

## Initiative

By Mike Stewart, CSP



**A frustrated sales manager** participating in a training program I was conducting recently asked, "Why is it that my salespeople can't do anything on their own?" Then he added, "It seems like they have to check with me about everything. I spend way too much time on the phone. I can't get my own job done because I'm always doing theirs!"

**The other sales managers in the program agreed** that they received entirely too many calls from their salespeople every day. These managers agreed that most of the calls were about simple decisions that the salespeople should have been able to make easily.

**"How do I train them to take initiative?"** they wanted to know. This comes up often when I am working with managers, so I asked them a question I was sure I knew the answer to, "How many calls have you received while you've been here during this program?" The answer surprised them. It was: We haven't received nearly as many calls as we usually do.

**"Why haven't they been calling you** while you have been here in training?" I wanted to know. The reason was simple and straightforward: They didn't want to bother their managers while they were busy! They just made decisions and took action on their own. Nothing blew up. The next question I asked was very obvious:

**"Why can't they take initiative all the time** if they can do it when you are 'busy'?" The answer was also very obvious, "They can!" and it needs to be looked at from two perspectives:

**1. As a Manager** you should recognize that your team members who are competent and capable take advantage of you and don't take initiative simply because you permit it. They probably want to be noticed and get a little attention and stroking. They most likely don't understand that they are hurting their careers and their promotion possibilities by appearing to be so dependent on you.

**You need to take a personal inventory** and be sure that you aren't creating this dependence by micro-managing and second-guessing your salespeople. You also need to be sure they know precisely what is expected of them, have the authority they need,

and that they are empowered to make decisions and take action.  
In either case:

**My recommendation to you as a Manager** is that you adopt the policy of another, very wise and successful manager named Charles Ray:

***If you know what I'm going to say, don't ask.  
If you know what I want you to do, don't wait  
– just go ahead and do it.***

**2. As a Salesperson** you should be aware that when you call your boss and ask what you should do you are branding yourself as indecisive, unwilling to accept responsibility, perhaps as incompetent, and most surely as a high-maintenance pain in the neck.

**My recommendation to you as an individual** is that you be sure of your competency. If you need training, ask for it. Confirm that you have the authority to make decisions and take action, then, adopt the mottos of two world-class corporations, the Royal Bank of Scotland Group and Nike:

***Less talk.  
Make it happen.  
Just do it.***

***Straight ahead!***

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International sales trainer and consultant, Mike Stewart, CSP, specializes in hiring and developing high-performance sales teams. He is a leading authority in diagnosing and overcoming Sales Call Reluctance. To learn more about Mike and the services and products his company offers, go to [www.StewartSalesDynamics.com](http://www.StewartSalesDynamics.com).

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If you are a member of the media and would like to interview Mike or feature more of his articles in your publication, please contact him at [Mike@StewartSalesDynamics.com](mailto:Mike@StewartSalesDynamics.com) or 1-866-515-0022.

