



BY RICK MCCORMICK

Circle of Development – Skillset

Three areas of skillset development are critical to success, but these skills do not come naturally for most of us, so they must be intentionally developed.

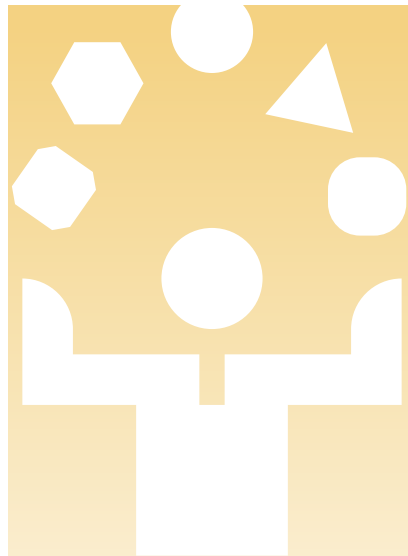
Everyone brings a certain level of personal and professional skills to the table when they enter the F&I profession. The natural ability to communicate and connect with others is hard to teach and easy to recognize. The ability to meet someone and immediately connect, get them laughing and making them comfortable is an invaluable skillset. As valuable as that is, you must consistently grow the skillset of moving people to take action. Larry Bird had a Hall of Fame career in the NBA and was naturally talented. Yet to excel at the NBA level he knew that excellence of performance would be the result of excellent practice. He would typically show up two hours before each game and take 300 practice shots to consistently grow his skills.

Three areas of skillset development are critical to a Hall of Fame career in F&I. These skills do not come naturally for most of us — they must be intentionally developed — so let's look at our skillset development plan.

SKILLFUL LISTENING

We have been duped. We have been told that we must persuade others to see things our way to move them to buy our products — mentally twist their arm, show our superior knowledge, and disprove any objection they raise. The descriptive words of a good presentation have been “pitching” and “convincing,” but the opposite is true.

Active listening with an emphasis on helping not selling, makes each customer aware that we understand them and their particular needs. Trust is built when you listen; while resistance is built when you talk. When you listen to learn, you un-



“A WINNER IS SOMEONE WHO RECOGNIZES HIS GOD-GIVEN TALENTS, WORKS HIS TAIL OFF TO DEVELOP THEM INTO SKILLS, AND USES THESE SKILLS TO ACCOMPLISH HIS GOALS.”

—LARRY BIRD, NBA HALL OF FAME

cover their needs, and that leads to a focus on the products that will help them have a great ownership experience. We should never attempt to sell a product unless the customer needs it. That means we should never present products until we have uncovered those needs. Develop skillful listening, and it will lead to a better process and a more profitable outcome.

EMPATHY

Empathy is one of the most valuable skills that we can learn. It allows you to bond with another person and enables you to understand their unique challenges, perspectives, and experiences. To truly identify with someone, you must be genuinely interested in them and their situation. Skillful conversation that reveals to the other person that you are genuinely seeking to understand them and how they feel will allow you to enter their world and seek to make it better. Our offerings should improve the customer's future, make risks more manageable and limit their exposure to unexpected expenses and what they could cost them. Our charisma, natural talent, and effective and genuine empathy is more effective than all the closing techniques we have been taught through the years.

COMMUNICATION

Skillful communication is more than just what you say. It includes your tone, timing, and how you lead the conversation. Effective communication should focus more on the questions you ask that lead them to talk, than the answers you provide to their objections. Two simple yet powerful habits can lead to more productive conversations: never interrupt while others are talking and nodding your head to show agreement encourages them to continue talking. The more they talk, the more you learn, and the more effective you will be in helping them gain the protection they need in connection with the major purchase of a vehicle.

Join me in the next few installments of Peak Performance to examine these more closely. Keep climbing! ■