

New Year's resolution: Get rid of these sales myths

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The start of each year brings a commitment to new goals and resolutions. Here's one to think about: Get rid of sales myths that don't serve you or your company well.

Many salespeople and sales managers are subscribing to outdated ideas and methodology. So they achieve less-than-desirable sales results and/or have a difficult time managing their sales team. Here are three myths to eliminate.

- **Job-tenure myth** — Experts tell business owners and sales managers that the alphabet generations — X, Y and M — (millennials) are different than the baby boomers, and are motivated to stay in a position for only two years. Then they will move onto the next opportunity and enjoy about 14 different jobs.

Here's a tip: Let your competitor waste their time and money on this traveling sales group. The numbers show that short stays by sales reps isn't a profitable business model. You hire a new salesperson and even with the best training process, it takes about six months to get them up to speed. She must learn the business, fill the pipeline and close business.

According to the job-hopping experts, you now only have 1½ years for that salesperson to produce revenue for your company before moving on. The formula doesn't make sense. Most top sales producers really hit their stride after two years. They have built relationships, referrals are coming in and repeat business is in place.

Look around at the most successful people you know. Are they job-hoppers or job-committers? Bill Gates, Warren Buffet, even Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook, committed six years to building a small empire. What would have happened to Facebook if Zuckerberg had become bored after two years and decided to explore another opportunity?

Business owners: Don't lower your expectations or standards. There are salespeople out there, of all generations, with longevity in their résumé. Change your expectations and it's amazing what will change.

- **Buyers-are-liars myth** — It's surprising how many sales organizations and sales trainers still shout this mantra from the mountaintop. What's even more surprising are

the next words out of their mouths: “Build relationships.” How in the world does a salesperson build relationships with a prospect they’ve profiled as a liar?

Prospects aren’t liars; they are just tired. They are tired of outdated selling techniques that create false conversation. For example, many salespeople have been taught to ask leading questions, such as, “So, Mr. Prospect, if we could save you money, would you want to?”

The question not only is outdated, it’s an insult to a prospect’s intelligence. What is the prospect going to reply? “No, we are proactively planning to lose money in that same area again this year.”

Prospects often are penalized by telling the truth. If the prospect is honest with the salesperson and tells him no, the salesperson goes into overdrive and applies another archaic technique: Overcome the objection.

Salespeople have been taught that the first objection isn’t the real one, so press on. So instead of telling the salesperson the truth, prospects are forced to lie and say, “I need to think it over.”

In 2011, ask for the truth and then be ready for it. It will eliminate practice proposals and fill your pipeline with real prospects. Don’t force your prospects to lie to you.

• **Always-be-closing myth** — Now that’s a sales meeting a prospect can look forward to. It sounds like this:

The prospect is meeting with a salesperson, decides to be vulnerable and open up about a challenge. The “ABC” salesperson hears the problem and translates it to a buying signal. She jumps on the challenge like a sumo wrestler and does a trial close.

“Wouldn’t you agree that some of solutions we offer would solve this problem?” (Does anyone talk like this at home?) The prospect recognizes a set-up question and closes down. The skilled sales professional knows that trial closes such as, “Wouldn’t you agree ... ” cause a biological reaction in the prospect. There’s a part of the brain called the amygdala, often referred to as the old brain. Under pressure, the amygdala goes into fight-or-flight mode.

Neither reaction is good, because the sales call either gets hostile or the meeting ends early. Top sales professionals know how to set up a call that always gives the prospect full control and choice of the outcome. The old brain calms down and a smart sales conversation happens.

Make a resolution to get rid of these sales myths for 2011. The new economy demands a new approach and a new philosophy.

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