

## Sales is a Competitive Sport

**T**he S in SMART stands for Skills. The development of selling skills is fundamental to anyone's success as a salesperson. Ensuring that sales team members acquire and continue to develop skills is a primary duty of every sales manager. I've found that many sales people underestimate the importance of building basic skills, and so do not invest anything like the time and effort in learning that they ought to.

Have you noticed that at sales conferences and dinners, it's often athletes who make keynote speeches and give presentations on everything from teamwork to motivation? It's not just because conference organizers want to get cool gear for themselves and their kids, although that may be part of it.

The parallels between selling and sports are so many and so obvious that perhaps everyone in sales takes it for granted. But for those people reading this who are not in sales, or are new to sales, it's worth laying out the similarities just to make sure the point is not missed.

Sales *is* competitive. Sure, people compete in every area of business. But sales is the place that attracts competitive people because it's *officially part of the job*.

In some business areas, competition can be a mixed blessing. People allow their competitive instincts to surface inside the company. They compete directly with their colleagues, and this can get in the way of communication and collaboration. It can generate mistrust. It drives internal company politics, power plays and personal agendas.

A lot of that dysfunctional behavior happens in sales too, of course. But sales people have a healthy outlet for their competitive instincts, and it's called, naturally enough, *the competition*. Some people go so far as to call it the *enemy*.

The enemy is anyone who can *beat* you to the deal, anyone who can stop you *winning*, anyone who's not clearly on your *team*. To win, you must have a *game plan*. You perform better if you *train*. Good managers are also good at *coaching*. Sales *is* a competitive sport, with stars, rules and trophies. Sales, like professional sports, can be a risky career, but with big rewards for the successful. With this in mind, it should be obvious why I've devoted a whole section in this book to the skills needed to be successful in sales. Can you imagine a football player, or a distance runner, or a downhill skier or a chess player, or any other competitive athlete who does not spend significant time on understanding and developing the skills needed