



Dealing with Dry Spells

8 Safe Routes That Lead Out of the Desert

You're having a great year. Money just seems to flow to you. Your telephone keeps ringing with potential clients, or your waiting room is filled everyday with patients. You don't even have to look for new business. It is knocking your door down. Life is a joy. Ever had a week, month or quarter like this? I have. It seems that nothing can stop the momentum – or so I thought.

Then it happens! Suddenly every lead dries up. Your waiting room is empty for days on end. Customers start calling – not to take orders but to complain. Every move you make seems to hit a dead end. Your staff becomes disheartened and they turn on you. Machinery starts breaking down. Your web site goes down. You dread waking up and going in to the office each day. Suddenly your dream job has become a nightmare and you just want to stay in bed to prevent things from getting worse. Ever been there? I have. I was miserable. But I started taking steps to get back on track. At the suggestion of my mentor, I made a list of what I did so I could help you out when you get caught there, too. There is a way out of the desert of depression and loss. 8 Steps to be exact. Here they are and enjoy the journey on your way out.

1. Recognize the process. Remember that ups and downs happen all the time in everyone's life and business. That's what life is about. That's what drives the market. Look back at your own record. Was everything always rosy and successful? My guess is: probably not. Ask yourself these questions to get yourself back on track with your process:

- *Am I underestimating my own worth?* Dry spells cause us to get depressed and blame ourselves for everything. Remember that clinically speaking, depression is anger turned inward. Quit your personal blame game and recognize that you aren't always going to win every case, close every sale or please every customer. Not every sales trainer is as successful as he or she portrays themselves to be. One time while wandering in the desert of a temporary slump, my friend, Joe Bonura advised that I listen to some motivational tapes. I said, "Which ones?" He said, "Your own. They are very good." Joe got me back on course by restoring my self worth.
- *Am I comparing myself with others?* When we are down we immediately look at how others are doing better than ourselves to continue putting ourselves down. Odds are,

the other had dry spell, too. Henry Ford failed in business seven times before succeeding. Dustin Hoffman was voted “Least Likely to Succeed” by his fellow classmates in a prestigious Hollywood acting school. George Washington was blamed for starting a war on two continents long before the American Revolution. Abraham Lincoln lost several elections before being elected President of the United States.

- *Am I measuring things I can't control?* Are you blaming yourself for people's actions and reactions or systems beyond your influence? Sometimes in trying to make a sale or pleasing a customer, there are events that occur that you have no control over. People don't always react the way we expect. Events happen in the course of history and human nature that we can't change or stop. The tragic events of September 11, 2001 caused not only death and terror, but economic slides that many haven't recovered from yet. There was no way anyone could see that coming when they made their investments prior to those events.

- *Am I losing my sense of perspective?* Are you taking yourself too seriously? Are you thinking that the good times were better than they actually were? Are you puffing up your ego so much that you can't live up to your own standards? When we get depressed we tend to exaggerate the past and the truth dies with it. We use phrases like “Everyone,” “Always,” and “Never.” We think irrational. We generalize situations and our performance so that we have an inaccurate view of how we performed when things were better.

2. Take a rest. Slumps, or dry spells, cause us to try harder to correct ourselves. We wind up working harder and wearing ourselves out. We wear ourselves out and only find that we have dug our rut deeper. Like trying to nail Jello to a tree it becomes an exercise in futility. You need to rest your body and get plenty of sleep. Don't do your chores. Reduce your sugar and caffeine intake and start taking care of yourself. You need to be ready to perform when you get out of the desert. Don't resort to medications to rest your body. Let the natural systems you were given take over and do what they were intended to do. Take a sabbatical from wearing yourself out with work. Develop a healthy exercise routine. Proper exercise can rejuvenate your body and help you get negative energy out. I work out regularly and I find it helps to go particularly when I am frustrated. I get my frustrations out at the gym.

3. Learn to manage criticism. Don't let your critics get you down. Stop believing them. Consider the source(s) of the criticism. Are these people accurate? Do they know you well enough to criticize you? A friend once told me not to let strangers get me down because they don't know me well enough to hate me...yet. Are you taking the criticism personally? Are you being discerning in your self evaluation of the criticism? Are your critics accurate? I make 20-30 marketing calls in my daily plan every week. In almost two years I have only been hung up on three times. If I let those few get to me, I am not only taking it personally, I am not letting the phenomenal results I have had tell me that this is a great record! Can you respond to your critics with kindness? Can you walk away from your critics with a pure heart and give them nothing to throw back at you? Nothing stifles a critic like kindness. It lets them know they didn't get to you.

4. Set boundaries. Know what you are willing to take on and start saying no to anything outside of that boundary. Sit down and make a list of criteria for your life. Guard it ruthlessly. Don't violate your own principles. Keep your boundaries and others will keep them. If you are caught violating your rules others will take advantage of that as a perceived weakness and start to encroach on your territory. Stay away from Controllers. We get addicted to saying "yes", and hate ourselves for not saying "no." Stay away from Manipulators. They use guilt, intimidation, etc. Stay away from Complainers. They tend to dump their garbage on anyone who will take it. After a while you will stink even to yourself from everyone else's trash. Remember that people who are depressed tend to collect others who are negative and depressed. More and more people who are depressed gather at your self-initiated wake. Before you know it, you are overwhelmed with (and at the mercy of) a full-scale pity party.

5. Don't change your success habits. I heard Chipper Jones, slugger for the Atlanta Braves, talking one time in an interview about how he dealt with a batting slump. He said that he often started trying to over compensate and it caused him to neglect the basic principles that made him a successful hitter. Batting coaches know to always emphasize patience and the fundamentals when a player gets into a slump. If you are a salesperson, go out and do what you did when you were succeeding. Slow down. The panic will come through in your voice if you are not careful. Go back to the basics of asking very good questions. One time the Green Bay Packers got defeated in a Sunday game that they easily should have won. On Monday morning, their legendary coach, Vince Lombardi waked into the team meeting with a ball in his hand. "Gentlemen," he said, "this is a football." He brought the team back to the basics of what they were there to do.

6. Refresh your spirit. Read books and listen to tapes that help you relax and not think about your work load. Learn meditation techniques and relax. Make this a routine to help you pace yourself when you get back on the winning side. Some steps to take in refreshing your spirit are:

- Expose yourself to good news everyday.
- Cultivate a childlike sense of awe
- Use nature and beauty to inspire you
- Establish routines that refresh your spirit.
- Guard your heart. Watch your love life—your love for people.
- Look for patterns: remember your past successes (and failures that turned into success).

7. Develop a support team. Every time I find myself in the desert, I have several people I can turn to that encourage and support me. My wife, my mentor, the members of my profession and several others are always there to lift me back up. One day I was having a particularly bad morning on the telephone. It seemed that everyone I talked with was negative and taking it out on me. By the fourth person I decided that I needed to talk to someone positive before I called anyone else. I knew that if I didn't, I would let their negativity influence me and make me negative, too. So I called my friend Terre. She uses the same methods I use in marketing and she understands the ups and downs of a typical day in our business. In a few minutes she rejuvenated me and got me back on track. She reminded me of what it takes to be successful and told me how she admired the success I

had achieved through doing what I was doing. By the way, later that day I had one of the most successful moments in weeks. I called her the next morning to celebrate the good news with her – and thank her for her help.

8. Re-enlist in your purpose. Understand why you exist. Dry spells make us forget what we are in the game for in the first place. You fell like the old joke about the guy up to his neck in alligators who is distracted from his original mission: to drain the swamp. Rick Warren has written a great best seller, *The Purpose-Driven Life*. In it he writes about finding out what your mission/purpose on this planet is and staying focused on it. Use the dry spell to become creative and re-connect with what your passion is. Find ways to re-direct your energies into efforts that produce results.

As John Maxwell says, when life knocks you down, pick up something on your way back up off the floor. During my latest dry spell I began putting my first book together. I updated my web site shopping cart. I generated more business in areas that I had never attempted before. It turned out that I made more income in that month than the previous 19! Not bad for someone “stuck in a desert.” What is your purpose? What do you delight in? Are you enlisted in it fully? Are you distracted from the eternal and long-lasting by the problems of the immediate? Think globally, but begin to act locally and you will find your purpose will direct your path out of your wilderness of despair. It’s not as desolate as you think.

Permission is granted to reprint this article provided the following paragraph is included in full:

Jim Mathis, CSP is an international Certified Speaking Professional, executive coach and trainer. To subscribe to his free personal and professional development newsletter, please send an email to: subscribe@jimmathis.com with the word SUBSCRIBE in the subject. An electronic copy will be sent out to you every month. For more information on how Jim and his programs can benefit your organization or group, please call 888-688-0220, or visit his web site: www.jimmathis.com.