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Why Every Salesperson Needs Development

This month's column is for the career salespeople, those who have been in sales for some time and those who manage them.

With the increased performance demands placed on sales departments of every company in, and outside of, our industry, the people directing sales activities are seeking ways to refine, advance, and develop their teams.

Right up there with all the critical tasks that fill your day, such as price changes, firefighting, and playing the find-the-missing-item game, it is crucial to your company's growth to fast-track the development of your team's sales skills while coaching them to the performance levels required by your customer base.

WHY DO IT?

The role and the activities performed by a sales professional have been – and still are – in a constant state of flux. Other than the foundational skill set that each rookie is exposed to, many of the refinements in the way we sell has changed. Tactics and techniques that worked just five years ago don't work today. That said, success and standards are subjective points measured against your chosen metrics. Your salespeople are like top athletes, and each requires training and individual coaching.

For your top performers, focus on just one activity that will make them better overall. Since they are at the top of their game, they only need slight modifications to see significant results. As we continue on the performance scale, coach to the behavior that will provide the most impact to each individual's performance.

If you have 10 salespeople on the team, there will be 10 different coaching scenarios going on while also being focused on the continuing group education.

JUST ASK

This simple acronym sums it up: ASK = Attitude, Skills, Knowledge. While a salesperson's attitude has always been at the forefront of their success, these days we must make some refinements to

accommodate today's empowered consumer and build a solid bond with them. The level of confidence that must be communicated to the potential buyer is one of value, not ego.

The determination to succeed – combined with a personal internal persistence – is about an attitude and a mindset that must be woven into the fabric of today's professional salesperson. Determination arises from the acceptance of the lows associated with failed sales attempts, all while knowing that when reviewing the breakdown of a post-interaction between you and the customer, it is not the customer who is at fault. Every missed sales opportunity has a critical point that will be the cause of sales success – or the reason for it to fail, and the reasons why we lose a sale can be endless.

Some of the reasons we lose a sale today are not necessarily because of the commonly heard excuses: "They can get it online quicker," "The price online is lower," and "Free shipping, free returns." While each of those may contain some truth, they are still not the reason for the loss of so many sales opportunities.

The real reason for lackluster closing rates and clients who don't come back is due to the salesperson's failure to communicate value. That value has nothing to do with price. It is based upon themselves as experts, the showroom they work in, and the products they represent – each provides an exceptional benefit to the customer that goes beyond price alone.

NO GAIN, NO PAIN

Building your selling skills is like golf; you play against yourself, and the only way to get better is to review the actions you took and make the modifications needed to drop your swing count.

The same is true when you're a professional salesperson; it takes effort to be good at what you do. Every time you work with a client, make a self-evaluation of the process you went through, from greeting until close or when they left without buying. Think of each customer as a golf swing. How

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many swings did you take before the client bought from you? Practicing, evaluating, and modifying your presentations are all ways to build your attitude of determination.

Once you are determined to be a professional, the next step is to develop a high level of persistence. Every successful salesperson needs to be persistent. Many believe that the age of the internet has reduced the need for being persistent in selling situations, but it has not. In fact, the opposite is true. The client can buy entirely at their whim, while showroom salespeople can only sell when face to face with the client.

Be persistent and assertive in creating and then following your plan, but don't be aggressive. Be persistent and assertive in expressing your value proposition. Be persistent and assertive in the number of times you ask the client to "buy" — each is crucial to selling success.

SKILLS THAT PAY THE BILLS

All professions – sales, engineering, medicine, law – require the mastery of a particular skill set. I selected the four professions above not for their skill variances, but for their similarities.

The skills they have in common are: questioning, listening, planning, product, and process. The significant difference between sales and these other professions is that in selling, there is no mandated licensure requirement to keep your occupational skills up to date.

The real success stories of those in sales has to do with their self-motivation to be better than they are. They know the skills that worked in the past may not work in the future. They invest time to read and learn in order to be on the top of their game. They learn about interpersonal skills and they know their products better than anyone.

To provide yourself with these increased benefits, advance your questioning, listening, and closing skills. This is accomplished during the self-evaluation of your client visit. If you rephrase a question you asked, would it have yielded a better result? Was there a part of the conversation that, when reviewed, provided information that may have helped close the sale?

While we are at this point, what is closing the sale? Most people will say it is asking the client to make a purchase. I take exception with that definition. Closing the sale starts when you ask your first question because closing happens before the relationship begins.

Let me define this a bit more: When you ask any sales-related question, and the response you get from the client allows the sale to move forward, then that is a closing question.

ONCE UPON A TIME

Today we are all part of the self-imposed, fast-paced, hurry-up lifestyle. One way to get a client to slow down a bit and focus on you is to tell a story. While you may not have the same chops as Stephen King, you can develop and find benefit in storytelling.



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Now, the story you tell is not one of products, features, or benefits. It is one about people and involves happiness or sorrow; it is a story of warning and direction. This is why storytelling is an advanced skill to develop for those members of a sales team who have experiences to share. This is why the story is a way to share details, messages, and information that only experience can tell with validity.

The other benefit of good sales stories is that they grab the clients' emotional attention, taking them away from logic for a moment. Stories help you build rapport with the people you interact with, and trust stems from there. It is also a way to make information stick in people's heads.

BUILDING THE STORY

There are many types of stories to develop, and the first is the "Showroom" story. It contains all the reasons why this is the best showroom in the area and online. Most of the details in this story are ones the client would not know about through regular advertising and marketing methods.

Showroom stories need a "gotcha" moment, something the client will either remember or be moved by. For example, in the showroom story, it is the showroom that is the "hero" that encounters an issue also known as the "stimulus," which gives rise to a "conflict" that the "hero" has

provided a "resolution" for and gives credence to the "moral."

Now let's build a story that can be told during the walk to a display.

"Our showroom has been around since 1972, and we have experienced a lot in that time and also have developed a reputation as being a great asset to our clients. I remember when the Smiths were building their new home, and they were short one lighting fixture to get their CO. The fixture was delayed by only a few days, but it was a major inconvenience for the Smiths since they were ready to close. Our showroom provided them with a loaner fixture that could be swapped out after their closing. The Smiths closed on time, got their new lighting fixture, and just came back in to do their landscape lighting. This is the kind of service you can only get from us, a local lighting showroom."

Building stories are the best way to turn down the logical brain of the client and light up the emotional side. The goal of all advanced sales development is to build those critical interpersonal skills. It is a sure bet the results will be an increase in overall performance. Whether it is strengthening your salespeople's mindset or skill building, take the time to invest in their professional development.

And of as always, happy selling. ❖



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