

The Six Steps To Solid Sales Success

Having a methodical approach to securing sales will help you build a successful business

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Solid sales success is attainable for sales people in all professions. What they must first do is gain better control of their selling skills. Too often the salesperson feels that they're at a loss when entering a client's domain. It's not unusual for salespeople to say that they "Just can't make this call," or "The prospect already has a vendor," or "The prospect's friend is taking care of that account," or even "I don't know, it just doesn't feel right." Those are just a few of any number of excuses.

So what's the problem?

The problem is that sales is not an easy profession. The salesperson always seems to be at a disadvantage. They automatically "sell to" the buyer rather than let the buyer buy from them. Through listening, learning, understanding and responding to their clients' needs the sales professional can gain the upper hand.

Remember that sales should be a win-win situation for everyone. Clients, customers and salespeople should always feel good about the sales process; otherwise there's something wrong.

Becoming successful at sales may be about control but it's not about manipulation, lack of caring or taking advantage of any one. Sales success is also about finding needs, fulfilling those needs, following up, representing correctly, adding value and having fun.

While it's true that people buy emotionally, sales are sustained rationally. So look for distress, fear, concerns, weaknesses and needs, provide solutions, solve problems and you will create opportunities.

Twenty-eight years ago I formulated these six steps and taught them to my retail, as well as wholesale, sales force. These steps helped me build a very successful business. They can do the same for you.

The steps are:

- Understanding who you are
- Understanding others
- Getting prospects
- Getting agreements

- Adding value
- Closing

Before any salesperson goes out on a sales call, in fact, before they even become a salesperson, they have to understand themselves.

What does it take to become a motivated salesperson? It takes insight into who you are, what you want and knowing that you have the desire, commitment and outlook to succeed.

We've all heard the 80/20 rule. You know. 80 percent of the sales are made by 20 percent of the salespeople in any organization. So, you really have to look inside yourself to see if you have the makeup to be part of that 20 percent. Otherwise, why waste your time?

Sales is a game and you have to decide whether or not you want to play. And like all games, most importantly, do you have what it takes to win?

Let's start with the premise that at least you have what it takes to find out if you have what it takes. We'll make that assumption because you're reading this.

UNDERSTANDING WHO YOU ARE & UNDERSTANDING OTHERS

It is vitally important to understand ourselves so can be comfortable in our careers. Once you understand who you are, not only in the part we play (i.e. salesperson, mother, father, softball player, book club member) but also in our intrinsic self, we begin to build self-esteem. We can deal with the ups and downs of life in a more objective way. And it becomes easier to understand others.

Setting Goals

With an understanding of the relationship between your "self", your "part" it should be easier to begin to understand and categorize your goals.

While all of us set goals of one type or another it has been shown that those who put their goals in writing are more likely to achieve them. Part of the reason is that these people are more apt to refer back to their written goals. They are a documented record of where they want to go.

You may have heard the old question, "How do you eat an elephant"? And its famous answer, "One bite at a time"! Well the same goes for goals. You can't get to the moon if you haven't built a spaceship. It's best to start with realistic goals that are broken down into manageable segments. As you achieve each step and go on to the next, you'll begin to see how things expand and multiply!

Relating To Your Prospects

Ok, Now that you're starting to get a handle on who you are in your "self" and your "part". What does it mean to your business?

There's a saying that "People buy from people they like". And, for the most part that's absolutely true. That doesn't mean that if you need a bandage for a bleeding wound you wouldn't buy it from a jerk. But, if you were shopping for bandages just to have them in the house and the salesperson was indeed a jerk, then you would probably tell him or her to go pound sand and buy it from someone else. To paint an even more pointed scenario, if you had that bleeding wound and two sales persons were there to wait on you, one being the jerk and the other being a caring, compassionate individual, who would you give the sale to?

So, in the real world, it's how you interact with your prospect that helps give you the edge.

People buy emotionally. Needs, wants, distresses, frustrations, etc. push people into action. It's those emotions that fuel the buying engine. Being able to uncover those emotions is a key in becoming a successful sales professional.

As I mentioned in my article *The Seven Elements Of Successful Management*, there are three very important ingredients all sales professionals should understand. They will always help in the uncovering process when interacting with prospects.

- Types of Attitudes
- Types of Behaviors
- Types of Communications Styles

These are the ABC's of effective salespeople, as well as successful managers and all the other parts we play in our lives!

Know Your ABCs

Knowing the different types of attitudes, behaviors and communication styles of individuals can help in building rapport between you and your prospects and clients.

It's important to understand your core attitude, behavior and communication style first. Once you have a clear picture of who you are you can then learn how to interact successfully with others. Remember, people buy from people they like and the more you are like the person you are selling to the easier the sale becomes.

In addition, learning how to recognize and adapt to the attitudes, behaviors and communication styles of your prospects and clients will give you added control of

the sales process. Once you understand the types of attitudes, behaviors and communications styles it will also help make getting prospects a much easier task.

Attitudes are the reasons why individuals do things, it's what moves them into action. Attitudes are derived from our beliefs and our value systems. Simplified examples of attitudes include the desire to help the less fortunate, the need to search for truth and knowledge, wanting to spend our time, money and resources in order to get the highest and best return on our investments, the desire to build alliances so as to raise in stature or power, the need look for harmony and beauty in life and/or the desire to follow the guidelines set up for us in religion, company manuals or other sets of rules.

Behaviors are the manifestations of how we do things. Do we behave in a dominant manner? Or are we more of a "people person", ready to joke and party at the drop of a hat? Perhaps we like to be steady in our behavior, someone who would rather keep things manageable and peaceful? Or maybe we're very detail oriented and into keeping to our selves? These are very simple explanations of behaviors, written here to give you a slight overview.

Communication styles are the tools we use, or don't use, in gathering, processing and delivering information and ideas. They include, but are not limited to, our body language, tone of voice, whether we tend to be more visual, auditory or kinesthetic and the words we use.

Words are just words to too many of us. Quite often they lose their meaning and either turn into meaningless chatter or just noise that someone else is waiting to stop so that they can either start their noise or have some peace. For some prospects/clients what you have to say may indeed be interesting. But beyond what you have to say is, more importantly, what they have to say.

GETTING PROSPECTS

With a new perspective on the attitudes, behaviors and communication styles of yourself and others you can begin to see how your interaction with clients and prospects can lead to them feeling good about you and what you're selling.

As you begin to build rapport with clients and prospects, opportunities begin to present themselves. You can get into a position to ask for (and get) referrals. Referrals come when you have satisfactorily given your client or prospect what they wanted and more.

It is necessary to always keep in mind that people do things according to their own agenda. In other words everyone is tuned into the same radio station WII-FM (what's in it for me?). You have to recognize and acknowledge your clients' and prospects' expectation level. The more you do that the easier it will become

to make a sale. When you keep your clients and prospects happy you begin to build up a pool of credible personal and professional recommendation sources. But in order to make people happy you have to get them first!

Earlier we spoke about buying a bandage for a bleeding wound. Sure you'd buy it from the jerk if your blood was spilling on the floor but you'd feel so much better buying it from the compassionate person who took your pain to heart. Now suppose your wound wasn't visible to the salesperson but they knew how to find out about it and enable you to realize that you should also do something about it. Wouldn't you be willing to buy something to get rid of it? Well getting prospects and clients to buy is all about making them aware of their distress and in some cases their pleasures. Once you understand a person's distress you begin to take control of the selling process.

How does someone find those distresses? By asking questions and listening to the answers. Everything you need to know will be told to you if you just ask the right questions and listen to the responses.

The salesperson should only talk thirty percent of the time, at most. That leaves seventy percent for your prospect or client to tell you everything you need to know. If you learn how to listen the sales gates will open.

There are certain questions that help you get the answers you need. Those answers will even tell you whether or not you have a "prospect" or a "suspect" on your hands. Enabling you to continue or go on to the next person. You're better off knowing that someone is a "suspect" at the beginning of the process than wasting time and finding it out later.

People don't like to be sold but they do like to buy. And everyone has his or her own agenda. They are NOT going to buy just because you want them to. The more you force, the more you will push them away.

For many salespeople getting prospects means many things. It may be getting referrals, cold calling, joining networking groups and organizations, advertising or all of these methods. No matter what it is, every sales person needs to be able to easily and simply explain what he or she does without seeming like they're selling.

All you have to do is pretend that you are advertising on TV or radio and have a limited time to tell people how you are. Write a short and simple explanation of what you do without sounding like a salesperson and you're on your way. You can even use that self-description in your cold calling.

There are plenty of salespeople who make their living as a result of cold calls. For these people every call is a means to an end. As an old friend once said "The average sale I close is worth \$2,000.00, I'll make 100 calls a day for 15 contacts

for 2 appointments that may result in one close, I'll take those odds everyday of my life!" And he has done extremely well for himself. Of course by now he doesn't have to make called calls because all those old cold call clients have become very good referral sources for him. But like he says "It works!"

So, looking at it from that angle one thousand calls a month could put the cold caller on the road to doing quite well.

GETTING AGREEMENTS

Time and experience has taught us that if you don't have certain agreements lined up before you head into an appointment, you're probably wasting your time. Keep in mind that you are as much of a professional in your area as the person you are meeting with. Just as they don't need to waste their time neither do you.

The agreements are the ground rules of your meetings and discussions.

Remember, while you are setting up the ground rules and all through your meetings you are using your knowledge of the ABC's of effective salespeople.

Make sure you set a time frame for you meeting. Find out what your prospect/client is hoping to get out of the meeting. Let them know what you are hoping to get out of the meeting. Put what you see as potential roadblocks, such as budgets, attendance of decision makers, costs, etc. on the table before the meeting begins.

By getting issues agreed upon before you meet you and your prospect/client will save valuable time and energy. In addition you will have learned more about your prospect/client than you would have if you dove headfirst into your meeting without asking questions and listing you those all important answers.

ADDING VALUE

As we've discussed, there is no reason to give prospects or clients your information until you understand what they need. By now you may have realized that by your prospect or client telling you all their pertinent information they may be closing the sale for you. What you need to do at this point of the process is to give your prospect or client the information they have told you they need.

You can even ask them what they would like you to do. "If you were me what would you do next?" is a question that evokes a great and telling answer.

Using this method reveals how much time and money you've saved by not giving away too much information, making needless extra meetings just to find out that you were on a wild goose chase the entire time, and spending countless hours tracking people down without knowing what they want.

Now is when YOU add your value. You address pertinent situations. Long ago you started to learn what they needed by asking, listening, using your ABC's , probing and listening some more, now all you have to do is produce only those things that address the issues they've revealed.

When you have been instructed by your prospect/client as to what they need you are in the final step to getting the sale.

CLOSING

Don't ever be afraid to ask for the close!! Remember, you are giving them the vehicle to do away with their problems.

And don't ever be hesitant to ask for payment. You sure would be willing to pay whatever it costs to get that bandage to stop the wound from bleeding that we discussed earlier wouldn't you?

These six simple steps can help you build a much more successful sales career.

While there may be variations of these steps by different individuals, the order and integration of each step is extremely important. The foundation of the steps are the ABC's of communication. Without them the other four steps will be much harder, if not impossible, to climb.

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