

SALES TRAINING NOTES

Challenge Coins

October 2024

You know, one of the things I give to every person who graduates from my Sales Academy or Sales Management Academy class is a Challenge Coin. And I thought you should be aware of the history behind this tradition. You see, a challenge coin is a small coin or medallion bearing an organization's insignia or emblem and carried by the organization's members. Traditionally, they might be given to prove membership when asked and to enhance morale. Service members and law enforcement personnel also collect them. Historically, unit commanders presented challenge coins in recognition of exceptional achievement by a unit member. They could also be exchanged in recognition of visits to an organization.

Several stories detail the origins of the challenge coin. Many originate in popular culture based on current events. However, one story resonates with me, and I want to tell it to you.



According to this story, challenge coins originated during World War I. Before the United States entered the war in 1917, American volunteers from all parts of the country filled the newly formed flying squadrons of the Army and Naval Air Service. Some were wealthy scions attending colleges such as Yale and Harvard who quit in mid-term to join the war.

A wealthy lieutenant ordered medallions struck in solid bronze in one squadron and presented them to his unit. One young pilot placed the medallion in a small leather pouch around his neck. Shortly after acquiring the medallion, the pilot's aircraft was severely damaged by ground fire. He was forced to land behind enemy lines and was immediately captured by a German patrol. To discourage his escape, the Germans took all his identification except for the small leather pouch around his neck. In the meantime, he was taken to a small French town near the front. Taking advantage of a bombardment that night, he escaped. However, he was without personal identification. He avoided German patrols by donning civilian attire and reached the front lines. With great difficulty, he crossed no man's land. Eventually, he

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stumbled onto a French outpost. Saboteurs had plagued the French sector. They sometimes masqueraded as civilians and wore civilian clothes. Not recognizing the young pilot's American accent, the French thought him to be a saboteur and made ready to execute him. He had no identification to prove his allegiance, but he did have his leather pouch containing the medallion. He showed the medallion to his would-be executioners, and one of his French captors recognized the squadron insignia on the medallion. They delayed his execution long enough for him to confirm his identity. Instead of shooting him, they gave him a bottle of wine.

Back at his squadron, it became a tradition to ensure that all members always carried their medallion or coin. This was accomplished through challenge in the following manner: a challenger would ask to see the medallion; if the challenger could not produce a medallion, they were required to buy a drink of choice for the member who challenged them. If the challenged member produced a medallion, the challenging member had to pay for the drink. This tradition continued throughout the war and many years after the war while surviving squadron members were still alive.

I tell you this story to explain why I started giving Challenge Coins to each person who attended a Sales Academy or Sales Management Academy here in Springfield. This is your way of showing anyone you participated in and graduated from the academy. I believe it is essential to learn something so powerful that it can change your life. When you do that, you should have a memento to prove that you completed the course and can do the job. I am so proud of all of you who have attended my class and received the Challenge Coin. To me, it is a humbling experience, and I know many of you feel the same way. So let's always make it produce the sales it was intended to create and let's all Get Your Cookie!

Jack