

Still Learning From Johnny Carson

By Mike Stewart, CSP



Salespeople, managers, executives and other high achievers can still learn some important lessons from the late Johnny Carson, who died last Sunday, at 79.

He, as almost everyone knows, hosted "The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson" for 30 years, spanning parts of four decades. He taped his last show on May 22, 1992.

"My success just evolved from working hard at the business at hand each day."

- Johnny Carson

It's hard to believe that Johnny has been off the air for almost 13 years, because his memory is so fresh in our minds. At least some of us, including me, can't watch or even think of Jay Leno or David Letterman without remembering Johnny.

Why is his memory still such a remarkable presence for so many people today? Obviously, in my view, he had a powerful impact on us as individuals. He not only made us laugh, but he touched us at a much deeper level.

- We liked Johnny and we trusted him.

...People buy from people they like and trust.

(Your Reputation)

- He didn't hog the spotlight but made others feel important.

...The mainstay of his program was his guest interviews - more than 22,000 of them. He didn't talk about himself or try to 'one-up' his guests - see most talk show hosts today - but fed them setup lines, and made them look good.

(Sales Calls)

- He was prepared.

...He presented his monologue every night, and perhaps a skit, which was carefully constructed and rehearsed. He had the benefit of teleprompters, but when he got off track he knew his material well enough that he could continue with style.

(Presentation)

- He was relaxed and confident on stage.

...This was not Johnny's true nature. According to many who

knew him well, he was a quiet introvert who disliked crowds and was comfortable only with small groups of people he knew well. He described himself as 'shy'. His stage presence was the result of mental preparation and physical relaxation exercises prior to going on.

(Pre-Call Planning)

The most successful sales calls result from intense pre-call preparation. Read "Warm Up Before You Hit Your First Shot" from my book "Close More Sales!"

- He was calm and unflappable

...When he became host of The Tonight Show, his audiences were attracted by the contrast between Johnny and the show's previous host, Jack Paar, who was volatile and likely to blow up. This quality became a foundational part of his public persona.

(Handling Stress)

- He was flexible and spontaneous.

...When a joke bombed or he made a mistake, he laughed and recovered. Often, he made a joke, or used a facial expression and body language that said, "Oops!" He knew people are forgiving and don't expect you to be perfect.

(Sales Calls)

- He found humor in most situations.

...To combat his shyness, he became his class clown and performed magic tricks for local Rotary groups. He taught himself to be comfortable in front of others and to be funny by writing a humor column for his high school newspaper.

(Customer Relations)

- He was self-deprecating

...Johnny was able to laugh at himself and was usually the butt of his spontaneous humor. He took his job seriously, but never took himself seriously. This quality endeared Johnny to the public and many people believe it was the key to his longevity.

(Customer Relations)

- He was creative.

...His prepared material was original, current, succinct, and targeted precisely to achieve the desired objective. His spontaneous quips were his own, not canned sound bites taken from other comics.

(Consultative Solutions)

- He was focused

...Johnny was criticized for not chatting with his guests, or sparring with the audience during breaks. This saved his energy and material for the time he was "on" and allowed him to stay focused on keeping the main thing the main thing - performing for his TV audience.

(Closing More Sales)

- He started many others on the path to stardom.

...Perhaps the thing Johnny Carson was best known for was giving other comedians their career-making break. The list

of top stars who got their start on "The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson" is way to long to even begin to name here. He was unselfish and felt that he was here to help others.
(Leadership and Teamwork)

***"Talent alone won't make you a success. Neither will being in the right place at the right time, unless you are ready. The most important question is: "Are you ready?"
- Johnny Carson***

Johnny Carson's professional life, lived in front of millions of TV fans, can serve us well with examples of beliefs and behaviors that can help us all achieve and enjoy the success we seek.

Learn more by searching Johnny Carson at www.Yahoo.com

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