



## Lesson 3

### ***Take Risks: Show Up and Try***

If you were to play a word association game, you probably would not associate the words “risk taking” with Iowa. People usually associate words such as corn, beans, cows, or pigs. Contrary to perception, growing up in Iowa is a great place to learn how to take risks. In Iowa, however, it is not called risk taking: it’s called showing up and trying.

I learned this lesson well from my years on the West Bend Community High School dance team. Jan Gruber, our high school Spanish teacher, decided that West Bend needed a dance team. Many of my classmates had never seen a pair of dance slippers, much less a dance studio. In fact, the old term “can’t walk and chew gum” probably evolved from an observer

watching the first practices of our newly formed dance team. Jan Gruber didn't care about our lack of experience; she only cared that we showed up and tried. And we did, practicing for hours, learning how to work as a team.

After hours of practice, Jan decided that West Bend was ready to compete in their first dance competition. Because dance competition was in its infancy in Iowa, competing schools were not divided by class or size. Little West Bend Community High School would be competing against schools and teams four times our size. Some people might consider entering this type of competition risky. We didn't consider it a risk because we only knew one philosophy—*show up and try*.

Our first entry into competition resulted in winning first place and the showmanship award. It also resulted in my learning an important lesson:

**Show up and try. Sometimes you discover a talent you never knew you had and sometimes you become excellent.**

Small-town kids learn at an early age that you don't have to be good or excellent *before* attempting something new. In fact, because of the shortage of bodies, you can show up, try, and make it on the team . . . even if you're not that good! When comparing notes with friends who attended larger schools, they share the opposite philosophy. You had to be good before you even thought about auditioning for a group or sport. Unfortunately, it is at this point people learn a self-limiting belief: You have to be good before you can try a new endeavor. It is the ultimate chicken and egg scenario. (How do you ever get good at something if you never show up?)

The lesson of showing up and trying served me well in my first sales position with Varsity Spirit Corporation. Varsity is a classic David and Goliath story. Varsity was a new player in the market competing against the goliath of the industry, Cheerleader Supply, who was quadruple the size of Varsity. Cheerleader Supply had more reps, a bigger catalog, and better brand recognition. Varsity had five sales reps, a much smaller catalog, and no name recognition. Some people might view

signing on with this underdog company a risky situation and a waste of time. Thank goodness, the early sales team at Varsity didn't consider it a risk because of their past schooling in "showing up and trying."

In 1994 and 1995, Varsity Spirit Corporation was named by *Forbes Magazine* as one of the 200 fastest growing companies. In 2004, Varsity Spirit Corporation acquired the goliath, Cheerleader Supply. Amazing things happen when you show up and try.

## **How to Create A "Show Up and Try" Sales Culture**

Challenge your team and ask them why they are not showing up.

Areas of concern may be:

- The competition is bigger, therefore, the sales team perceives them to be better.
- The competition is better known, therefore, the team believes that the customer will not be responsive to meeting with a lesser-known brand.

- The team is uncomfortable approaching a new situation because it requires a different set of skills.
- The team believes they need to be perfect before they can try something new.

Then ask the most important question: How in the world do you get good at something if you don't show up and try?

A critical leadership skill in building a high-performing sales organization is teaching your team to show up and try . . . *before they are good!*

Here are a few ideas:

**1. Incorporate a “show up and try” section in your weekly/monthly sales meetings.**

Encourage your sales team to share the good, the bad, and the ugly. Get your team to share stories and apply lessons learned from the stories. John Maxwell, author of *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, states it best: “Experience gives you

the test first and the lesson second.” Teach your team to take the test and learn from mistakes.

**2. Emphasize that the successful and intelligent people in life have tried and failed more than their non-successful counterparts.**

The key is that smart people learn lessons from each failure. Do the math. If you show up and try ten times, fail ten times, learn ten lessons that will help you in the future, you are going to be *100 times smarter* than your competition. Think your team will be more open to failing after exploring that math formula?

**3. Form a “show up and try” club.**

Membership requires trying something that you aren’t good at or don’t think you are qualified to do. Keeping membership requires participants to try one activity per month that is uncomfortable. Reward the rep for trying the activity, regardless of results.

**Show me a sales team that will show up and try and I will show you a sales organization that can not and will not be beaten by the team that is waiting to get good before showing up.**

