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Sometimes, Breakthroughs Hurt

A defining moment. You know, those experiences you have that alter your life forever and change who you are at your core; or who you are. Even years later, the experience I had delivering my very first keynote is etched in my mind. So clear, so vivid. (So painful!) This is the story of my greatest breakthrough moment that truly transformed my life, as I hope it does for you.

1989 - not long after I developed my own coaching system and became a full-time executive sales coach and trainer. Being one of the first to pioneer coaching, and more specifically carving out my niche as executive sales coach, I was fortunate to have gotten some positive exposure in the media that helped accelerate my career.

Around this time, Jack, one of my friends from college, mentioned that his company was looking for a keynote speaker and wanted to know if I was interested.

“Absolutely! My first opportunity to deliver a keynote,” I exclaimed. Jack passed my name along to the internal decision makers and after a few conversations, I secured my very first keynote.

I was glowing with excitement! The event wasn’t for another three months in California, but I felt compelled to start preparing immediately.

“My first opportunity to talk to an audience of a thousand people. The presentation just had to be perfect,” I thought.

Perfect. A word that years ago held a very different meaning to me than it does today.

Like millions of people across the world, I too suffered from a debilitating condition. And that condition was **perfectionism**, which also is also partnership with the **Control Freak**.

That's right. I know it's hard to believe but I'm a recovering perfectionist. (Still recovering).

Everything had to be perfect. I needed to be perfect. And this presentation had to be perfect as well.

Where Did This Mindset Come From?

I don't exactly know what triggered my perfectionism. I could reflect when I was in elementary school and could hypothesize that there were experiences I had as a child which may have flipped that switch.

Maybe it was because I was a chubby kid up through high school, or as my mom would call me, a "husky" kid.

Maybe it was because I didn't really have a lot of friends until I was in the seventh grade.

Maybe it was because I was one of the first kids to have braces at the young age of seven.

Or, maybe it could have stemmed from being ridiculed in class when I incorrectly answered a teacher's question.

Regardless of the specific defining event, it was clear that something deeply impacted me, my thinking, my personality, and that defining moment pushed me to choose that, for the rest of my life, to avoid those experiences from happening again, I'm going to be perfect.

And that's when the first chapter of the story was written.

"I'm getting into great physical shape. I'm going to be top of my class. I will have the most friends."

The Challenge with Being Perfect

This "perfectionist affliction" impacted me in other ways.

For example, I needed to be the perfect son. The perfect brother. The perfect student. The perfect friend. The perfect father. The perfect husband. The perfect businessman. The perfect salesperson. I needed to be in perfect physical shape, and of course, ensure I was the perfect coach, trainer, and speaker.

During this earlier part in my career, I was fortunate to have a wonderful coach in my corner. With all the value I received from coaching, this was the one area that I pushed back and resisted on the most.

It wasn't soon after our first coaching session when she noticed this debilitating mindset. As she continued to call me out on my perfectionism, coaching session after coaching session, my initial reaction would always be, "So what. I'm a perfectionist. Isn't that a good thing? I mean, don't you want to strive for excellence in everything you do?"

Striving for Excellence or Striving for Perfection?

I took a strong stand around this, viewing perfectionism as a good thing. After all, it worked for me, or so it seemed. The quest for perfection consumed me, in every area of my life. While I can contribute much of my success to this perfectionist-driven mindset, paradoxically, it also contributed to my demise, as I soon realized this success from striving for perfection came at a great cost.

Back to the keynote. It was December, and I was scheduled to speak in Las Angeles at the beginning of March.

As mentioned, I got right to work on this hour-long keynote as soon as the engagement was finalized.

“I have one hour to make an impact and deliver value,” I thought.

For those of you who present in front of a group, it’s just best practice to start outlining the topics and talking points of your presentation.

After completing the outline and topics of discussion, I thought, “This is good, but an outline isn’t enough. I need to know exactly what I’m going to **say** so that I can be sure the timing works out to be under an hour. And I want to make sure everything I say is going to be, well, perfect.”

So, I proceeded on **scripting out** the entire hour-long keynote, which came out to about thirty type written pages.

“Great, I now know every word of this presentation,” I thought. “But I don’t know what I’m going to **sound** like when I deliver this keynote. After all, I need to command the stage and

ensure I have strong stage presence, as well as make sure that my pace, tone, inflection, volume, and message is clearly demonstrated.

So, I then proceeded on **audio taping** myself delivering the keynote.

“This is good,” I thought “but I don’t know what I **look** like when delivering this presentation. After all, body language sends a powerful message to your audience and I need to ensure that my verbal message is aligned with my physical message, and make sure I don’t display any detrimental habits when delivering a keynote that I’m unaware of.

So, I **videotaped** myself delivering my keynote.

Sidenote from the Coach: At this point in the story, you may be reading this and thinking “So what’s your point here, Keith? This makes perfect sense to take all these steps to prepare and deliver a successful keynote.” Welcome to the party. You’re a perfectionist!

The Final Painful Lesson

Three months of editing. Three months of ongoing audiotaping and videotaping myself to ensure my presentation was perfect.

I obsessed over this keynote up until the point when it was time to leave for the airport and head out to Los Angeles.

I arrived two days prior to my keynote, just to be safe and to adjust to the time difference.

Jack, my buddy who got me this gig asked me if I wanted to play golf, go out for dinner, even meet for coffee. I told him, "I needed to prepare. I need to be ready."

Well, the day finally arrived. I was nervous but felt prepared. Dozens of revisions, innumerable practice runs and here I was. Ready to deliver.

The conference was being held in an older venue. It was a large auditorium, one that could easily seat approximately 1,000 people. This being an industry event, vendors were lined up around the perimeter of the room, touting their products, and services.

In the middle of the conference hall were dozens of round tables, each of which could seat about 20 people. While they had lined up a couple of other speakers, I was going to be the last to deliver my keynote, and then dinner would be served.

The industry conference kicked off at 10am and I was scheduled to talk towards the end of the day, before dinner. There were two other speakers who were going to be delivering a quick presentation before mine.

Whether you've never delivered a presentation, or you're used to doing so, there are some baseline best practices and guidelines to always adhere to.

1. If you want to engage with your audience, make sure you have a wireless or lavalier mic so that you can walk on and off the stage.
2. Be your authentic you and trust yourself and your message.
3. Focus on the audience, not you.
4. Ensure there are no external distractions or noise that would compete with you.
5. And finally, never speak when food or alcohol is being served. I learned a long time ago that, while I can overcome practically all distractions, the three things I can't compete with are food, laptops, and phones.

As the day progressed, the room was buzzing with excitement and filled with energy. People networked and pitched their products. Relationships were being forged. It was evident that those in attendance were truly passionate about what they did.

But I stayed focused, obsessing, "Okay, it's three hours before I speak." Then it was two hours, then one, and finally it was time for me to present.

The other two speakers began their presentations in rotation. The MC made his way to where I was waiting to tell me, "As soon as this person finishes their presentation, you're on."

It was finally time. Time to let people know who I was and how I can enrich their lives. Time to deliver value and make the impact I always wanted to. Time to shine with the perfect presentation!

"To confirm, you won't be serving dinner until I finish with my keynote, correct?" I wanted to confirm this with the MC.

“Correct, you go on then, when you’re finished, we are going to serve dinner.”

I sat anxiously awaiting the moment of truth. In my hand, I had the thirty pages of my keynote printed. I rehearsed my presentation until the very last moment. And then I heard...

“Ladies and gentlemen”

It was time.

“All the way from the East coast.”

“Holy shit” I thought. “Here comes my introduction.” My heart rate jumped.

“Please give a warm welcome to Keith Rosen!”

I stood up from my table and made my way towards the stage. As I walked up the stairs to the stage, the MC handed me a corded microphone.

“Wait, where’s the wireless lavalier mic?” I asked.

“Sorry, the battery died, and you’re going to have to use the corded mic. Just put it in the mic holder when you go up to the podium.”

The MC handed me the mic as I made my way to the podium. I placed the thirty pages of my presentation on the podium. As instructed, I placed the microphone in the holder and began my presentation.

“So far, so good,” I thought to myself. “It’s time to walk off the stage and engage the audience.” I picked up the mic of the podium and began walking to the other side of the stage where I was going to walk down the stairs.

Well, that didn’t work out so well. You see, since it was a chorded mic, the chord, while long enough for me to walk down the stairs, and onto the floor, was stuck under what could have been the heaviest podium in the world that you could not move.

So, there I was on stage, only able to move about eight feet from one side of the podium to the other. I felt like a dog on a leash. I started to panic.

“Okay Keith. You can work through this. It’s not the end of the world. Just keep on going.”

I walked back to the podium and placed the mic in its holder. My notes were in front of me. Every single word that came out of my mouth was printed on these thirty pages.

Do you remember the best practices and guidelines I shared earlier about public speaking?

I didn’t notice it at first, but directly above my head was a massive air-conditioning vent. I was about twenty minutes into my presentation when the air conditioning kicked on.

But that wasn’t the problem. The problem was that the vent above my head blew so loudly and strongly that it blew all my notes off the podium and all over the stage.

Yup, that’s right, ***every single page*** that I was relying on to deliver the perfect presentation was now scattered all over the stage floor.

I picked up my notes, now all out of order, placed them on the podium and did my best to continue without the crutch of my written presentation in front of me.

While delivering my keynote, I was simultaneously judging myself. “I’m screwing this up. I’m forgetting sentences, paragraphs.” The stress and fear started to take hold of me.

I continued my presentation, doing my best to salvage what I thought was turning out to be one of the worst moments of my life.

And then it happened. You guessed it, not halfway through my presentation, dinner was being served!

I was getting flustered and thrown off guard. “What happened to waiting to serve dinner after I was done with my presentation?”

Looking out at the audience, I felt that I lost at least half of them, as they shifted their focus to the dinner that was placed in front of them.

I forged ahead but I was no longer present in the moment, as if I was having an out of body experience. Words were coming out of my mouth, hoping they made sense, but I wasn’t listening to what I was saying.

I was stuck in my head. While the audience enjoyed their dinner, I was too busy preoccupied about what an abomination this presentation was.

“Just five more minutes and I’m done. The show must go on.”

Those five minutes felt like five hours. When I finished my keynote, I thanked the audience and walked off stage.

And here’s where it got interesting. People clapped. However, I didn’t hear them.

After dinner, some of the companies came up to me and asked for my business card. I was even hired by one of the companies to do work with their sales team while I was there.

I didn't care.

The person running the event, told me what a good job I did. He even invited me back to present at next year's conference.

I wasn't listening.

I was stuck in my internal narrative. All I could think about was what a failure this was. And what a failure I was.

I didn't care about the accolades or the new client, which would normally be a good indication that I must have done something right.

At that point, I was at an all-time low.

I pasted a fake smile on my face for the rest of the event. But in my heart, and in my head, I told myself a different story.

"I'm NEVER doing any type of public speaking again. I'm done coaching. I don't deserve to have any clients. I failed. This was FAR from the perfect presentation I envisioned delivering for the last several months."

I even considered moving to a Caribbean island and starting a new career renting out Jet Skis.

When the event ended, Jack came up to me, also sharing his positive review of my delivery.

"Are you crazy?" I said. "Did you not see what happened to me on the stage?"

We left the venue and walked over to a local restaurant. As soon as we sat down at the table, I unloaded on him.

The mic, the pages blowing off the podium, dinner being served, the content in my presentation, and lines that I forgot to deliver.

Jack cut me off cold. "Wait, just stop for a second."

With a factional tone he continued. "First, I didn't even notice that the mic was stuck under the podium because no one knew your plan."

Second, it was a blip in your presentation when you had to pick up you notes, and you continued without hesitation.

Finally, when dinner was served, I was still engaged.

And do you really think the audience knew what content you didn't deliver or what you changed in your presentation because you didn't have your notes in front of you?

C'mon Keith. It's not like everyone was sitting there with a copy of your presentation in their hands reviewing it for accuracy."

***If you strive to be perfect, when everyone around you is human,
How do you foster deeper authentic relationships?***

The Transformational Moment

Then it happened. My defining moment. The floodgates opened. A rush of memories and experiences **flooded** my mind.

The conversations I had with my coach suddenly became clear to me.

I finally got it. And more important, I *owned* my perfectionism.

“Wow, I’m such a perfectionist! I exclaimed. “And I’m getting in my own way!”

My epiphany. *In an instant, what I have been viewing as my greatest strength suddenly became my greatest weakness.*

Being Human vs. Being Perfect

It was at that defining moment when I started welcoming myself back to the human race. After all it’s a lot easier, more enjoyable, and less stressful being human, your authentic self, and living from a place of self-acceptance, instead of striving to be perfect, and continually beating yourself up and making yourself wrong for not being perfect – an exercise in futility.

Our global society is referred to as the

Human race.

Not the perfect race.

Besides, how can you connect with other people, and build authentic relationships if everyone around you is human and you’re trying to be perfect?

And is there such thing as **perfect**? Perfection defined means, “flawless. An ideal standard, and completely free from faults or defects.”

Based on this definition, perfection is an unattainable illusion we strive to achieve, but never do!

The Universal Test

About a month after delivering this keynote in Los Angeles, I had an opportunity to deliver another keynote at a business convention in New Jersey.

To demonstrate to myself that I really did get this lesson, this experience was totally different.

I trusted myself, I trusted what I knew. I trusted who I was. I trusted what I was an expert in. And most importantly, I made it 100% about the audience, focusing on the value I can give, rather than making it about me, how I’m showing up, how I look, and what I can get.

When I walked up onto the stage, I didn’t bring any notes with me. I finally learned what the greatest speakers and coaches have learned. I shifted my focus from delivering from my *head* and listening to that negative inner voice, to delivering, connecting, and speaking from my *heart*; allowing my authentic, unique self to emerge.

Regardless of what you’re doing, if you trust your heart, who you are, and what you know, the message will always be there. That’s when your true gifts and value emerge and when you start making a transformational difference in the lives of others. Because now, they FEEL your passion, commitment, energy, connection, expertise, and an authentic desire to make their lives better.

***Rather than striving to be perfect,
Embrace being human, instead.***

Perfectionist Self-Assessment

Here are ten questions to self-reflect on and assess how much of a perfectionist you are.

1. Are you often disappointed and frustrated in others because they don't meet your expectations or strive to live up to the same standards as you do? How does this affect the relationships you have?
2. Are there people who have "let you down" throughout your life or career? What happens when people, (friends, family, co-workers, team, boss) don't live up to the expectations you have of them?
3. Are you often disappointed in yourself for not being more productive or successful in everything you do?
4. Do you spend more time focusing on what you're not doing or what's wrong, rather than what you are doing and achieving?
5. Do you travel on the path of acceptance of yourself and others, or do you spend more time making people wrong and negatively judging people, including yourself?
6. After completing an assignment or project, such as a proposal, writing an article or a newsletter, how much additional time do you take to make sure it's, how do you say; "Ready."
7. Are you satisfied in every area of your life? If not now, then when?
8. When completing a project, task, or goal, or when you make a sale or achieve your quarterly number, is that sense of achievement fleeting or long-lasting? (When is enough, enough?)
9. Do you find yourself often building evidence to support your case, making yourself right, or focusing all your energy prove your point? Are you rarely, "wrong?"
10. Do you measure your success based on external factors, results, and what you do, rather than who you are?

Getting Back to Human

So, are you a perfectionist? Keep in mind, there are varying degrees of perfectionism that show up in all areas of your life.

Realize you don't have to choose between feeling fulfilled and satisfied and wanting to achieve bigger goals or strive for excellence. You can have both; fulfillment in your life and in your career while enjoying the pursuit of lifelong learning, continued development and meaningful, value-driven goals.

I'll never forget the question I asked my coach after sharing this story with her that clearly illustrated how deep my perfection went!

"So, if I let go of and stop striving to be perfect will that, by default make me perfect?"

My point is, chances are, you've been carrying around this burden of perfection most of your life. Remember, give yourself permission to let go. Respect the fact that this will take time.

After all, 30 years later, and I'm still a recovering perfectionist! The difference now is, you have a deep awareness when you fall into the perfectionist trap. Now, you have the power to make the choice not to.

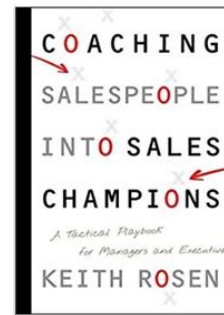
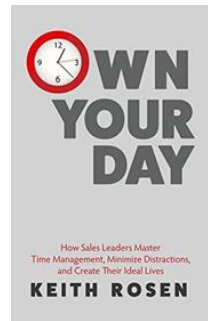
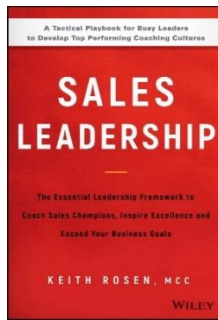
Embrace your humanity. Life works a whole lot better, your relationships improve, and you achieve more with less pressure when you embrace being human rather than striving to be perfect.

PS - And if you found any typos, great. I chose not to review it to make it perfect 😊

PSS - I wrote this ten years ago. It just wasn't ready to be published because it wasn't perfect.

-ENDD-

KR KEITH ROSEN
makeithappen



[Schedule A Call](#)
with Keith!



- Global Authority on Sales and Leadership
- CEO of Profit Builders and Executive Sales Coach
- Author of, *Coaching Salespeople into Sales Champions* and *Sales Leadership*

Keith (KeithRosen.com) is the CEO of Profit Builders, named one of the Best Sales Leadership Coaching organizations worldwide. Since 1989, Keith delivered his programs to over 3 million sales leaders in practically every industry: on six continents and in over 75 countries.

Inc. magazine and **Fast Company** named Keith one of the five most influential executive coaches. He's been featured in Entrepreneur, Inc., Fortune, The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal. Keith has written several best-sellers including, [Own Your Day](#), [Coaching Salespeople into Sales Champions](#), winner of Five International Best Book Awards and the #1 best-selling sales management coaching book on Amazon for the last 7 consecutive years. His latest book, [Sales Leadership](#), was named the 2018 Sales Book of the Year.

Keith was also featured on the award-winning television show, Mad Men and was one of the first coaches who earned the distinguished Master Certified Coach designation credentialed through the International Coach Federation.

As a leader in the coaching profession, Keith was inducted in the inaugural group of the **Top Sales Hall of Fame**.

Keith was named The 2009 **Sales Education Leader of the Year** and was honored as having one of the top 25 Sales and Leadership Blogs for the last 5 years.

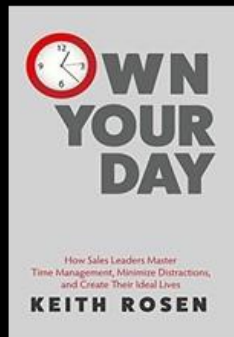
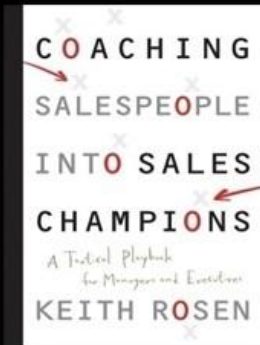
He was named one of the **50 Best Salespeople of all time**, along with Zig Ziglar, Steve Jobs, Dale Carnegie and Jeff Bezos and the **top 50 Speakers** of 2018-2020 by Top Sales World.

If managers aren't coaching, salespeople aren't selling. For more information about Keith's coaching or [sales leadership coach training program](#), contact Keith at KeithR@KeithRosen.com.



KEITH ROSEN

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Connect With Keith!

- Develop the Language and Habit of Coaching -

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