



# Achieving Maximum Sales Performance

**Your own psychological weaknesses are to blame for your performance shortcomings, and only a psychological solution can overcome them.**

ARE YOU PSYCHOLOGICALLY ready to make a quantum leap in your production?

This new feature, “Personal Coach,” is an attempt to translate some of the fundamental knowledge of current behavioral science into specific and practical strategies for eliminating self-sabotaging habits, to kick fears of rejection, failure, embarrassment, and success, and to improve productivity. The main idea behind maximizing your sales performance is relatively simple: It is that we are not victims of bad luck, or poor timing; we are active participants in all of our production problems. Prospecting and sales problems are not just things that happen to us — they are complex experiences over which we have control. There is little doubt that regardless of how much you have produced in the last three years, you are only using a fraction of your talents, skills and abilities.

The ability to achieve what I call maximum sales performance (MSP) rests on a large body of modern behavioral psychological research, which suggests that change and improvement are dependent on learnable skills. You are not destined to continue to sabotage yourself, to live a life full of fear or to

underachieve. MSP outlines the fundamental strategies used by many psychologists in their private practices to identify, confront and resolve a wide range of human dilemmas.

In the months ahead, we will address a number of topics that have an immediate impact on every financial advisor's ability to prospect, to open new and larger accounts, to obtain golden referrals, to move from a transaction-based business to a professional financial-planning business, and to improve client relationships.

The self-change skills outlined in the MSP program are straightforward and do not require any unusual amount of intelligence, or a degree in psychology to understand how to use them. If you have been in the business two years or more, you will discover that these change techniques taken as a whole will produce a quantum leap in your income and simultaneously improve the quality of your life. You will learn how to use psychological techniques to identify, confront and eliminate all of the problems that force you to underachieve.

A second unique characteristic of this change program is that it makes no extravagant promise of miraculous personality changes in 14 days. My professional commitment is to helping, not selling, and the “change process,” I will outline is hardly a panacea for every problem in your life. It is, however, an accurate reflection of some of the most powerful psychological strategies employed by behavioral psychologists in their private practices and the promise of some of its methods have been amply demonstrated in dozens of double-blind scientific studies conducted on rookies, average producers and top-producing financial advisors.

Indeed, I have been testing and validating these strategies

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on advisors for more than 35 years. When a new change strategy is introduced, we instantly test it on a group of financial advisors. If it proves to boost performance faster and with less difficulty, we add it to the program and eliminate the older, less effective change technique. My objective is to teach you how to increase your productivity and simultaneously improve the quality of your life.

## GROWTH AND CHANGE

Benjamin Franklin observed that only two things in life are inevitable — death and taxes. If Franklin were writing today, he might add a third item — performance problems. You may know more than everyone in the office about mutual funds, you may be the best telephone salesperson in the region and you will still underachieve until you learn how to identify, confront and eliminate all of your negative habits.

Do not believe that I take a dim view of financial advisors being able to solve their own problems. Financial advisors are talented and versatile people — they have survived countless challenges. Yet, if they are so skillful in prospecting and opening new accounts and possess so much product knowledge and even have offices filled with prospecting plaques and sales awards, why do so many financial advisors sabotage themselves? Instead of talking about other people, let me give you a quick performance quiz. Be as truthful as you can.

During the last 30 days have you:

1. Procrastinated?
2. Killed time?
3. Worked on low priority activities?
4. Shuffled paper from pile A to pile B?
5. Failed to ask for referrals?
6. Sensed that you were not as motivated as you would like to be?
7. Arrived late, wasted time, or left early?
8. Felt discouraged, depressed or angry (at yourself)?
9. Failed to return a call to an angry client?
10. Experienced a fear of rejection?
11. Experienced a fear of failure?
12. Experienced a fear of being embarrassed?
13. Experienced a fear of success?

Answering in the affirmative to just one of the above questions would indicate that a gap exists between your production and your potential and the only way to close that gap is to use psychological training. Will another prospecting approach overcome a fear of rejection? No! Will a new mutual fund eliminate a fear of failure? Never! Will a new business plan eliminate a fear of success? Not in your lifetime! The facts are psychological problems have always and will always demand psychological solutions. The key to making a quantum leap in your production is through performance training.

There are a number of possible reasons for underachievement, but I will restrict myself to two of the most important. First of all, financial advisors tend to be high achievers, and high achievers are born with the capacity to experience rejection, failure, and success. Now this may not sound like an earthshaking observation, but it has important bearing on the question at hand. Have you ever wondered why you procrastinate, kill time or find it so difficult to ask for a golden referral?

Why can't we all be multiple million-dollar producers? Could it be that in the process of developing the skills and knowledge to become a top-producing financial advisor, we also developed some self-sabotaging habits? Those of us who have survived our childhood have learned to avoid (or at least respect) sharp objects, high cliffs, snakes, heights, fire and so on. In fact, we have learned to be on the lookout for potentially dangerous situations. This is useful when these situations are plentiful, but many of us have become oversensitive; that is, we may be overestimating the likelihood or intensity of a threat to our self-esteem. We must be sensitive to survive, but sensitivity has both assets and liabilities. It allows us to adapt — to learn survival patterns — and to experience moments of intense pleasure and satisfaction. Our brain and nervous system allow us not only to experience distress, but also to feel anticipatory pain. Our brain and nervous system help us to develop important associations like “fire and danger” or “guns and death.” What happens to you when you are opening your mail and you notice an envelope from the IRS Department of Audits? Do you feel like calling a few clients and asking them for a golden

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referral or do you actually begin to feel nauseous?

Human sensitivity is one reason for the inevitability of developing self-sabotaging habits. Another reason lies outside us. Our industry is in a constant state of change. Not only is change going on from day to day, but literally it is changing from moment to moment. Adaptive top producers are prepared to change as their business changes. Think for a moment about the many stresses that are common to all of your friends after they left high school, for example:

- choosing a college and going to college
- moving out on their own
- getting married, children
- choosing a career
- changing careers
- changing companies
- financial obligations (e.g., purchasing a home)
- illness
- deaths of family and friends
- problems of raising children, even adult children
- aging
- losing a job

Now add to that list all of the activities that produce stress, worry, and energy loss that are unique to our industry. The list goes on and on and on.

The stress that you have to experience daily includes all the stress that everyone else has to experience; but all the additional stress derived from the industry you are in may increase the overall stress that you are undergoing by another 500 percent. Frankly, it's amazing that more financial advisors do not break down. But the high stress in your profession certainly does account for the high numbers who fail, or merely fail to perform close to their potential. And even among million-dollar producers are many advisors who know at a very deep level that they are only using a fraction of their talents and skills.

Warning: Following the techniques of MSP is going to add to your stress for a couple of months. But then you will discover that your stress level will experience a dramatic drop — as you learn to control performance anxiety.

## WHY MSP IS UNIQUE

There are many programs on the market that could be loosely grouped into a category called “self-improvement.” Some are specific in both their promises and their focus: They guarantee to make you more positive, more successful, more assertive, less obese, more motivated, develop greater self-esteem, etc. Others lean toward a more general promise of improved awareness, greater happiness, and a perfect marriage with successful children, who will never create problems. Most contain dramatic case histories that illustrate how this or that strategy changed a person's life (watch any infomercial and you can verify this point). The self-improvement strategies endorsed by these popular self-help books and programs are equally diverse. They range from very specific exercises to rambling sermons on consciousness and new forms of meditation.

And, here I'm writing another how-to-save-your-own-life recipe program, right? What possible grounds do I have for arguing that this program might be helpful where others are not? How can I possibly believe that this one is unique?

Well, to begin with, I'm not arguing that every single self-help program is the worthless product of some charlatan. Many are well written and contain reasonable recommendations. The vast majority, unfortunately, cannot claim sufficient scientific evidence on their behalf. This is rarely conceded by their authors, of course, who may be wildly enthusiastic about the miraculous powers of their pet therapy. How are you supposed to know which techniques have been scientifically studied and which are the arm-chair conjectures of a self-proclaimed guru? Alas, until we have some better controls over what is marketed as “psychotherapy,” individuals in the general public may be at a loss to decide which approach is best suited to them.

Nevertheless, I hope it will help you to know that unlike the vast majority of professionally marketed programs, MSP does not promise to help you attain a permanent state of success or personal fulfillment. Whatever else it may be, success is not something that can be captured and contained. It can, of course, be frequently experienced, and it is my hope that this series of articles will help you experience more days when you come closer to your potential than you have in

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the past. The underlying assumption here is that performance problems are inevitable. No one can totally escape them, but we can learn skills that will help us minimize their threat to our ability to approach our true potential.

A second point of departure between this program and some of its competitors is that, in MSP, I argue that learning how to maximize your performance takes effort, time and skill. This effort and skill are not beyond your reach, however, and you need not possess exceptional intelligence or unfailing willpower to develop them. In many of today's self-improvement programs, the secret to success is said to be "insight" or "awareness" — an intimate appreciation and acceptance of yourself and your world. While I'm hardly an enemy of insight, I do not believe that awareness is sufficient to alleviate most personal problems. As I will explain in the next few months, awareness must usually be accompanied by action to produce a satisfactory resolution of a production problem. That is, those financial advisors who would like to have more of their clients give them referrals will discover that they actually have to ask for the referrals.

This means that there are no miraculous keys to nirvana, no overnight paths to inner peace. The resolution of present and future problems will require effort, persistence and a willingness to experiment. As you practice and refine your performance-enhancing skills, of course, it will become easier to deal with the frustrations and failures that may lie one phone call ahead.

A third difference between the MSP program and others is the extent of its scientific backing. Virtually every self-improvement author has a drawer bulging with glowing comments from happy alumni, or so they claim. Few of them report how many participants failed to improve, or even discovered they were worse off than when they began. Nor do they comment on how many of the participants would have improved just as well, and in some cases better, without any training at all. Only rigorous scientific experiments in which trained investigators objectively assess the strengths and

weaknesses of a technique after completing double-blind studies can demonstrate the efficacy of a program.

The techniques presented in this program are based on the results of these experiments — results which suggest that kicking fears and eliminating self-sabotaging behaviors are not only possible, but they are within your grasp. Like life itself, however, science is an endeavor sprinkled with both success and failure, happiness and frustration. Not every financial advisor who has completed this program has experienced a quantum leap in his production. At this time, we still have much to learn about how and why financial advisors act, think, and feel the way they do. We have made considerable progress in the last decade, but we are still a long way away from knowing it all.

The fourth and final difference between this program and most of its competitors is that I admit that I cannot guarantee that the techniques in the program will be personally helpful to you. I present them to you with a cautious optimism. They are the best we have at this time, but our best is imperfect. You can be assured, however, that my confidence in their usefulness is shared by a large portion of behavioral psychologists across the nation. Indeed, I will be revealing some of the most respected strategies in the field of psychology. The techniques and steps outlined here are basically those used by many therapists in their private practice. Hence, I'm sharing with you what we believe to be our most effective techniques for defeating underachievement and maximizing your prospecting and client-building skills.

Talk to you next month.

**Dr. Aaron Hemsley is one of the few clinical psychologists in the nation whose background includes a successful career in sales and sales management. A former agency manager and member of the life insurance industry's Million Dollar Round Table, Dr. Hemsley has consulted with five major universities and three U.S. Olympic teams in how to use psychological techniques to improve performance. He has authored four books and more than 200 articles on performance psychology and the sales process. He can be reached at [ahinfo@aaronhemsley.com](mailto:ahinfo@aaronhemsley.com).**

**Contrary to the majority of today's self-help guides, MSP contains techniques that have survived considerable scientific research.**