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How to Rewrite Your Future

Here's a sobering thought: Your future, and the future of your sales team, is already written. Your organization's history, circumstances, successes, and failures, coupled with your own management style, communication skills, and vision determine the level of performance that's possible for you and your sales team.

That's the bad news. The good news is you can completely rewrite the default future that lies ahead of you by applying the three laws of performance. In their new book, *The Three Laws of Performance: Rewriting the Future of Your Organization and Your Life* (Jossey-Bass, 2009), Steve Zaffron, CEO of the Vanto Group, and Dave Logan, senior partner of management consultancy CultureSync, explore how people and organizations elevated performance to unprecedented levels using these laws:

First Law: How people perform correlates to how situations occur to them. People often assume that the way they experience an event or interaction is the same way others experience it. But that's rarely true; situations occur differently for each person. How many times have you said to yourself, "Why is that person doing that? It doesn't make any sense!" And yet, if you got into that person's world and experienced the situation as it occurred to them, you would see their actions made perfect sense. Zaffron and Logan stress that leaders cannot control or determine how situations occur for others, but they do have a say in it. Ask yourself: "How can I interact with others so that situations occur more empowering to them?" And, "What processes, dialogues, or meetings can I arrange so that people can feel like coauthors of a new future, not merely recipients of others' decisions?"

Second Law: How a situation occurs arises in language. How situations occur is inseparable from language – spoken, written, body language, tone of voice, appearance, and so on. This also includes unsaid communications – assumptions, expectations, disappointments, resentments, regrets, interpretations, and so on. "The unsaid is the most important part of language when it comes to elevating performance," say Zaffron and Logan. That's because the unsaid clutters the conversational environment in much the same way that paper clutters a desk, leaving no space to work and create something new. "Before anything new can happen, people need to make space by doing the linguistic equivalent of clearing out closets," say the authors. That's not to say you need to let people air every passing thought; instead, "the point is to notice that there are issues constraining people because of what they aren't saying. When people can address and articulate the unsaid, space begins to open up."

Third Law: Future-based language transforms how situations occur to people. There are two different ways to use language. The first is descriptive, using language "to depict or represent things as they are or have been," explain the authors. The second is future-based. It "projects a new future that replaces what people see coming. It doesn't modify the default future; it replaces it." For instance, the authors point out that when Benjamin Franklin coined the term "American," he transformed 13 warring colonies into a nation – a feat that political analysts of the day predicted would never happen. Great leaders, they add, "listen for a future that inspires them and then they create a space that allows others to help them coauthor a new future."

Think about a performance challenge you're facing right now and you'll notice that you think about it in terms of past events. Your mind describes the problem based on what has already happened and the likelihood of whether it will happen again. "What if," say Zaffron and Logan, "you could substitute that future with another? Not one based on what's happened before, but something new? What if the future you see coming were to alter in its substance, going from default to invented?"

When you do that – when you substitute a future based on the present and past to one that's completely new – you'll discover that you begin "living into that future" now. "Rewriting your future," explain the authors, "alters how situations occur in the present." So go ahead – "fully create a blank space and then make declarations into that space" and you'll find yourself moving into a new, better future.