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Common Mistakes of Sales Professionals

Today's marketplace is saturated with information. Terry Jones, the founder of Travelocity said, "As a result of the internet, information has escaped." Sales people are confronted with prospects and clients who are much savvier than they were just 5 years ago. In addition, most have been exposed to manipulative selling tactics, and have been burned in the process! Good business people will learn from their mistakes. Buyers today are looking for credibility in their vendors. They do not trust easily. Today's buyers have stiff requirements before they give their loyalty.



CHANGING YOUR APPROACH

Today, a "sales person" can only be effective if he (she) has transformed himself (herself) into a "business person."

Successful sales people today have dramatically changed the way they approach the following:

- Contacting prospects
- Getting in the door
- Asking questions and assessing needs
- Presenting their products and services
- Following up
- Closing the sale

If you see yourself exercising the same old routines when it comes to any of these steps in the sales process, it would help to understand the areas in which change and improvement are necessary. Sales people who have failed to transition to a new way of "selling" are likely making these mistakes.

INSUFFICIENT LEVEL OF PROSPECTING

Sales people often falter when they fail to put prospecting at the top of their to-do list. They unconsciously find reasons to avoid prospecting. They find themselves in a constant state of "getting ready" to prospect.

Top performing companies excel at sales. Every successful sales professional has developed a prospecting plan that delivers predictable and sustainable revenue. This plan is executed weekly, without fail.

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The prerequisite for selling success *and* business success is a robust and qualified pipeline of opportunity. It's analogous to gas in your car. You will not make any headway on your journey without gas in your tank.

When a sales person makes the transition from thinking like a sales person to thinking like a businessperson, they melt away call reluctance, the fear of rejection, and deadly procrastination.

FAILURE TO CONTACT TOP DECISION MAKERS

A close look at the mediocre performer will reveal much about the sales professional. Average earners generally lack the confidence, knowledge and preparedness to penetrate a prospect company at an executive level. The following excuses abound.

- “These people are impossible to reach. Between voice mail and their executive assistants you just can't get through.”
- “Higher ups don't get involved with sales. They delegate the process to people below them.”
- “These people make ten times what I make. They don't want to waste their time with sales people.”

Executive decision makers
DO NOT want to talk to
sales people about products.
They DO want to talk to
informed and insightful
business people about ideas!

LACK OF CONFIDENCE

At the root of an insufficient level of prospecting and failure to reach top decision makers is a lack of confidence.

A wise sales person once said, “The first sale is to yourself.” Poor performers don't truly believe that they are in a position to deliver real value to their customers. A sales person who lacks an unshakable belief in their company cannot prospect or sell with any conviction. Consistently above average performers believe in themselves and their products. Their belief creates courage, desire and energy, resiliency, and a depth of business sense and professionalism.

LACK OF GENERAL BUSINESS UNDERSTANDING AND INSIGHT

An effective sales person does not need an MBA to succeed. But, the days of the one-dimensional competitor are gone. Sales professionals today need to know more than just how to sell. They need to understand the nature of business in this economy. There is a new set of rules for the way to capture a prospect's attention and establish yourself as a credible and trusted advisor.

Today's successful sales professional will be a student of business and possess a depth of understanding beyond knowledge of their product. The “product and feature” approach to sales is no longer effective. Yet, 80% of all sales people still approach selling in this way.

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FAILURE TO USE TITO

The acronym, **TITO**, stands for **Trends, Issues, Threats** and **Opportunities**. Sales professionals who take time to understand how trends in technology, government, or even society affect their prospects are prepared to have a meaningful conversation with an executive or decision maker. This sales person will be able to discuss issues these trends create for their prospect. When the sales professional takes it a step further and understands several threats that the issues present, he or she is actively increasing their level of credibility. Finally, a sales professional who can uncover opportunities that are present in the trends, issues and threats, is well on the way to positioning himself as one who brings value to the table.

FAILURE TO ASK MEANINGFUL AND RELEVANT QUESTIONS

Sales people often come up short on what to say during a presentation, other than their sales “pitch”. One of the keys to transitioning oneself from a sales person to a businessperson is in knowing what to “ask.” An individual’s depth of knowledge and preparedness in a particular area can be gleaned through the questions they ask. Sales people are notorious for skimping on their preparation. Not taking the time to prepare relevant and meaningful questions is at the top of that list.

Asking excellent business questions helps the sales professional in the following ways:

- Establishes credibility in the eyes of the prospect that the sales professional is “clued in” on what matters.
- Asking relevant and meaningful questions often compels a prospect to lower their guard and open up. When the prospect answers questions honestly, and in detail, the sales professional can propose solutions to differentiate himself from the competition.
- Asking a “series” of excellent questions elevates the sales professional from being credible to being trusted. Trust will make you stand out from the crowd.

INABILITY TO ESTABLISH A LINK BETWEEN A PROSPECT’S NEEDS AND WHAT THE SALES PERSON HAS TO OFFER

A sales person, and their organization, can possess the most effective and appropriate solution for a company’s needs, but if the prospect does not see it, it simply does not exist.

Weak sales people are unable to establish a link between what the prospect needs and wants and how their products can satisfy those requirements. Some reasons for this disconnect are:

- The salesperson is stuck in the old method of selling. Known as the “Show up and throw up”, or “Spray and pray”, or the classic “Feature dump”, this sales technique allows the seller to demonstrate that he or she knows everything about their product. They launch their presentation with a product and feature run-down. With great enthusiasm, they tell

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the prospect all about their product and how fabulous it is. Unfortunately, they fail to make the link between what the prospect wants and needs, and the product's features and functions.

- The sales person was unsuccessful in asking meaningful questions that revealed what is most important to the prospect. In the absence of this information, it's impossible to make the required link.
- The sales person has not grasped the fact that buyers today are savvy. If your sales approach is "more of the same" your buyer will have little confidence in you or your product. The prospect disconnects. You've lost the sale before you even got out of the gate.

PESKY FOLLOW UP

A salesperson that hovers around their prospect, barraging them with follow up phone calls and emails which lack value is just like an annoying gnat on a summer day.

A sales professional can make contact with a prospect as many times as they want and need to, as long as the intention is to provide information that is relevant and meaningful to the prospect. American Marketing Association studies have shown that it is important to maintain contact with your prospect in order to stay on his radar screen. How most sales professionals go about this, however, is all wrong.

Top producers develop a system of follow up that incorporates meaningful information in every contact. All roads lead back to thinking and acting like a "businessperson." Establishing credibility and trust will differentiate you from the crowd.

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