

Strategies: Three reasons your sales team should stop writing practice proposals

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Salespeople waste thousands of hours and internal resources writing practice proposals. What's the definition of a practice proposal? It's quotes, recommendations, responses to RFP's created for prospects that have no intention of ever doing business with your company. These prospects vary from the price shoppers looking for a deal or prospects that just want to keep their existing vendor honest.

Why do salespeople waste time writing such proposals, knowing their time is better invested developing current clients or uncovering new, qualified opportunities? It's a combination of ineffective selling skills and lack of emotional intelligence skills.

Here are three areas to examine and course correct with your sales team.

#1: Lack of assertiveness. The salesperson ran a good sales meeting, however, didn't uncover any reasons for the prospect to make a change. However, the prospect asks the salesperson to "put something together." The non-assertive salesperson goes along to get along. He writes a practice proposal to avoid rocking the sales boat. He is hesitant to ask for what he needs and what he needs is to uncover the truth: why the heck is this prospect looking to make a change?

Assertive salespeople get to the truth quickly and only put qualified prospects in their pipeline. They nicely state the obvious. "As much as I'd like your business, I haven't really heard any reason for you to make a switch. What am I missing?" It's now up to the prospect to convince the salesperson why she is looking for another vendor or partner.

Assertive salespeople are comfortable stating what they need because they know win-win relationships are just that--both parties win. There's no win-win in writing practice proposals.

#2: Ineffective prospecting. Desperation is another reason salespeople write practice proposals. Their sales pipeline is empty so irrational thinking takes over: a pipeline full of unqualified prospects is better than nothing. Empty sales pipelines can often be attributed to three things:

- The sales organization has not defined their ideal prospect. As a result, salespeople invest a lot of time meeting with prospects that are never going to buy. A transactional, price shopping buyer is not going to pay for value.

Conduct a win-loss analysis and figure out the demographics and psychographics of your best fit clients. For example, a technology consulting firm will close more business from organizations that are early adopters of change. A marketing firm wins business with

prospects that understand that marketing is a process, not a one-time event 'Hail Mary' event.

- No defined key performance metrics. Most sales organization measure lagging KPI's: appointments, demo's, proposals and closed business. This is rear view mirror management. If your sales team doesn't have enough appointments, look out the front window. Identify and measure leading indicators, all the sales activities that lead to a first qualified appointment.
- Really bad value propositions. Here is a common, sad sales scenario. A hard working, disciplined salesperson executes the sales activity plan and connects with a qualified prospect. The conversation isn't compelling because he delivers a one size fits all value proposition rather than a customized value proposition designed for the buyer and the industry. There is no emotional connection with the prospect and no next step.

#3: No defined sales process. The sales department is still the one department in the company where systems and processes have not been documented. There are processes in accounting, marketing and shipping.

It's a scene out of the Wild West with each sales cowboy and cowgirl running their own sales playbook. There are no key qualifying questions or defined selling stages. As a result, every prospect gets a trophy, or in the case of sales, a proposal.

No defined sales process results in salespeople write practice proposals for non-decision makers. These are the folks that have a lot of time---but no money or pain. Practice proposals are written every day because salespeople don't uncover budget before writing a recommendation. And the list goes on.

Practice proposals take valuable time out of a salesperson's day. They also suck mental energy from salespeople that are working harder, not smarter.

Give your sales team the tools needed to succeed. Teach your team how to be assertive and create win-win relationships. Get clear on your ideal client. Install a sales process that can be measured and coached. It's time to give those practice proposals to your competitor. Keep them busy while you are out pursuing real business.

Good Selling!

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