

Secrets of Team Selling



Consumers may shop from their phones, but face-to-face selling has never been more valuable.

BY MARK OKUN

One of the many disruptions that the digital revolution has caused is the renewed importance of face-to-face selling. In the past, the salesperson's role was a solitary endeavor, conducted one on one.

The need to adopt a team selling approach is all about access — to information, to purchasing items 24/7 365, to a comfortable alternative to the salesperson, or to the showroom that didn't "get" the client.

The goal of any client interaction is to understand their motivating needs. As their mission becomes clear, providing the correct type of communication throughout the sales process will yield the best result.

THE INTERNET DID IT

How did this new speed bump in the age-old sales process happen? The internet. Many changes are blamed on the internet, but this one holds true. Amazon® and eBay started in 1995 and in the short span of 23 years — one generation — we

have witnessed a complete about-face in digital competition. Once thought of as a scary place to share your credit card, the web has morphed into a trusted resource for research and shopping.

According to a *Forbes* Insights/Synchrony Financial survey of 250 retailers representing significant sectors of big-purchase retailing, "Retailers indicate that customers like to browse the internet to research major products, but when it comes to making an actual purchase, they prefer to do it in person, in the store, according to almost half of retailers (46 percent)."

The survey also indicated most customers (82 percent) conduct their research online, and the majority feel that information on the web does not eliminate the need for sales associates who are experts. In fact, friendly, helpful, and knowledgeable sales associates are the main reasons that inspire an in-store visit.

TEAM SELLING IS NOT NEW

While team selling might seem like a new concept, it is not — but it has changed with the times. For

readers of this column with limited sales experience, I want to introduce you to the "TO." The "T" in "TO" does not stand for Team; it means Turnover.

Think about the typical process of buying a new car. When a salesperson was unable to close the sale, or if there was a demand the salesperson was unable to authorize, the client was "turned over" to a manager who was better at making the sale.

As you can imagine, this insensitive activity creates an uncomfortable, or even an adversarial, engagement for the client. Team selling is always a better solution because this synergy creates more options for the client.

The "TO" process was the beginning of team selling: two or more people working in conjunction with a client to make a sale. Today there is a spin to this method that makes engagement a benefit to the client and not an area of pressure. The change happens when we substitute the word "harmony" for the word "conjunction." While the ultimate goal is to sell the customer lighting and associated items, we also want to foster our personal and business image while we build a client for life.

TEAM SELLING, NOT "TO"

In every sales scenario, you want to build rapport and use discovery questions to find out the customer's real needs. One of the differentiating factors in lighting showroom sales that separates it from other types of selling is the breadth of knowledge required to do the best job for the client. Team selling is the learning solution. It builds the working knowledge of the sales force while presenting to the customer that this showroom cares enough to provide the proper human-to-human assistance.

The goal of team selling is to help the customer make smart choices, not make them start the sales process from the beginning with a different person or introduce a hard closer. When the "TO" technique was done, the original salesperson would exit immediately after introducing the next salesperson and a hard sell would begin.

THE POWER OF TEAM

Today, team selling is not turning over the sale to another, but adding to it. When you want to bring a second team member into the sales conversation, the first salesperson asks the client for permission to do so.

"The chandelier you selected is beautiful. We

spoke about dimming controls, and Jane recently returned from a seminar on the best controls. Can I bring her over to make sure we have the latest information to select the correct product for your application?"

After introducing the next person as an additional expert in any area that supports or adds on to the purchase, the original team member stays there. The benefits are twofold: The client gets the best information that will assist them, and the first salesperson receives either assistance in closing or a learning experience.

The introduction from the first salesperson includes questions, concerns, or asks the second for clarification on a product category. Don't overdo it, keep it to a maximum of three inquiries.

While this appears that the original salesperson is the subordinate of the second, this process is most potent when the team members are all on the same product knowledge level and use team selling to make the client experience better, leading to more closed sales.

The second salesperson introduces themselves to the client with a "We can do this together" temperament. This approach will instill a level of comfort with the customer.

The critical client response comes after you have exclaimed the expert status of the person you will introduce and that response is in the option of them saying "Yes" or "No." It is not in anyone's best interest if we create an uncomfortable feeling in the client. If the customer says "Yes," go to the next step and get the second person. If they

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say no, agree with their choice and move to a pure close on the product in question.

This sales process does not explicitly define when or who to bring into the sale. The concept is to select the partner who will deliver a corresponding sales message in a way that supports what has been already presented and adds information to the presentation.

TEAM SELLING APPLICATION

Team selling can extend to every department, but it must begin with the sales team before expanding to other areas. As lighting showrooms increase their product offerings and other retail channels add lighting to their mix, team selling becomes a natural process that benefits all involved.

The first challenge is creating a team selling process, the basics of which are knowledge, respect, and communication. Being an overall expert in a lighting showroom is no small task. Have team members begin by mastering one or two specific product categories. This does not mean learn "only" one or two product categories; this means "master" them. Many times a salesperson will only offer clients the products or services that they are comfortable with, which can leave the customer blind to the complete product and service offerings available. It also limits the maximum revenue potential.

Here's a true example of a team selling effort: The salesperson with the client was a skilled presenter and closer. She knew about color coordination, style, and design, but her sales performance history indicated less than a complete sale (a complete sale is when the client purchased the desired item plus the ancillary items). Through coaching conversations, it was uncovered that

the lack of side sell items was directly related to her timing and self-confidence when presenting those products. The team selling approach helped her sell more add-ons and gave her first-hand, real-time exposure to techniques that helped her present more options and increased her skills.

The process that bolstered both revenue and the client experience was based on team selling commitments. This team was committed to the success of the other associate and the growth of the showroom. While salesperson "A" was a great presenter and closer, salesperson "B" was not, but "B" was a lamp and control system savant. They worked together supporting each other, and the results were measurably better. Both "A" and "B" knew each other's strengths and weaknesses. When "A" was with a client, "B" kept an eye out for the signal that indicated it was time to swing by. "B" would approach and say in an excited way, "Mary, those great new LED lamps we have been waiting for are here...oh, I'm sorry I didn't realize you were with a client." Looking at the client, "B" says, "You're lucky to be able to have these available now." "B" then walks away. This was all that "A" needed to remind her to present the "new" LED lamps.

The need to practice the craft of sales is not optional. The sales team that is properly educated and well-rehearsed will provide a harmony in their presentation that will give clients a sense that they are in the right place to get their lighting. On the other hand, when team selling efforts look like an exit from a clown car, the image is not flattering. It makes clients uncomfortable and they will question every detail of the interaction.

TEAM SELLING SUCCESS

Every successful team will encounter obstacles and struggles in their efforts to implement team selling. With all the speed bumps the digital revolution has given to maneuver around, they need to reduce or, better yet, eliminate any internal competition between team members.

Each person on the team must be willing and able to play both lead and support positions, regardless of their hierarchical status. I recommend that all showrooms explore team selling. While every sales scenario will not require the team approach, the more you can apply this principle, the better experience your client will have and more revenue will be generated. Happy Selling! ♦



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