

## **Why ‘Skillent’ should be the measure of every professional salesman.**

**By Rodney Webb, the 91% Guy**

‘Skillent’ is a word I coined to help make an important point about attitude and my approach to training. I define ‘skillent’ as a *skill* that has been practiced and developed till it looks like a natural, God-given *talent*. When you accept ‘skillent’ as the ultimate measure of your competence, you are freed from *self-imposed* limitations which are often the most crippling kind.

Talent is what you were born with and, while it may be great, it’s limited. No amount of will or determination can alter it. Skill is what you learn by training or experience and it is essentially unlimited, its growth governed by your decisions. ‘Skillent’ is the combination of the two and as skill becomes the greater component, the more it resembles talent.

The concept of ‘skillent’ can be especially liberating in a field like athletics or straight commission selling where a few bad games or missed sales can make you wonder if you’ve really got the stuff to be a champion. Hit a slump and you could come to believe that your success will be forever shaped by the limits of your natural gifts. Fact is, *talent* is only a starting point. Over time, it’s ‘skillent’ that makes the champion.

Consider this:

Tiger Woods is recognized as the best putter in golf. But he wasn’t born with a putter in his hand. There was once a time when his putting was worse than mine. But in the years since that time, he’s taken a few million putts that I haven’t taken. It’s said that every day, before he takes off his spikes, Tiger Woods sinks 100 putts in a row. If he

misses the 99<sup>th</sup>, he starts over. That kind of discipline is not a gift from God but an expression of will, a decision anyone can chose to make.

Michael Jordan is the best basketball player ever to play the game. Yet in the ninth grade, he lacked the talent to play for his high school basketball team. His natural *talent* was less than extraordinary, but his ultimate *skillent* was unmatched.

No doubt, as a boy, he recognized that others could run faster and jump higher, but at some point, the young Laney High School student determined that *no one* was going to work harder or practice smarter. From that moment up until his retirement, he practiced 500 jump shots every single day.

A young player watching Jordan's seemly effortless excellence might shrug and accept that he simply lacks the 'talent' to perform at Jordan's level. On the other hand, the young player who understands 'skillent', watches the master and is energized. He knows that Jordan's performance level *is* attainable – though it may take 800 practice shots a day. (To hear that message in Michael's own words, go to [nike.com/jumpman23](http://nike.com/jumpman23) and click on Jordan TV.)

Of course, Larry Bird was, by any objective standard, one of the least 'talented' players to step onto an NBA court, yet he ranks among the fifty best in 'skillent'. How fortunate for the Celtics he never accepted his limited *talent* as an excuse for less than excellent performance.

### **Skillent in Home Improvement Selling**

As I travel the country, speaking to home improvement salesmen, I'm usually introduced as "The 91% Guy-- the guy who closed nine out of ten leads a week for 72 weeks with a 6% rescission rate." It's a tough introduction to follow. The initial

reaction from the sales force is always, “No Way.” But by the time I leave, most of the salesmen believe such a performance level *is* possible and they understand how I did it. Unfortunately, far too many will set their personal goals well below that standard. They’ll settle for a ten or fifteen percent increase in close rate, shrug and say, “That’s good for *me*. I just don’t have Rodney’s *talent* .”

Nonsense.

In the sales business, qualities like ‘charisma’ and communications ability may add up to what is described as ‘a *talent* for sales’, but I’ve seen again and again with candidates of modest talent that the pivotal *skills* are as teachable as a foul shot and, like the foul shot, are refined through endless repetition. In screening sales candidates, I’ve found that a willingness to learn and a determination to master the skills is more important than natural sales ability.

### **If it’s repeatable, it’s perfectible**

The first step in building sales *skill* is to establish a disciplined process and a structured presentation. I teach a ten-step process I call SuperStar Selling™. It moves through the same distinct phases whatever the product, whatever the objections. There’s plenty of room for improvisation and spontaneity but always within the disciplined structure.

The structure is memorized and the presentation is committed to memory—much of it word for word.

The second step is to ‘practice the way you play’. In this business, the equivalent of Jordan’s practice shots is role-play. I recommend three sales meetings a week with individual salesmen role-playing in front of a group that knows the presentation verbatim.

The pressure of performing your presentation in front of your peers will reveal weaknesses that might never become apparent to you at the kitchen table.

## **Refining your game**

With a disciplined structure in place, the sales manager can act as coach, diagnosing the problems his salesmen are meeting and focusing his training meetings on the weakest elements in the presentation. As new objections emerge in the field, these can be explored in role-play at the sales meeting till most every objection has been handled and becomes part of the regular role-play drill.

Just as game films are a powerful diagnostic tool for the athlete, often the best way for a sales rep to recognize mistakes is to see a video of his performance in a role-play setting. While it's sometimes painful to see your mistakes in front of others, recognizing your mistakes-- and theirs-- raises the 'skillant' of the entire sales force.

There are many elements to an effective training program but the most important is an understanding that, in the end, 'skillant' is all that matters and your 'skillant' is *your* choice.

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