

Friday, July 27, 2007

PACIFIC BUSINESS NEWS

Is your company's sales process keeping up with changing times?

Pacific Business News (Honolulu) - by [Colleen Stanley](#)

Customer needs change. So when is the last time your company looked at your sales process to determine if it needed a change?

The Information Age has dramatically changed how businesses compete. Small businesses look and act big. New ideas are quickly copied, creating the threat of a commoditized product. Customers have more options than ever. So it makes sense that there might be a better way to approach the market.

You know it's time to update your sales process when it includes:

- Overcoming objections. Think about this archaic, distasteful selling skill that has been taught to salespeople through the years. When taught, it sounds like this:

"The first objection is never the real one. Overcome the prospects' objection three to seven times. Keep overcoming the objections until you get to a yes."

Put yourself in the prospect's shoes. Does sitting in front of a salesperson who is "overcoming your objections" really encourage you to tell the truth? Does this build trust and relationships?

If you and your company desire a reputation built on integrity and no game playing, start seeking the truth on the sales calls, instead of the answer you want.

- Handling leading questions. "If we could help, would you want to hit your deadlines? If we could help you make more money, would you want to engage us?"

Now what kind of a question is that? Of course your prospects want to hit their deadlines and make more money.

Today's prospects identify leading questions and know you're only trying to lead them to your answer, not theirs. The walls go up, and sales dodge ball begins. Prospects start saying less, and it gets harder to gather information. The result is a superficial conversation with no depth.

Better questions to ask are, "Let's fast-forward. What does it look like if your company continues to miss deadlines? Tell me your view on the profit situation if you keep doing what you are doing. Is the problem going to stay the same, get bigger or go away?" Your job as a sales professional is to gather data, not force and create it.

- Selling features, advantages and benefits. The prospect asks the salesperson, "What makes you different?"

Outdated answers sound very generic. "We increase productivity, save you money, have good quality and service." This is about the time your prospect goes into sleep mode, since the last three salespeople answered the question the same way.

There's a well-known phrase in sales: prospects don't care about what you do -- they care about the problems you solve. The new global economy requires salespeople to be critical thinkers and well-versed in consultative selling skills. The salesperson so trained knows how to introduce compelling talking points when setting up the agenda for the sales meeting.

"We typically work with companies who are taking too long to get product to market and, as a result, are losing market share. We work with companies who are tired of spending all their time in company voice-mail trees trying to resolve customer service issues."

Focus on the prospects' issues, not your product and services.

- Being overly cheerful and enthusiastic. In the good old days, salespeople were taught to be enthusiastic and upbeat. Walk into the appointment and be high-energy.

Question: Are any of your salespeople calling on introverts? These poor people are bowled over by fast talk, energetic handshakes and overused expressions such as, "How are you today?" (It sounds like you're showing up to cure the prospect of his/her ailment.)

The astute salesperson takes his or her authentic self to the sales call.

About the Author

Colleen Stanley is president of SalesLeadership Inc., a business development consulting firm specializing in sales and sales management training. The company provides programs in prospecting, referral strategies, consultative sales training, sales management training, and hiring/selection. She is also the author of "Growing Great Sales Teams: Lessons from the Cornfield." Reach Colleen at 303.708.1128 or visit www.salesleadershipdevelopment.com.

Permission is granted to reprint this article in print or electronically as long as the paragraph above is included and contact information is provided to katie@salesleadershipdevelopment.com. Thank you.