

TACTics

for Sales ProfessionalsSM



Sandler Sales Institute
180° From Traditional Sales Training®

WEEK 25

CLOSING

The TACTIC: Don't paint seagulls in your prospect's picture.

The STORY:

Bob, a floor salesperson who really believes in pushing the sale along, had spent enough time to learn exactly how the prospect was going to use the product. But there was a problem: Bob was convinced that the prospect really didn't see all the ways the product could be used, and this was the reason the four attempts at closing had not worked. There was only one solution. He decided to tell the prospect about all of them.

"You know, Bill," he began, "You haven't thought of all the ways you can use this product."

Bill turned his head to one side and responded, "Oh really."

"For sure. If you have a few more minutes, I'll be glad to tell you about some of them."

Bill nodded his head "yes" and then added, "But I really only need it for the one purpose . . ."

"Well, not only can you use it for that, but in addition it will . . ." and launched into an extended description of all the other ways it could be used.

About fifteen minutes later, Bill looked at his watch and stated, "Bob, I really appreciate the education. Look, I'm going to be late for a meeting." As he got up to leave, he added, "Why don't you send me some literature when you get the chance. I'll call you when I look it over."

"Fine. I'll get it right out in the mail to you. Thanks for stopping in."

Bill left and immediately headed to the nearest competitor where he walked in, pointed to the product, and said, "If you have that in stock, I'll buy it now." And the competitor did.

The RESULT:

How often does this happen? More times than most salespeople want to admit. And the salesperson at the competitor's probably assumed the sale was one of those easy sales that are the fantasies of every salesperson — someone walks in, points, and walks out with the product.

Bob lost the sale because he believed that he knew better than the prospect how the product should be used. He ignored what the prospect said just before he launched into his educational presentation. Bob painted a picture that the prospect could not buy into.

And the salesperson at the competitor's had no idea that Bob forced the prospect into his arms.

DISCUSSION:

Bob made two major mistakes in his presentation. First, he ignored Bill's statement that he knew how to use the product. Second, he went on to explain how to better use the product -- totally ignoring Bill's immediate need. It is probable that Bill felt insulted. Since Bill went to a competitor and purchased, it is highly likely he did feel insulted. And to make matters worse, the chance of Bill ever going back to Bob's store is remote. Why go back to deal with someone who won't listen to you? Who insults you?

APPROACH:

It is tempting for salespeople to display their product knowledge trying to convince someone to buy. After all, unless the product has never been sold before, somebody is using it. Learning how the product is being used is important information for a salesperson to have. But it is not important to tell a prospect how he should use the product. Asking a prospect the right sequence of questions leads him to understand how he could use the product. This process, self-discovery of product usage, is a powerful incentive to buy.

When Bill told Bob that there was only one purpose he could see for the product, Bob should have stopped talking and asked, "Gee, I guess I missed it. How would you use it?"

Bill would then have responded by describing exactly why the product would be useful. At the conclusion, all Bob would have had to do was ask, "What do you want me to do?"

THOUGHT:

The prospect is the one who will use the product, not you -- do not presume you know better.

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WEEK 26

PRESENTATIONS

The TACTIC: Sell today, educate tomorrow.

The STORY:

Tim was driving back from another disappointing sales call when it hit him. Now he knew exactly what he had to do to get more appointments and close more sales. He needed to know everything possible about his company's products and exactly how past customers had used the products. Tim had a plan. He was going to be prepared.

For the next three weeks, Tim was a man possessed, meeting his objectives and developing a knowledge base that surpassed every other salesperson in the company.

"Success is assured," he thought. "No one can compete with me now! I am a walking encyclopedia of product information and usage."

And he really was. Other salespeople, amazed at Tim's radical change in sales behavior, started coming to him for product information. Tim even found and alerted marketing to a small but significant error in a product brochure.

It wasn't long before Tim started lining up appointment after appointment. With his new-found security, the old timidity was gone. Tim was turning into a tiger.

And an unbelievable 85% of the initial sales visits were turning into requests for proposals. Tim further intensified his personal product and usage education and poured this information into the most comprehensive and informative proposals anyone had ever seen. Everyone, especially the prospects, agreed that Tim knew his stuff.

As the months rolled on, with Tim being swamped by more and more requests for proposals, there was a little voice in the back of Tim's head that kept mumbling something.

Seven months after starting his education, Tim was completely exhausted. But he felt good. Or at least until he figured out how many sales he had closed since starting his education. He was shocked to find out that his closing percentage had gone down. "What am I doing wrong?" he asked. "I have prospects begging me for what I know. I can't write the proposals fast enough. How could I be selling less?"

The RESULT:

Tim was incredibly successful selling knowledge, not product. Tim learned to educate the prospect, not sell the prospect. Unfortunately, many salespeople become caught in this trap because while they are doing this, it feels as if they are getting somewhere. Product knowledge is helpful, but Tim forgot that he was hired to sell product, not knowledge.

DISCUSSION:

Product knowledge and how past customers are using the product is very useful information to have. Unfortunately, many sales training programs have as their focus educating the sales staff with product information. From this focus on product information, the sales staff comes to believe that the way sales happen is by educating the prospects. The belief is that educated prospects are prospects who will buy. Nothing could be further from what really happens.

Prospects buy for their own reasons. While their reasons may be similar or even identical to those of other customers, you cannot presume that you know what those reasons are unless you ask.

While educating prospects is a worthy goal, it does not make sales. Blindly assuming that educating prospects will increase sales is a path to frustration.

APPROACH:

Don't provide education. Tim is immensely successful at selling education. Prospects know that when Tim is the salesperson, they will have an education that prepares them to get the best possible product. Unfortunately, it won't be from Tim because he is perceived as a teacher, not a salesperson.

Free education by salespeople is a common situation fostered by most sales training programs. The rationale for this is simple; you don't want to send out a salesperson who doesn't know the product. The salesperson then mistakenly comes to believe that even more product knowledge will result in even more sales.

This situation ignores why prospects buy your product: They buy your product because it solves some problem they have. And the problem it solves might never have been covered in the sales training sessions. If all you do is educate, you will never learn what that problem is. Which would you rather do? Learn the prospects' problems and sell your products to them or educate and sell nothing?

THOUGHT:

Prospects don't need to be educated; they need relief from their pain.

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WEEK 27

INTEREST, CLOSING

The TACTIC: Permit the prospects to sell themselves.

The STORY:

Nick was cold calling trying to find someone, anyone, who would listen to him. Invariably he was screened out before he ever got the person he wanted. His calling script wasn't working — he never got past the part where he explained why he was calling. He'd be put on hold and within twenty seconds, he'd be told that either the company had no interest or to send some literature. In sheer frustration, he got up and wandered out onto the sales floor.

"Excuse me," said an older woman coming up behind him, "can you tell me if you deliver?"

Nick, not in the best of moods nor even paying attention to what he was saying, responded, "Deliver?"

"Yes. I like the one over by the window," gesturing with her arm, "can you deliver that one?"

"Yes, I suppose. Do you really want that one?"

"It would fit perfectly."

"Fit perfectly . . . " Nick started to respond.

"Oh, yes. The size is just right, too."

"You want the one on display?" asked Nick.

"If you have one in a box that would be better."

"I don't know if we do."

"Then I'll take that one. But you never answered my question; can you deliver?"

"Yes, we can deliver."

"Good. I'll take it."

The RESULT:

When Nick responded to the woman's first question, he ended by asking a question, "Do you really want that one?" This simple question immediately put the pressure back on the prospect. The prospect had to answer with something. When Nick responded to her a second time, "Fit perfectly...", the woman thought it was another question. The woman felt the need to respond, not Nick. And she did respond by purchasing.

DISCUSSION:

One of the “beliefs” of many salespeople is that they make the sale by overcoming the reluctance of the prospect to buy. Note the assumption in the last sentence, “the reluctance of the prospect to buy.” Are you nodding your head in agreement? Does this mean that every prospect who has ever bought from you really didn’t want to buy? And further, the only reason prospects bought was due to your sales ability? Hardly.

Prospects become customers because some product or service you are selling will solve some problem or problems they are having. To find out what the problems are, you have to ask questions. Nick did not walk onto the floor with the belief that anyone was going to buy anything. After a fruitless session of cold calling, Nick was probably wondering why he even became a salesperson. He was unprepared to deal with the prospect as he normally would have, and as a result, asked questions instead of giving answers. Nick didn’t get in the way of the woman solving her problem.

APPROACH:

Listen to what your prospect is saying. Ask your prospect why she is talking to you and not your competition. If she has not talked to the competition, you need to determine her purpose in talking with you. Is she looking to buy or looking for an education?

If she has talked to the competition, ask her what she learned. You should even ask why she didn’t purchase from the competition. You will then learn why she is talking with you.

Accept the idea that a prospect wants you to care about why she is out looking. How many times has someone said she bought from you because you care? You demonstrated your concern for her needs by asking questions. She wants to buy your product and you have created a comfort level that enables her to do so.

THOUGHT:

The prospect sells herself and you are there to make it happen.

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WEEK 28

FOLLOW UP

The TACTIC: Don't poke the corpse.

The STORY:

"I'm going to get him to buy," said Bob, just having learned that the prospect had canceled for the third time, "no matter how much he tries to avoid me."

And with that goal, Bob laid out his plans. First was the full literature assault. Having kept track of what he had sent, Bob collected all the product and service literature he hadn't yet sent. For the next two weeks, the prospect's incoming mail would always contain something interesting to read.

Second, Bob was not going to be put off a third time. The prospect's secretary was becoming a good friend, and Bob knew she wanted this sale to happen. She even told him that of all the proposals she had seen, his was the most impressive. Bob decided to have some flowers sent to her thanking her for her assistance. She'd be sure to mention this to her boss.

Third, the prospect's boss, who, according to the prospect, had reviewed Bob's proposal, was due back from the coast on Monday. "I think," mused Bob, "that it's time to call him directly. I hate to go over someone's head, but they really need what I have."

And finally, Bob was going to get the prospect back on the phone no matter what and ask him just what else was needed to make the decision.

Bob was sure that the sale would be his within two weeks.

The RESULT:

Two weeks later Bob was reviewing all the steps he had taken. During this period, Bob spent close to four full days on the account. Not a stone had been left unturned. Bob could not believe that the prospect, in a most unpleasant phone call, had told him the answer was "no." After all he had done, the prospect could still not see the virtue of what Bob was offering. Bob marked down to call back in four weeks.

There is nothing wrong with being aggressive in getting business. The simple problem here is that Bob did not know when it was over. Not being able to accept that it was over, Bob spent valuable prospecting time poking at a dead prospect when he could have spent the time finding someone who was interested. This happens all the time.

DISCUSSION:

Following up on what a prospect is going to do is good. Unfortunately, many salespeople don't even make a single follow-up attempt. Here, Bob has gone beyond what can possibly be considered good follow-up methods. Bob is a pest and deserves to be treated as pest.

He also has created a problem for every salesperson who contacts this prospect. The prospect is reinforced to view salespeople as annoying buzzing insects.

Finally, he has created a problem for himself. He has reinforced his belief that the proper sales tactic for less than eager prospects is an all-out assault. In the future, Bob will waste hours pursuing dead ends instead of recognizing a dead end and moving on.

APPROACH:

In Bob's case, after the prospect canceled for the third time, the chance of making a sale was over. From that point forward, it was a complete waste of time and money.

Get an understanding up front with your prospect that gives him an opportunity to say, "It's over." This can be as simple as you stating, right at the beginning, the following:

"You may find this a little unsettling, but I want you to tell me, any time, when you want me to end it. When you tell me to end it, I'll respect what you say and that will be it. Fair enough?"

Making this statement takes guts. You can be sure that the prospect has never heard anything like this from a salesperson. The advantage this statement gives you is powerful. The prospect is agreeing to deal with you on an open and honest basis. Should you feel at any time during your interaction with him that he is avoiding you or raising smoke screens, remind him of his agreement with you and then ask, "Does this mean it's over?"

No matter the answer, you control what is happening, not the prospect.

THOUGHT:

The sooner you recognize the sale is not going to happen, the sooner you can move on to one that will.