

TACTics

for Sales Professionals SM



Sandler Sales Institute
180° From Traditional Sales Training [®]

WEEK 41

CLOSING

The TACTIC: How long have you been selling?

The STORY:

Mark had been making a decent living for ten years as a salesperson. Always in the middle of the sales charts, Mark was comfortable with his selling skills. At least he was until taking his most recent sales position three months before. In his new position, he was at the bottom of the sales chart.

I don't understand, thought Mark. I'm doing the same things here that I did in the other companies and I can't get anywhere. Maybe it's the quality of the prospects; they are pretty dismal. No, he thought, they're pathetic.

Particularly rankling was the situation with Susan. Hired on the same day as Mark, with six months of sales experience, she was consistently climbing up the sales chart. She probably does better because she's a woman, he thought. The prospects aren't expecting a woman salesperson, and that's her edge. Yeah, that's it.

Of course, he decided to himself, the other reason I'm not doing as well is because the territory I've been given is mined out. Nobody could sell to these idiots.

Feeling somewhat better, Mark closed up his briefcase and decided to drop in at the mall. Perhaps I need a new suit to bring my luck back.

On the way over to the mall he wondered for a moment if he should have signed up for the sales skills seminar the company was offering. No, he decided, that's only for people who don't know which end is up. The only salespeople there would be the newbies and the company brown noses.

The RESULT:

Mark is equating the length of his selling history with quality. In addition, he has convinced himself that his current situation is not his responsibility. Will a new suit help Mark?

DISCUSSION:

While Mark may seem to have an over- abundance of excuses for not performing well, it is not unusual to hear many of these same ones from the majority of salespeople. The common thread through all of these excuses is the total refusal to accept any responsibility for current performance.

“It’s not my fault I’m doing (fill-in one of the following: poorly, marginally, about average), it’s because of (fill-in anything that the salesperson has no control over).”

The number of years someone has spent in sales does not guarantee success today with a prospect who has just walked in. Success with a prospect is guaranteed when the salesperson accepts responsibility for performing in a professional manner. If the prospect buys, great. If the prospect doesn’t buy but gives you five warm referrals, great.

APPROACH:

Ask a consistently successful salesperson, in any product area, what he attributes his success to, and you will hear many different things. The common thread will be, “I take complete responsibility for my success or failure in sales.”

Every salesperson knows he should have a positive mental outlook. The only problem with that phrase is that it is meaningless. But it sounds good.

Either a salesperson takes complete responsibility for his or her sales, or the sales will not be made. They will not be made because there is always an excuse for why not.

THOUGHT:

A salesperson’s sales are a result of his taking complete responsibility for performance.

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WEEK 42

INTEREST, PRESENTATION

The TACTIC: Your meter's always running.

The STORY:

Jim was on a roll. In the past five months, he had come from the bottom of the sales chart to the top. Everyone at the office was impressed. He was determined to stay number one. With this in mind, he decided that every client was going to receive additional attention at no charge. Stop in and visit them, see what “no-charge” help was needed and provide it. Let his clients know that he was available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

And for the next three months, Jim's clients thought of him as the best salesperson they had ever known. One client in particular was flabbergasted when Jim drove two hundred miles to get and then deliver a needed spare part on Saturday afternoon.

Another client even called Jim's manager to tell her just how impressed she was with Jim's sudden appearance late one Friday when he sat down and helped them get an order out the door. “He pitched right in,” she said.

But then a strange thing happened that no one, not even Jim could figure out. He started slipping down from number one in sales to number two, then to number three and then a sudden free-fall to second from the bottom.

Something's wrong, thought Jim. Every client loves me, but I don't have anymore orders. Don't they appreciate what I do for them?

The RESULT:

Jim's clients love him because they get extra services for free. If, and when, they have a need for more of Jim's product, they might buy from him. But a curious thing happens when people get something for free; they are less likely to buy in the future. After all, why should they? They get so much for free now without asking.

DISCUSSION:

There is nothing wrong with going beyond the call of duty for a customer. But here's a question — you take a New York City cab to your destination, get out and tell the driver to wait for an hour while you run inside to a meeting — do you think, assuming he even waits, that he's going to wait for free or is the meter always running?

Let's assume for the sake of argument, that this same taxi cab driver doesn't charge you for waiting and neither of you discussed it. Every other taxi cab driver you know charges for waiting, and this one doesn't.

Suppose you get in his cab again two days later. Aha, you think, the fellow who doesn't charge for waiting. So you attend a three-hour meeting, get down to the cab and find out the meter has been running for three hours. How do you feel? Like you have been robbed? Like you've been cheated?

Do you have any right to these feelings?

APPROACH:

Customers, if given free services will be trained to expect more and more free services. Their expectations of what is free will escalate in direct proportion to the amount of free service provided. And like your experience with the cab driver, if you stop providing these free services the customer will feel robbed and cheated.

Does the customer have any right to feel robbed and cheated? Probably not, but that still does not make the customer feel better. So what does the customer do then? Goes somewhere else.

The best approach to free service is to never give it. Ever.

THOUGHT:

If you give it away for free, then don't expect to ever get paid for it — ever.

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WEEK 43

CUSTOMER FOR LIFE

The TACTIC: Get an IOU for everything you do.

The STORY:

"I'm sick and tired of running around doing favor after favor for my clients," stated Jim as he sat eating lunch with Melinda.

She looked up and asked, "What do you mean?"

"It's like with that publishing company. They needed a part for the press, and I took all day Saturday to drive out to the warehouse and back to get it for them. All I got was a thank-you. That's it. Nothing more."

"What else?" she inquired.

"Well, three weeks ago I filled up my car with that special proofing paper for my advertising agency account, personally delivered it after hours, and what happens? Did they refer me to anyone else? No. I've got scores of things I do for all my clients."

"You don't see what is missing?" gently asked Melinda.

"What do you mean?"

"That part you got . . . when you found out they needed it, did you get an IOU for something else?"

"A what?"

"Did you say, 'I'll get the part, but in return I need you to sit down with me on Monday morning to tell me whom, if you were me, you'd call on'?"

"Or," she continued, "with the advertising agency . . . did you say, 'I can bring the paper you need tonight, but when I do, we have to sit down and work out an ordering schedule so that this doesn't happen to you again?'"

"No," responded Jim with a smile growing on his face, "but I see what you are suggesting. Thanks."

The RESULT:

Melinda gets additional sales because her clients don't ever expect to get anything for free. While she may not charge money, she does "charge" by getting an IOU for each and every favor completed.

DISCUSSION:

In the sometime rush to make a sale and/or keep a customer happy, it's very tempting and easy to make an offer to do something. Any good salesperson then feels, as she should, an obligation to make good on the offer. The simple motivation on the salesperson's part is that if the prospect or customer sees the salesperson going above and beyond, this will lead to a sale, either now or down the line.

Rarely does the salesperson consider this to be the slippery slope down which she slides to fewer and fewer sales. Consider the free offer from the prospect's/customer's point of view; you are telling her that you will work for nothing. Harsh, but accurate.

APPROACH:

There is nothing wrong with making an offer to do something that does not immediately result in a commission. This is the essence of keeping good customers for life. However, the offer to do something should always be paired with an IOU. When the offer is paired with the IOU, the customer is making an implied mental contract with you. "I do this for you; you do this for me."

There are thousands of implied contracts that can be established.

A simple lead generation contract...

"I appreciate that you need the supplies, and I'll be glad to take them to you. When I get there, I'd like to spend a few moments learning who else you know that could use my service. Would that be OK?"

A commitment to do additional business....

"Bill, what happens if, for some reason, I can't make it on Saturday?"

"Well, our project will be late, and I'll be in trouble."

"When I get there, I'd like to setup some sort of vital supplies ordering schedule with you so that you don't get into a tight spot. Would this make sense?"

Always do whatever you can to keep a customer for life and, at the same time, create an implied contract so that the customer never expects something for free.

THOUGHT:

Getting an IOU for everything you do is as simple as telling the customer you expect one.

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WEEK 44

CUSTOMER FOR LIFE

The TACTIC: Keep your customer off the street.

The STORY:

"I'm not worried about the Smitherington account going anywhere else," proudly stated Jim at the monthly account review. "I'm the only one who talks Smitherington's language."

"You sure about that?" asked Ed, the sales manager.

"Sure. Where else is he going to turn for what we've got at the price he's paying," responded Jim and then added, "Besides, he and I are like this." Jim twisted two fingers together.

"Well," went on Ed, "some of the other salespeople have mentioned that new firm trying to move in on their accounts."

"Hey, I'm not worried about them. That company doesn't have the history we do with Smitherington. Besides, their salespeople aren't that good."

"How do you know that?"

"Two weeks ago Smitherington called me up and told me just how helpless they were when they called on him. They couldn't even answer his questions. No problem. We had a good chuckle over it."

About twenty minutes after the meeting was over, Jim found a message on his desk. It was from Smitherington cancelling future product shipment because he had found another supplier. Jim immediately placed a call and found that Smitherington had left for a two-week vacation.

No problem, thought Jim, he's just trying to beat me up on price. Really, no problem. About a week after he gets back I'll call him. Yeah, that's what I'll do.

The RESULT:

Jim did not keep his customer "off the street" and as a result lost the business, probably forever.

DISCUSSION:

Some salespeople feel that specific customers owe total allegiance to them. Unfortunately, the salesperson's ego sometimes gets in the way of reality.

Consider the customer who is subjected to such a salesperson. No one likes, nor tolerates for long, a relationship where he's totally dependent on someone else. Once a person perceives this to be the case, resentment builds. Once the resentment starts building, it is just a matter of time before something happens.

In a sales situation, the customer goes into the street and flags down the first warm body that can sell what the other guy was selling. Even if the warm body is more expensive, the sale will be made. Even if the warm body can't deliver in the same timely fashion, the sale will be made.

APPROACH:

The salespeople who are always at the top of the monthly sales chart have many common characteristics. One of the most important is knowing that they are not the only people in the world who can effectively sell the customer. There are many others who will call on their customer and who can do just as good a job. Having this understanding is the first step in keeping the customer off the street.

The second step is very difficult for many salespeople to take. In so many words, they will say the following to their customers in every meeting:

"I know you can buy from many others, and yet you buy from me. Why is that?"

This simple step allows the customer to feel in control, yet actually puts the salesperson in control. Consider for the moment that if the customer is wavering, asking this question allows the salesperson to uncover the concerns and deal with them.

THOUGHT:

If your customer is on the street, you or someone else will sell him. If your customer is off the street, only you will sell him. Take your pick.