

TACTics

for Sales Professionals SM



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

WEEK 45

INTEREST, PRESENTATION

The TACTIC: Play-it-safe words kill sales.

The STORY:

"You're close to making the sale, but I have to talk with some other people," said Mary, watching for the reaction from Tim.

"That's good to hear," responded Tim with a sigh of relief.

"What you are proposing looks good, but I'm not sure of where our budget will be this year."

"Does that mean there is a chance of doing business?" Keep it positive, thought Tim, positive.

"Considering all of the proposals that we have seen so far, yours certainly has top consideration." Mary figured that if she kept up this barrage of meaningless phrases, Tim would eventually leave feeling just like the last six salespeople — with positive feelings and absolutely no commitment on her part at all.

"Is there anything else, Mary, that I could do to help you make a decision?"

"Tim, let me be honest with you," responded Mary, "If I have my say, then there is a good chance that we could do business."

"My company would certainly work to meet your needs," responded Tim.

"It appears that every opportunity is open to you. I don't think you have to worry about where we will go with this. You have our top consideration."

"I can't tell you what that means to me. I look forward to hearing from you."

The RESULT:

Tim was promised nothing, but left feeling good because he thought he was promised something. Mary avoided commitment and politely got rid of another salesperson.

DISCUSSION:

Why do salespeople accept play-it-safe words? Because when they go back to the office, they get to think and say that the prospect/customer is probably going to buy — this makes the sales manager happy.

Why do prospects and customers use play-it-safe words? Because they have learned this is the surest and quickest way to get rid of salespeople. They get to avoid commitment and as a bonus, get rid of the salesperson.

In this story absolutely nothing was promised by either party. No commitments. Unfortunately for Tim, he is under the illusion something was promised.

APPROACH:

Instead of accepting play-it-safe words, turn them into a question directed at the prospect.

- “You have our top consideration.” “By ‘top consideration,’ just what exactly does that mean?”
- “Your proposal looks good.” “By ‘looks good,’ I’m not sure what that means; could you explain a bit further?”
- “I have to talk to some other people.” “The other people, who are they?”
- “There’s a good chance that . . .” “By ‘good chance,’ I’m just a bit confused. What do you mean by that?”
- “We really appreciate the effort you’ve made.” “I’m a bit confused; by ‘really appreciate,’ you mean...?”

Wait for an answer, and don’t accept more play-it-safe words as the answer.

THOUGHT:

Play-it-safe words are how prospects and customers avoid commitment. If you accept these words, then don’t expect a sale.

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WEEK 46

INTEREST, PRESENTATION

The TACTIC: Don't presume. Ask questions.

The STORY:

Jim knew for sure what the prospect was looking for. It was the only possible thing.

"We also have this same car in a beautiful shade of deep red."

"Oh," she said, "that's nice."

"I couldn't help but notice," said Jim, pleased with himself for noticing what she drove into the dealership. "Just like the one you drove in with."

"Yes, my car is red . . ." she tapered off.

"And the sunroof on your car, you can get the same type on this new one. I'm pretty sure that if you're serious, I could get the sales manager to discount the sunroof package."

"That would be nice," she replied in a very noncommittal fashion.

"So," said Jim, "what else could I answer for you?"

She pursed her lips and looked out the window towards where she had parked.

"Well, tell you what," she said, "let me think about it, and I'll get back to you."

"Okay, here's my card. We have a red one with a sunroof coming in tomorrow. You'll love it."

As she left, one of the other salespeople came over to Jim and said, "I see you were talking to Diane. Did you hear how she got that car she's driving? Her husband walked out on her two weeks ago. That car was his. She told my wife that she'd like to run it off a cliff. Doesn't want to own anything that reminds her of him."

The RESULT:

Jim did not make the sale for many reasons. The biggest reason was that he presumed to know what was important to the buyer. As it turned out, what was important to the buyer was not what Jim presumed. All he had to do was ask a simple question, "What is important to you when buying?"

DISCUSSION:

Top performing salespeople never presume to know why someone is interested in buying, nor, after the sale, how the buyer is using the product. They ask and ask and ask.

Salespeople who are not performing well or those that bounce up and down, constantly presume to know the answers to unasked questions. Why? Perhaps it is a pattern they have fallen into because they want the customer to know that they have all the answers. And if they have all the answers, then the customer would be silly to not buy from them.

Another reason for presuming? The salesperson feels “not-in-control” if the customer does most of the talking. It’s easier and more comfortable for the salesperson to do the talking in the hopes that something said will make the customer buy.

But think of the customer who’s sitting in front of you. The customer is interested in something. The customer has reasons for being interested. The customer feels that the reasons are important. The customer wants to see if the reasons are important enough to part with the money. Ignore this simple reality and lose the sale.

Or, pay attention to this and help the customer make the decision by talking to you about what he wants.

APPROACH:

The first question that Jim should have asked was, “If you could do your car over, what would you have done differently?” While the sentence is not completely logical, Diane would have responded in a way that allowed Jim to keep asking questions.

The same applies for any sales situation. The customer, in 99% of the situations, has already bought what you are selling at some past point. So ask him, “If you could go back and do that purchase again, what would you change?” Be prepared to wait for a response because 99% of the customers will never expect a salesperson to ask this question. They expect you to act as if you already know.

THOUGHT:

Unless you ask questions to find out what the prospect or customer is thinking, you are fooling yourself into losing the sale.

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WEEK 47

INTEREST, CLOSING

The TACTIC: Talk less and sell more.

The STORY:

That morning Bill woke up with laryngitis. “Great,” he croaked at the mirror, “the big sale is today, and I sound horrible.” Stopping off at the pharmacy on the way in for some lozenges, he found his voice in even worse shape. While he could talk, it was just barely above a whisper and for not more than a few sentences.

The other salespeople, once they discovered Bill was silenced for once, thought it quite funny. In the past, Bill was known for loud and long sales talks. Now they all wondered how long it would be before he decided to pack it in for the day.

After blowing off the first two prospects, Bill decided that trying to talk as if his voice were intact wouldn’t work. Besides his throat feeling like a combination of coarse sandpaper and a fresh burn, the painful sound of his voice was enough to drive away even the most dedicated buyer.

What the heck, he thought, I’ve got nothing to lose. When I approach a prospect, I’ll whisper that I’ve lost my voice and that she should ask me questions. I’ll jot the answers down. Who knows?

At the close of business that day, Bill was not the top producing salesperson. But, to be straightforward, Bill had never been the top producing salesperson. What he had accomplished, though, was nothing short of remarkable; he had beaten his previous best day’s sales total by 112%.

The RESULT:

Bill made the sales because he physically could not speak more than a few sentences. As a result of his not being able to “commandeer” the sales situation, the prospect had the time to make her own decision. In this case, the sales were made by the prospects.

DISCUSSION:

Perhaps Bill lost his voice because he spends so much time talking the prospects into occasionally doing something. Would it be more productive to talk less, and as a result, see more prospects?

Bill may well be using the “talk-’em-into-signing” method of sales because this is all he knows. As a result of his illness, he may have discovered another, more effective method.

This is not to suggest that salespeople become mute and resort to writing down the answers to questions. But it does suggest the possibility that there is virtue in not trying to talk the prospect into the sale.

Prospects and on-going customers do not care to be on the receiving end of a one-sided conversation. While the salesperson may know a great deal about a product, what the salesperson knows may not be the reason why a prospect buys.

APPROACH:

The only method a salesperson can use to talk less is to ask more questions. As a result of asking questions, the prospect does most of the talking. Initially, unless a salesperson is used to asking questions, this is difficult. Most salespeople’s questions are those which lead the salesperson into launching a one-sided conversation.

Instead of asking for yes, no, or one-worded answers, ask questions that give the prospect a chance to talk.

Instead of “What can I help you with today?”, ask “I appreciate you stopping in . . . whatever brought you down today?” And, regardless of what is said in response, turn it into a question.

Instead of “What price range are you looking for?”, ask “Suppose I had what you needed to solve the problem but at more than what you could see spending . . . how could I help you?” This one is tough to say, but it’s amazing the results you will get.

THOUGHT:

Prospects want to make decisions — the more you talk, the less chance they have to make one.

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WEEK 48

PRESENTATION

The TACTIC: Go for the “NO.”

The STORY:

Bill had decided that Harold, his prospect, was not going to get away. He was going to get the sale no matter what. Now, driving to Harold's office, Bill reviewed all of the things he'd done to date.

It all began three months before when Harold took Bill's phone call. The call did not go as smoothly as Bill would have liked, but after fifteen minutes on the phone, Harold caved in and agreed to come down.

Not that it surprised Bill, but Harold broke three appointments over three weeks. Finally he showed up one afternoon totally unexpected. That didn't daunt Bill. After Bill spent two hours trying every which way to close, Harold left saying that he'd have to think about it.

Bill rose to the occasion by sending a different brochure a week for five weeks, each followed up by a lengthy phone call. Still Harold hadn't closed, but Bill knew that the sale was near.

"Lunch," thought Bill, "that's next."

So Bill took Harold to lunch and spent another two hours. Still no sale. But Bill got Harold to agree to an appointment at Harold's office. And now Bill was headed there to make the sale. I can smell the close, thought Bill.

Three hours later, Bill stumbled out of Harold's office. No sale and Harold was less than pleasant when the parting came. I guess, thought Bill, Harold won't buy.

The RESULT:

Bill might not look at the final "no" as success, but it is. Considering that he took three months to get the final answer, it could be said that Bill was a bulldog. Or it could be said that Bill wasted at least two and a half months on an unproductive prospect. Now Bill is finally free to be a bulldog with someone who is more qualified.

DISCUSSION:

One of the most destructive sales myths in circulation is how the “bulldog” salesperson finally got the contract, the deal, the sale, after months of constant work. This myth is held up as the epitome of what sales is all about. Well, if the deal is worth millions, and the commission is worth hundreds of thousands, then perhaps there is some worth in doggedly pursuing the prospect.

For the vast majority of salespeople, the deal is not worth hundreds of thousands in commissions. One interesting statistic is that the average sales commission in this country is around two hundred dollars or less.

If you keep track of the hours spent trying to sell all of your prospects, and then at the end of the month divide the total hours into your commissions for the month, you will find what you make per hour. If you feel the dollar per hour figure is ridiculously low, consider the fact that you need to get a “no” as quickly as possible and move on to another prospect.

APPROACH:

Instead of waiting until the end of the sales approach to find out if you are going to get a “no,” why not take care of it right at the beginning?

“Harold, appreciate you coming by today to look at my products. Before we go any further, I want you to know that at any time you can say “no,” and it will be over. Can we agree on that?”

The only possible answer you will receive is a “yes.” The pressure is off of you to ask the question of whether or not the prospect will buy. At any time during your sale, you simply say, “Harold, at the beginning we agreed that if you want to say “No,” it’s OK. Should I continue?”

If Harold says “No,” you are now free to move on to a prospect who is better qualified to say “Yes.” In addition, even though Harold didn’t buy from you, you and he both have each other’s respect. Will Harold recommend you to someone who might buy at this point? If you ask him right then and there, he probably will.

THOUGHT:

When a prospect tells you “No,” you now have the opportunity to spend productive time finding a prospect who will say “Yes.”