

How to know which salesperson to fire!

By Ian Stephens

After days of providing 1-1 sales coaching, riding shot-gun on actual customer interactions, Sales Performance specialist, Ian Stephens explores the '7 Deadly Sins' of sales people. The result – missed sales, profit and bonus opportunities.

Success leaves clues, as do mistakes. After 20 days and approximately 80 one-one coaching sessions and joint field visits, it was easy to see a pattern forming. Time and time again, sales reps would make the same mistakes, and sales opportunities walked out the door.

The 7 deadly sins of retail sales people are:

1. Missing rapport building opportunities,
2. Assuming you know what the potential customer wants versus uncovering their key needs, wants or desires,
3. Habitually asking closed questions instead of open ended questions which get the customer talking,
4. Talking twice as much as listening, versus listening twice as much as you speak,
5. Talking to all the features of the product instead of spending time on the 3 main features which meet their needs!
6. Failing to make people feel special and valued, and
7. Over promising, and under-delivering in respect to delivery times (if applicable)

Anyone doing three or more shouldn't be on the team – they are costing you sales and profit. Let's explore each and re-connect to the skills and behaviours we should be doing to maximize sales, profits and/or commissions:

1. Missing rapport building opportunities:

As a general rule, people buy from people they like. Based on my observations, many sales people fall into the trap of becoming 'habitual' about the sales process. And I understand why; Day in and day out you are going through a similar process, and this results in missing basic rapport building opportunities. Notice everything, and find things you have in common. If you are not a good rapport builder, then I suggest two things; either hone and practice the skill of rapport building, or get out of sales. It's just that important.

2. Assuming you know what the potential customer wants versus uncovering their key needs, wants or desires:

This is a trap for OLD players. The more experience you are, the more you think you know what the customer needs. And 99% of the time, you will be right. But for heaven's sake, let the customer tell you what they want before you jump to the conclusions. At least make them feel like they have been listened too, before you start showing them product choices. We love to buy, but we hate being sold to. The solution is to get the potential customer talking about their needs, wants or requirements, and then show them how your product or service is a direct match. And yes, you may need to educate and lead them to know what's new, and create a need they didn't know they had.

3. Habitually asking closed questions instead of open questions

Any question which only gets you a yes or no answer is termed a closed question. Many retail people are absolute 'habitual' masters of asking closed questions, and then have the audacity to complain in the lunch room about how closed some customer are when it comes to sharing information. The real issue is with the sales person and their ingrained habit of asking closed questions. For example "Is (insert feature) important to you?" will get you very little compared to 'What is important to you?' Ask broader open or leading questions which create conversation.

4. Talking twice as much as listening, versus listening more effectively

We have two ears and only one mouth. Why don't we use them in that proportion? Failing to listen effectively is the fastest way to snap rapport with a potential customer. You don't like it when someone you're talking to doesn't listen, so why do we do it to other people? Get your ears on and listen to what they are saying. Stop finishing people sentences for them, and assuming you know what they are about to say. Again, you might, but let them say it anyway. People like people who let them talk about themselves. Listen twice as much as you speak and reap the benefits in increased rapport, sales, repeat buying and healthier salaries/commissions.

5. Talking to all the features of the product instead of those which meet needs

Deadly sin number 5 is a bi-product of all that PRODUCT training you constantly receive from suppliers or product trainers. Your head is so full of features, we rattle them all off, instead of just referring to the main three or four which are a direct match to the needs/wishes or desires of the clients. Put yourself in the buyer's shoes, and it feels like one is being 'sold to'. The alternative; ask some questions to discover their needs, listening... then demonstrate you have understood by demonstrating only the main features which address their needs or desires.

6. Failing to make people feel special and valued

A universal human requirement is to 'feel the love'. We want to feel significant and important. Many sales professionals begin operating 'consciously unaware' that they are going through the motions and are not making the potential customer feel special and unique. 'Price' may be important, but survey after customer survey confirms that 80% of customers will pay between 10-15% more if they receive exceptional service. Call to action; be awake, and in the NOW moment with every potential customer. Make them feel like they are the most important person on Earth; then watch the universal law of the harvest kick in – what we give out, comes back – multiplied.

7. Over promising, and under-delivering

This sin will be applicable in respect to all the promises we make in our desire to get the sale; product availability, delivery times, or simply time deadlines for getting information/proposals to them. We tend to over promise, then under-deliver. High performing sales consultants do exactly the opposite... under promise then over deliver. It's a simple philosophy; if you think you can deliver Thursday, say Friday. They will then be delighted when you call and arrange for delivery on Thursday. Expectations are exceeded. Resist the temptation to over inflate your organizations capabilities. Give yourself and the operations crew some breathing space. And never forget the first golden law of customer service... communicating bad news is better than no news!.

Call to action: Circulate this article and dedicate five minutes at the next sales meeting/product training session

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