly to patience if you see it the way I do. If you do not, I'll restate the habit in a way that may make the patience point clearer. Here goes:

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*If you already know what you're going to say before the other person finishes speaking, you are not communicating effectively because you aren't listening, and the other person knows this.*

Ouch. Remember that Covey refers to these traits as habits. I take that to mean that it is a skill you must learn and practice. It is not innate for us to listen carefully to what others are saying, consider their position and respond accordingly. You have to make it a habit by working on it consistently and consciously until it becomes a part of your normal behavior. Try taking the next 3 weeks and decide that you will not begin a sentence of conversation with anyone until you are certain they are finished. If there are points you want to make with someone prior to a conversation, write them down so you can be sure to address them. This will allow you to more freely listen because you know you won't forget the things you wanted to be sure you discussed.

Patience will be an aid to you as an entrepreneur or sales professional or manager. One of your primary roles as an entrepreneur is to lead your business. Leadership requires patience as you cannot develop an appropriate vision for your business, you can not set the appropriate strategies in place to achieve that vision and you cannot create a culture of success without carefully considering the alternatives and to get input from trusted advisors and even your Team in most cases. Vision, strategy and culture are foundational pillars and thus require careful thought and consideration.

As a salesperson, it is your listening skills that will create revenue, not your "pitch." When you have the patience to truly hear the needs of the potential customer, you can determine if what you have to offer fits those needs or not. If you are patient and ask great questions, you'll be able to determine that.

As a manager, you are paid to make decisions. It would seem that patience may work against you in the fast moving environment of decision-making. Are you certain of that? Perhaps you should consider the cost of a bad decision before answering. Sometimes it is that extra 30 seconds of consideration, that extra phone call or email for advice or feedback, that quick review of the alternatives before deciding that will cause you to avoid errors. Human resource management is a great place for a revealing example. The supermarket industry studied the cost of replacing a \$6.50 per hour cashier. The cost: \$3,637. Imagine the cost of replacing more skilled, costly laborers. When you manage, patience will likely cause you to make the best decision, but do make the decision.

One last quote about patience:

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**"Patience and fortitude conquer all things."  
Ralph Waldo Emerson**

**See you next month.**



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