

Sales Tips and Strategies to Increase Your Sales Success



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to Increase Your Sales Success

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Introduction

We're all busy people, which is why the Small Business Success Library of books is a great way to get your hands on a lot of information vital to your success, in easy bite-sized pieces. I don't know about you, but I love lists, they seem to make sense to me and I can take on board some of the points and disregard others without having to wade through a bunch of stuff I already know.

In Volume One of our Sales series you will find over 50 tips and habits spanning fast-paced articles that will help you avoid the pitfalls of selling in today's increasingly competitive markets.

We start with successful habits – everyone knows that good habits lead to success. However, we also need to acknowledge that there are things we do that may in fact lose us sales. You'll find several articles with mistakes to avoid, those things that we all somehow pick up along the way as our sales careers progress. Things we probably don't even realize we're doing until someone brings it to our attention, or our closing rate starts to drop.

We use the analogy of driver training to bring your attention to how to successfully “drive” your sales success and discuss the habits we should be nurturing, the ones that will result in increased sales. These are often things we know we should be doing, but perhaps no longer pay enough attention to in our everyday sales life. A refresher course is always helpful. And what about that unavoidable sales slump that every sales professional has experienced at some time in their career? We've got some tips on how to climb out of the dumps and get back to productivity when you're feeling the slump.

Thought about getting yourself more organized? Organize Your Way to Better Sales will give you tools to ensure your lack of organization isn't losing you sales. Finally, learn some lessons from successful public speakers on how to improve your sales presentations.

Whether you are a small business entrepreneur new to sales, or a long-in-the-tooth sales professional, you'll find something in this eBook to make you think about how you are approaching prospects, making presentations and closing (or not closing) sales.

Sales Tips and Strategies to Increase Your Sales Success is a quick and easy read, but the advice in these articles has the power to increase your sales significantly, if you start adopting them today!

Ingrid Vaughan
Business Writer



Successful Sales Habits

Behavioural specialists tell us it takes 21 days of consistently using a new behaviour for it to become a habit. Here are some sales habits you could try that could increase your closing rate significantly.

Sell only to those who want to buy

Become a quick discerner of people who really want to buy from you, and people who just aren't interested. Spend more time on the people who want what you're selling, and less time trying to convince people who don't, that they do.

Know your product inside and out

There should be no question about your product or service you cannot answer to your customer's satisfaction. Knowledge inspires confidence, and if your buyer has confidence in you, your sales pitch will be more effective.

Ask for referrals

Without being pushy, determine never to let a sales opportunity go by without asking your prospect or customer if they know anyone else who might be interested in what you have to sell.

Follow up and do what you say you're going to do

Credibility is key for a salesperson. If you say you will follow up and don't, if you promise something and don't deliver you can't recapture that credibility. Not only will you lose it with this customer, but with every one he or she talks to about you.

Take responsibility for things that go wrong

Nothing frustrates people more than someone who denies responsibility for something that is their fault, or who casts

blame on others for it. Fess up if you've made a mistake, promise to make it right, and then follow through.

Ask and you shall receive


Ask for the sale. Be aware of the different social styles of the people you are selling to and use that knowledge to ask for a sale. Many a salesperson has walked away from people who were willing to buy, but were never asked.

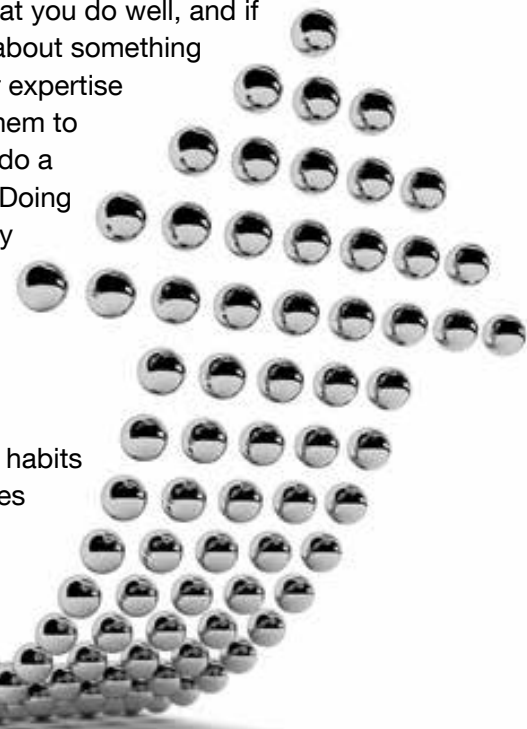
Speak well of your competitors

This shows integrity. People who are willing to trash talk their competitors might be just as willing to do so about their customers. They are seen as untrustworthy. There is always something kind you can say.

Don't fake it

Some people will do anything to avoid losing a sale, including making promises about things they really can't do and then scrambling to try to get it done. Focus on what you do well, and if you get questions about something that is beyond your expertise or specialty, refer them to someone who can do a good job for them. Doing this guarantees they will come back to you the next time they need your service.

Practice these new habits and watch your sales increase. 



Seven Deadly Sales Sins

We all make mistakes, but some mistakes are more costly than others. In the area of sales, in a small business, a mistake can mean the difference between meeting your cash flow requirements for that month, or not. It can mean the difference between gaining a new, loyal customer who will bring cash into your business for years to come, or losing that potential income source. Here's a list of seven mistakes to avoid when making sales.

Selling Without Knowing Your Customer

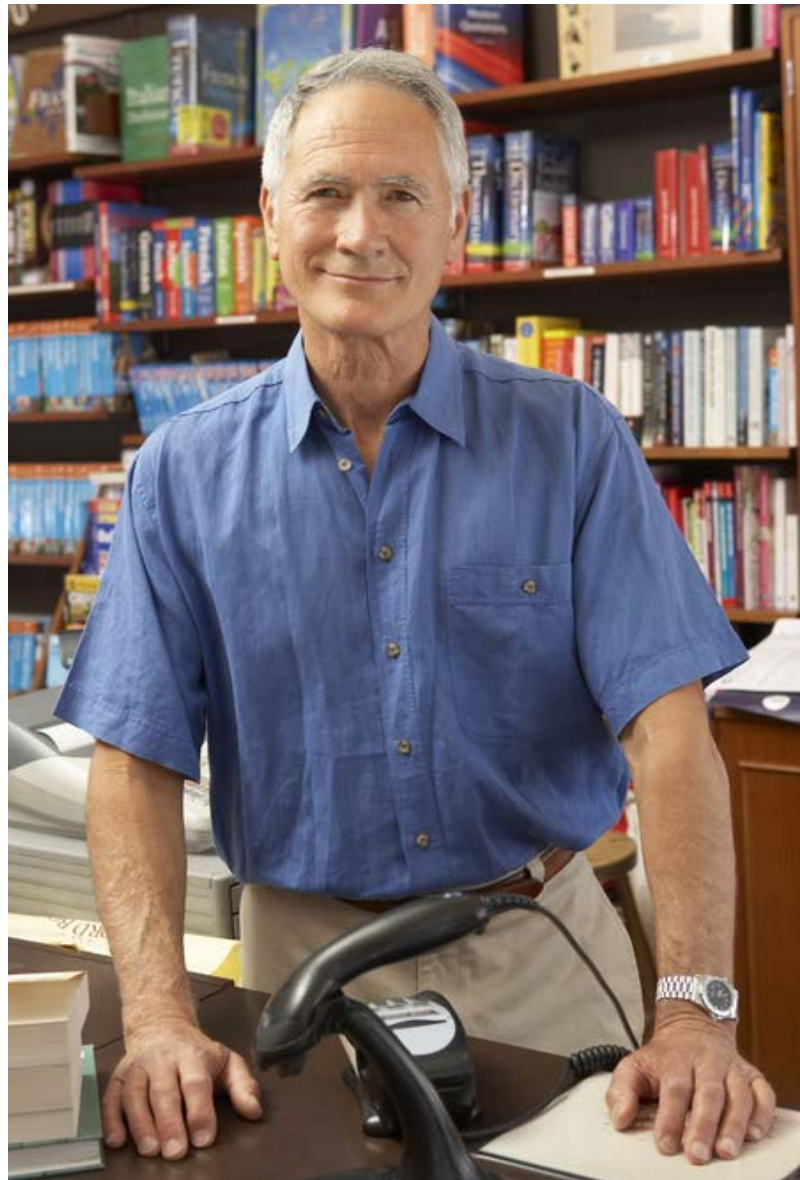
Customers want to buy from someone who is not only knowledgeable about the product they are selling, but also about the industry in general, and about their needs specifically. Would you sell the same way to a young one-income family with four kids struggling to make ends meet as you would to a two-income couple with professional jobs and large disposable incomes? If you take the time to listen to your customers and ask appropriate questions, they will tell you what you need to know. Knowing your industry is important. Knowing your product is essential. Knowing your customer is paramount to making sales.

Avoiding Dissatisfied Customers

If you avoid the people who aren't happy with you, you're losing the opportunity to build loyalty in those customers. Look at dissatisfaction as your opportunity to go above and beyond. Do everything you can do to make it right with those customers and you'll encourage loyalty that will stay with you for years.

Ignoring Small Orders

Every customer is an important customer. It may be tempting not to bother with orders that are small or on which you won't make much of a profit, but you never know what that customer



might purchase in the future. You also don't know how many people that person can refer to you if they are treated well, or how many people they will steer away from you if they aren't.

Using the Same Old Pitch

Coming back to the same customers with the same old pitch is a big mistake. People want to

know you are innovative, creative, and on the cutting edge of your industry. Make sure that you revitalize your sales presentation often. Use different examples, different approaches, appeal to different behavioural styles and offer different incentives. Being creative is one of the keys to making sales.

Not Taking Advantage of Sales Training

You may think you're the best salesperson on your team (and in fact you may be), but the best sales people never stop learning new ways to improve. Take advantage of every sales training opportunity you can find. You will never lose if you choose to keep on learning. Even if you don't hear anything new from the instructor, you can learn from the experiences of others in the room, or be a resource to others who aren't as experienced as you are. Make lifelong learning part of your sales strategy.


Being a Cheapskate

Everything you do makes an impression on your customer. Are you willing to take a client to lunch every few months to let him know you appreciate his business? Do you pick up the tab if you've met for coffee with a prospect?

Do you acknowledge others who give you free advice or referrals by sending a note or a gift? These may be small things but they make a big impression.

Going for the Popular Vote Rather than the Respect Vote

Always show integrity in your dealings with other people. It may feel good to put your competition down so you can convince your prospects of how much better you are, but in the long run it won't benefit you. People may like you in the moment, especially if you have charisma and the power of persuasion, but once you walk away they'll think about the things you said – both about yourself and about others – and they won't trust you. Integrity always wins in the end. A tip for dealing with competitors without trashing them is to study their strengths and weaknesses. Then, promote your strengths as they relate to the weaknesses of your competition. In this way you expose their weaknesses and demonstrate why you are better, all without mentioning them once.

Avoid these seven sales mistakes and incorporate these principles into your sales approach, and you'll not only increase your sales, but also find that your customers will notice and appreciate your business integrity. 



Sales Lessons from Driver Training



If you've ever been in the position of helping your son or daughter obtain their driver's licence, you'll know about the painstaking hours it takes to teach good habits (and unlearn bad ones). You'll know the feeling of taking your life in your hands every time you get in the car with a learning driver behind the wheel. You'll understand the thousand things you do so automatically when you've been driving for many years that you now have to try to remember in order to teach them. In fact, many of us who have been driving for a long time may have a hard time passing a driver's test. These lessons make a great metaphor for driving a successful sales campaign. Metaphors work really well to help us remember things that may not stick. Perhaps this one will work to help you remember some key elements of successful sales strategies.

1. Keep your eyes on the road

When you're a brand new driver, you are so terrified that your eyes are glued to the road, but once you've been at it for a few months, you tend to loosen up a bit and start noticing all the distracting things around you. It's probably similar to when you had your first sales position. Every meeting with a new prospect was terrifying and you kept your focus on the task ahead of you. But once you had a few sales under your belt, you may have started becoming distracted – losing your focus just a little bit. If you've been driving your sales career for a long time, you're especially prone to distractions, laziness, or worse: bad habits. Remember that successful sales people are highly focused and keep their eyes on the goals ahead of them, leaving distractions by the side of the road.

2. Be aware of what's in your peripheral vision

When you're first learning to drive, it's difficult to be aware of those dangerous things beyond the road directly in front of you. Learning how to do that is called defensive driving, and it's an important driving skill that may keep you from harm down the road – but it takes practice. (Note that being aware of what's in your peripheral vision is different from being distracted by things that have nothing to do with your driving!) It doesn't come naturally. While you're staying focused on your sales goals, you do need to be aware of what's in your peripheral vision. What are your competitors doing that may negatively impact your sales process if you don't see it? What is going on in your industry that will



have a significant impact on customers' buying decisions? Where is your company going in terms of its vision and goals, and how might that impact your plans? Staying focused is important, but so is knowing what's going on around you. If you drive your sales campaign defensively, you may avoid big mistakes or other disasters that jump out in front of you while you weren't paying attention.


3. Pay attention to the signs

In order to get a learner's license, a new driver must first pass a written test about road safety that includes knowing what all the signs mean. The signs are there to keep you from danger, to point you in the right direction, to warn you of what's ahead, and to keep others on the road safe as well. What are the signs you need to know for your business? Pay attention to what's going on in your industry, and indeed, in the national and global economy. By being a savvy trendwatcher, you may be able to predict certain consumer behaviours that can put you ahead of your competition when it comes to making those sales. Watch for signs about what's going on in your local community. Is there a big event coming to town? How might you be able to turn that into a sales victory? Is your downtown being revitalized? How could you get

involved so that people get to know you, and how might that turn into sales down the road?

4. Don't speed

Boy, this is a tough one. Most of us who have been driving for a while, if we're honest, will say we struggle with staying within the speed limits. And yet, those limits are there for our safety. When accidents occur, they are often a result of people going too fast to make good decisions. This can happen with sales as well. Rushing into a presentation without being properly prepared; going ahead with a campaign before you have all the information; trying to force a sale on someone who's just not ready to make a decision. We've all done it at one time or another, but we've also probably learned that rushing into things increases our chances of making mistakes. Taking things in stride and moving at a pace that is forward-thinking yet cautious is probably the best balance.

If you've found yourself in a bit of a rut lately with your sales progress, see if you've developed some bad "driving" habits and get back to basics. You might be surprised what comes from that process, and as a result find yourself sailing through your next sales test! 

Rising From the Slump: 5 Ways to Improve Your Sales Success



Have you ever found yourself in a sales slump? Where the thought of getting up and hitting the streets again for one more day is almost more than you can bear? When it feels like the last time you heard a “yes” was months ago and your paycheck has been bearing witness to that fact? When your motivation is low and your energy practically non-existent? Take heart. Everyone who has ever worked in sales has gone through a slump or two in their career, including sales professionals who are leaders in their industry. Slumps are normal, but how you deal with those “slumpy” feelings determines whether they will make or break your sales career. Recognize those feelings as normal,

but be determined not to wallow in them. The sooner you can start taking positive action – even if those actions don’t provide instant success – the sooner you’ll move toward getting back on your feet and conquering sales again. Here’s some advice to keep you on track when you’re demotivated and discouraged.

Keep prospecting current and continuous

One of the greatest temptations for sales professionals is to stop prospecting once they build up a healthy client list. Those who think prospecting is for beginners lose their edge pretty

quickly. If you continue to keep your prospecting current and continuous, when a slump sets in you automatically have a “hit list” ready to go. Prospecting regularly helps you to stay current with what’s happening in the market, whose business is closing, who’s starting a new business, what new franchises are coming to town, and who advertises where. Keep your prospect list up to date and it will help you pull yourself up when you feel like you’re hitting brick walls.

Qualify your potential buyers

Many sales people spend way too much time trying to sell to people who aren’t qualified to buy from them. This is a waste of your time, and learning to quickly qualify your buyers will move you toward success faster than you can imagine. If Mr. Smith is a really nice guy and will gladly and politely listen to your sales proposals but does not have the budget to purchase what you’re selling, you’re wasting his and your time. If the Johnson’s just took out a huge mortgage on a new house and have been clear that their discretionary dollars will be tied up for a while, it won’t matter that they’ve spent a lot with you before – right now they’re not qualified to buy. This doesn’t mean that you should stop maintaining relationships with people who can’t buy from you right this minute, but you may be wasting a lot of energy trying to sell to people who cannot buy, no matter how much they may like to, or how much they like you!

Move from convincing to revealing

A big mistake many sales people make is thinking it’s their job to convince or talk their clients into buying what they’re selling. Nothing could be further from the truth. Convincing usually ends up in desperate attempts at manipulation, which deter most customers from buying. It’s normal to feel a little desperate when your sales have been slumping, but ask yourself whether you’ve been spending more time lately trying to convince people to buy from you. Your job as a sales person is to reveal to the buyers what their needs are, and how you can meet those needs. Revealing makes your customers much more receptive to what you have to say. Reveal their problem or need, reveal

the benefit of your product or service, and reveal how easy it is for them to solve their problem with your product.

Work on building relationships rather than rapport

Someone once told me that rapport is about getting people to like you, building relationships is about getting them to trust you. While initially, rapport is important to make people feel comfortable with you, you will never build customer loyalty if you stay in that mode. Get to know your customers – what they like, what they want, what they do in their spare time, where they spend their money – because it’s in that process of building relationships that those ‘aha’ moments come to you. Suddenly you see how a need connects to a customer’s interest and you can find a pragmatic way to meet that need. It takes a bit of risk to venture into relationships, but the payoff is big.

Customize your sales proposals – one size doesn’t fit all

A mistake that many sales professionals make is thinking that once they’ve hammered out a decent sales proposal, they’re done and can hit the streets with it. They feel it doesn’t matter if they’re talking to a local shoe store or a national trucking company – the facts are the facts. Nothing could be further from the truth. The facts may be the same, but all customers are not. Taking the time to customize proposals for individual prospects or customers makes a big impression. Adding their logo to the cover of your presentation, using statistics and information on their industry right in your proposal, identifying needs that are unique to them and proposing a way to meet those needs – all work toward your credibility. Your knowledge and desire to truly meet their needs will move them toward the buy.

If you need a boost in your sales success, try these five strategies and see whether they help you get back in the saddle again, and closing those sales at record rates! One success leads to another – so get back on track quickly and you’ll find yourself naturally getting into the groove again. SBS

quick, or you're leaning too far forward, or your tone indicates a slight boredom, your customer won't feel your belief in your own words. He may even perceive your communication as contradictory, annoying or insincere – and that makes for a sure sales failure.


The trouble is, most of us can't really be objective about our own way of communicating and how we come across to others. We need feedback to make sure we aren't using a tone that indicates boredom, that our body language isn't intimidating, or the opposite – insecure. Most of us have the words down pat – it's the other 93% we need to work on! Here are some ideas to get a handle on how you're doing in the whole process of communication. If you've found yourself in a slump in the sales department – this might be the key.

Do your sales presentation in front of a brutally honest friend. Ask someone whom you trust to be honest with you to listen and give you feedback about those things you may not notice. What does your body language say? What are you communicating with your tone of voice? Is there an inconsistency between what words you are using and how the rest of you is communicating? Are you too forceful, too timid, too confusing, too talkative, not talkative enough? Do you have physical habits that are distracting (pen tapping, gum chewing, doodling while people are talking)? All these things can give the impression that you're not really interested in what's being said. Take the feedback from your friend and work on those things that are a turnoff for customers.

Ask your customers for feedback. This may seem weird at first – and you need to do it right or you may come across as attention-seeking. The best way to get their feedback is to ask them right at the beginning of the presentation whether they'd be willing to give you a brief evaluation of your presentation. That way, regardless of whether they buy from you or not, they'll know it's coming. Ask them to be honest – tell them you are always looking for ways to improve and you value their feedback. Then, give them a brief (no more than 3 or 4 questions) questionnaire that they can leave

with you. Ask them questions like – Did you feel you were listened to and that your needs were important? Did you feel any undue pressure to purchase, and if so, what specifically made you feel pressured? Do you feel you received enough information to make a purchasing decision? Do you feel we were interested in what your needs were and in finding the right product for you? Is there anything we could have done differently in our sales presentation? Simple questions like this will give you some great information and help you determine whether something is going wrong during your sales visits.

Ask your competitors or your suppliers what they have heard about you. This one is tough – because you may not like what you hear. Granted, you'd have to have a pretty good relationship with these folks and have built trust and integrity with them in order for this to work, but it can be an informative process. Ask them if they've heard customer comments about you or your business. Ask them what other suppliers are saying about you. Ask if they have a general sense of what people think about your business (or you!). This takes a bit of courage, but the information can be very helpful. Think about it this way - the worse the feedback, the greater your opportunity to make things better!

Think about all parts of communication when you enter the sales process. Selling is not just repeating a memorized speech about how great your products are. It's not even asking all the right questions. Someone once told me that people may forget what you said, but they never forget how you made them feel. Nowhere is this truer than in the sales process. People know when you don't care. They know when you're more anxious to make the sale than to hear what they need. And "feel" contributes more to the sales decision than information. Do a communication-check and make the changes necessary to line up your words with your tone and body language for a fluid, honest, engaging sales process, and you'll watch your sales begin to climb. 

10 Surefire Ways to Lose the Sale!

Here is a tongue-in-cheek bit of sales wisdom. But within the wit, lies the secret to winning your way to better sales.

1. Always assume you know exactly what your customer wants without asking.
2. Never follow up with new prospects. If they want to do business with you, they'll call.
3. Don't take notes while you're talking to a customer. You'll remember everything you need to by the time you get back to the office.
4. Don't be too organized. You need to have flexibility in your day. So what if you're a little late for your meeting with a new customer? They'll understand.
5. Always take rejection personally. If a customer doesn't want to buy from you, that's his loss! You have better things to do with your time.
6. Never give your potential customer too much time to think it over. People make better decisions when they feel rushed.
7. Deal with every customer in exactly the same way. Don't waste your time on creativity or innovation. What works on one will work on all.
8. Don't worry too much about how you look. Customers can see beyond your sloppy appearance if they really want your product.
9. Always put your competitors down. The worse you can make them look, the better you'll look to your customers.
10. Always go for the "big" sale. Don't waste your time with the little fish.

The sad thing of course is, we have all been sold to by people that act like this. Stay focused, keep your sense of humour and make sure you don't fall into any of these bad habits. SBS



Organize Your Way to Better Sales

It's Monday morning, and you walk into your office after a perfectly enjoyable weekend greeted by a mountainous stack of paper on your desk that teeters on the verge of collapse should anyone drop a paper clip on top. You have seven very efficient "TO DO" lists only you can't remember which one is most recent. At least twenty pink telephone message notes are scattered across the desk surface except that you can't remember which ones you've called back and which you need to do today. Your "in box" is overflowing, and your outbox is empty as usual. Your day-timer is perched precariously close to the paper mountain and you're actually afraid to touch it in case of an avalanche. Oh, and the message flashing on your computer says FATAL EXCEPTION ERROR, that reminds you, you have a sales presentation to work on and you forgot to call the IT person on Friday.

If this sounds at all like you, you may feel like you're losing your mind, but you may also be losing sales because of your disorganization. Let's face it, there are two basic types of people in the world. Those whose desks look like they've been air-brushed for a magazine, and the rest of us. Most people I know wish they were a little more organized. As a business owner, it's critical that you be more organized or you're going to miss that important call-back because the pink sheet is on the floor under your desk, or you'll be late for an appointment because you forgot to write it in your daytimer. Disorganization may cause you to forget where you filed the sales presentation on your computer and as a result you have to spend time you don't have rewriting it. Remember, time is money and staying organized saves time.

Disorganization is like a disease that prevents you from functioning in a healthy and productive way. Whether yours is a like a hangnail or a hemorrhage,

here are some simple tips to help you get your organizational act together, and increase your chances of sales success.

Make an appointment with yourself.

Every day, schedule a 10-minute appointment with you. For some people it works to do it first thing in the morning before your day begins, others like to do it just before they go home for the day. During that time, review your "to do's" for the day, the appointments you have scheduled, and the time you've given yourself to do the tasks. If you've overbooked yourself, reschedule an appointment or take a few things off your list. You'll be much more effective if your schedule is challenging but manageable. Schedules can easily get out of control if you don't take the time to manage them, so don't miss the most important appointment of your day!

Make sure you have the right tools.

Just like a carpenter needs the right tools to build a house, you need the right tools when it comes to organizing your business. I'm talking about scheduling tools and efficiency tools. Do you have a good calendar system? Keeping your calendar on your computer is not the best way to keep track of your time because it isn't portable. You need to be able to pick up your calendar and take it with you everywhere you go, so when someone says can we do lunch next Thursday, you'll be able to say yes or no based on what's written down, not what you're trying to remember was there. Smart phones are great for efficiency and they're always with you, but if you don't take the time to sync your calendar with your computer, it is of little value. Take the time to learn the technology to use your tools to your best advantage. If you don't keep track of things on your phone or computer, the traditional daytimer works just as well. Just make sure whatever you use is kept up-to-date.

Do you have filing trays on your desk that are adequate for your systems? What about drawer file space? If you have to stack files on your desk because there's no room for them in the cabinet, you're in trouble. Is your computer configured on your desk in a way that allows for maximum space to write, read and create? What about software – do you have appropriate tools that help you track sales, do follow-ups, assist with prospecting? These tools are an important part of organizing your physical space, as well as supporting your ongoing sales activity.

Clear your desk.

This is a tough one. Imagine your desk with only the things on it that you will actually need for each day. Pens, stapler, paper clips, your phone, and a set of stacking trays. Perhaps a photo (yes, just one!). Do a clean sweep of everything on your desk. That means finding a place for everything until there's nothing left but pure, clear desk space. A clean desk will help you find things more quickly, work more efficiently, and feel less stressed. So just where are you going to put all the things that were on your desk? Read on.


Implement the FRAT system.

FRAT stands for File, Read, Act or Toss. This simple system can save your organizational life. Did you know that in a typical office, a piece of paper is picked up an average of 23 times before it finds the place it will eventually stay? For every piece of paper, file or note on your desk, ask yourself, do I need to file this, and if so where (see the next point on filing)? Is this something I need to read – if so, where can I put it so I will actually read it? Do I need to act on this and if so, what exactly do I need to do (call someone back, rewrite that letter, follow-up on that sales call etc.)? If you need to act, put it someplace where you'll be reminded of what you need to do. Or do I need to toss this? Be honest – those newsletters you think you ought to read but know you never will, or the flyers you think you should look at so you'll get the best deal, only you never do until the sale is over? TOSS IT! This system is an easy way to clear off your desk and regain control of the monster your desk has become.

Create a filing system that works for you.

We're not all the same, and a filing system is actually a very personal thing. Find a way that helps you keep track of all the things you need to find – quickly. If you think logically, an alphabetical or numerical system may work for you. If you're an abstract thinker, maybe you'll find something colour-coded works better. Some things require short-term storage – you may want to file those in your desk. Some things you only access occasionally. Those might need to be stored in a filing cabinet. The things you need to access daily, or your daily projects or “to do's” might need to stay on your desk. Analyze the ways you think about paper and come up with a way that makes sense to you. Then implement it and work with it every day. Spend another ten minutes at the end of your day filing everything that has landed on your desk, and every morning you'll be greeted by an empty slate (metaphorically speaking) when you see your clean desk.

So next Monday, after a perfectly lovely weekend, you'll come into your office and realize by looking at your calendar that you have four sales calls to make today, and a proposal to write. In addition to that you have six messages you need to return and a maintenance call on the photocopier you need to make. You reschedule one of your sales calls for tomorrow because you realize you're overbooked, and that opens up your schedule to organize tomorrow's staff meeting. The great thing is you'll be arriving at those sales calls on time, calm, and in control of your day.

Which Monday would you rather have – the one you had at the beginning of this article or the one you had after you implement the principles you learned here? 

25 Everyday Ways to Increase Sales

Every once in a while it's good to remind ourselves of some of the simple truths of selling. We all know that good habits lead to success. Here's a simple 25-point habit-check. Post it somewhere you'll see it often to remind yourself of the things that are important for sales success.

- Demonstrate the highest level of integrity
- Sell yourself first and communicate the message that it is sound business to trust you
- Ask the right questions; listen to the answers
- Discover your prospect's key requirements (needs)
- Know all the objections beforehand
- Sell to people who are qualified to buy
- Tell everyone about your company and what it sells
- Continually look for new markets
- Treat every sales situation as if you are a consultant
- Give total commitment and belief to what you sell
- Know your buyer and his/her market
- Ask for referrals
- Continually show enthusiasm
- Listen more than you talk
- Always tell the truth (it's easier to remember!)
- Believe in yourself
- Spend more time selling than on any other activity
- Empathize with your buyer
- Follow up each call
- Give speeches to business and civic groups
- Generate within yourself a positive attitude
- Take responsibility for presentations that go haywire and assess what went wrong
- Always ask for the sale
- Keep notes on each customer
- Keep your sense of humor

Simple but true; develop these as daily activities, or teach them to your sales staff and watch your sales results change overnight. SBS



Surviving the Loss

Recovering from Losing a Big Customer

Nothing strikes quite the blow to a small business as losing a large or long-time customer. It's a bitter pill to swallow, and one that can be difficult to recover from. According to Terry Corbell, CMS Associates LLC, 70% of the time customers leave because they feel taken for granted. Further, Kevin Antler, CEO with KnowledgeBank, Inc. says "The fact that your client turned to someone else means that something clearly was missing in the relationship if you weren't given the opportunity to resolve whatever issues existed that caused the client to leave." As a small business, such a loss can be costly, so the obvious questions are: how do you recover when it happens, and how do you prevent it from happening again?

Talk to the customer about why they left

Ok, so it's painful, and it may hurt your pride, but the best thing you can do to assist your recovery and help you move forward is to find out why the customer left. If you don't ask, you can't learn what caused the client to switch, and fix it so it doesn't happen again. Or, you may uncover a competitive advantage your competitor has. This takes courage, and you have to go in to the meeting determined not to be defensive. Ask your client to be totally honest. Were there needs you weren't meeting from either a production or quality standpoint? Was your service less than it should have been? What could you have done differently



to retain their business? You will either find out that it really had nothing to do with you (I just wanted to do business with my cousin Frank), in which case you can walk away happy in the knowledge that there was nothing you could have done. Or, you'll get a list of things that you can work on so that it doesn't happen with anyone else.

Another advantage of asking for feedback when a customer leaves, is that it shows you really cared about having them as a customer. You never know whether things will work out with their new vendor, and if you left them with a positive impression, they may be back. These meetings are most effective when done face-to-face. Even though the client has left you, take him or her out to lunch and have the conversation. If they are uncomfortable with doing this, consider writing a letter. Thank them for past business, let them know that if they aren't satisfied

with the new provider to please give you another opportunity, and ask for suggestions on how the company can improve its service to help earn back that business if the new provider doesn't work out.

Finally, don't get defensive. Defensiveness will destroy the opportunity you may have in winning the customer back. View this experience as an opportunity to learn and improve.

Determine what you can do better next time


Bring your team together to review the client's feedback, if you have it. "As a consequence of losing the client, it is a great time to reexamine what else you could do to better retain your client(s), especially if this client was what you consider an ideal client," says Jeff Diercks, Managing Director of InTrust Advisors. Take an honest, hard look at your company and decide whether the feedback warrants some changes in the way you do things. Chances are, the things that caused this client to leave may also be nagging at other customers. Making these fixes before other customers are affected is a proactive approach to client retention.

Consider creating a stronger feedback system for existing customers. If you had known about the issues that caused your client to leave in the early

stages, could you have prevented him or her from moving on? Likely, yes. So make a commitment to talk to your clients more often to find out how you are doing. They may not talk to you on their own when they are unhappy, but they will speak loudly with their feet if they choose to move on.

Move on

After gathering all the information to understand what happened, move on. "We've all lost customers for a variety of reasons, but dwelling in the failure and dejection of the loss is not only a waste of time, it will affect your ability to support other clients," says Kevin Antler. It's easy to take it personally and blame yourself, but it's not productive. You can't control everything. When you have done your best to find the answers to questions about what you may have done wrong and made the changes necessary to address those things, rest in the fact that you've done what you can do. Dwelling on the loss will make you ineffective and prevent you from moving forward.

Small business clients can feel almost like family, and when you are rejected, it's painful. But taking responsibility for what happened, and being proactive in addressing issues that can prevent it from happening again, will move you firmly forward in finding your next big client! 



Applying the “7 Habits” to Your Sales Strategy



If you've never read or listened to “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People” by Dr. Stephen Covey, you must put it on your list of goals in the near future. If you have, you should still add it to your goal-list because it's worth reviewing every year or two! This time-tested, proven and brilliant series of life-rules has been on the bestseller list for almost 20 years, and is as relevant and cogent today as it was when Covey first wrote it years ago. These seven principles can be applied to any area of life, and reading through them in detail is worth your time and energy. These principles applied to your sales approach will increase your confidence, improve your strategy and impact your bottom line.

Habit #1 – Be Proactive

Rolling the dice and hoping you'll wind up with a sale doesn't cut it in today's market. You need to be savvy and strategic. Covey's first point emphasizes the importance of not leaving things to chance, and encourages a proactive approach to all areas of life. As a sales professional, are

you continually looking for new markets? Are you prospecting regularly? Are you generating and following up on leads? Are you constantly on the lookout for new people to approach, or new ways to talk about your product or service? If you are proactive in your approach to sales in the coming months, you'll notice a marked increase in your sales success. Those who are on the proactive edge will always be two steps ahead of those who are waiting for sales to drop into their laps.

Habit #2 – Begin with the end in mind

Covey talks about the importance of knowing what you want to achieve before doing anything about it. Be clear about your goals and what you want to accomplish and work backwards from there. Do you want to increase your gross sales by \$30,000 this year? What will you need to do to achieve that? Break it down and be specific. \$30,000 is \$2,500 per month or \$625 per week. What do you need to do each month in order to raise your sales by

that much? Do you want to improve your skills by taking additional training? When will you do that and how much will it cost you? Keep your vision clearly in front of you and work from there toward accomplishing your goals.

Habit #3 – Put first things first

Dr. Covey is fanatical about priorities, and all of us would do well to listen to this principle as a precursor to success. Putting first things first means knowing what's important to you, and organizing your life accordingly. Sales success and earning a good living is important, but is it more important than spending time with your family? Covey suggests that if you truly put things in your life first that ought to be first, the rest will fall into place. Examine your goals and how you're spending your time to see if they line up with your values. Incongruence in this area will cause stress, and will hold you back from success.

Habit #4 – Think win/win

In every situation, with every person, if you begin thinking win/win you will become more successful. This principle has the power to transform the ordinary to extraordinary. If every time you're talking to a customer or prospect you're thinking win/win (in other words, how can they get what they want and need, and you get what you want and need), you will be far more likely to make the sale and win a loyal customer. If all you focus on is how much money you can make off the sale, you may win in the short-term, but you won't win long-term success.

Habit #5 – Seek first to understand, then to be understood

This is not a new concept. In fact, you've probably heard some variation of it in sales conferences or workshops you've attended. Improving your listening skills is important. But Covey goes beyond just "listening" to "understanding". If you really want to get to the root of what your customer needs, you have to do more than listen. You've got to read between the lines, hear what they aren't saying as well as what they are. Ask questions that help you toward a greater understanding. Above all, you've got to

set aside what it is you want them to understand about you (how great your product is, how much it will benefit them, how much you need this sale, etc.). As long as your thinking is focused on being understood, you're not going to be able to understand.


Habit #6 – Synergize

The sixth habit involves the art of communication and positive energy between you and other people. Are you getting the most out of your relationships with co-workers? Do you appreciate the differences between your co-workers and value what each brings to the team? Do you feel a partnership with them? Are you on the same page, the same team? Are you pulling together, speaking the same language, wanting the same things, encouraging and rooting for each other?

If you are a business owner, are you building a synergistic team? Are you working closely with others in your community? The energy of many always outperforms the energy of one. Where can you apply the principle of synergy in your sales strategy?

Habit #7 – Sharpen the Saw

Finally, Covey talks about the commitment to continuous improvement. As a sales professional, are you always looking for ways to improve your skills? To grow as a professional and as a person? Nothing in life is static. It either moves forward, or backward. If you're not growing, you're shrinking. Sharpening the saw is about an attitude of perpetual growth and improvement. How dull is your saw?

Challenge yourself to read Covey's book. Take a look at how these principles can help you to reach your goals and achieve greater sales this next quarter. You might be surprised to find yourself applying them to other areas of your life as well, and achieving a kind of success in your life you never even imagined! 

The Things We Do That Lose Us Sales

The world of sales is an ever-changing experience. Products change, customers' preferences and expectations change, purchasing habits change, strategies change, but at their core, people want the same things" – value for their money, honesty and integrity in the sales process, quality customer service, a company that stands behind its products and its people, and a genuine respect or regard for their needs. If you keep those things in your mind as you navigate all the other changes, you will be less likely to make mistakes that will tend to lose you sales. Consider whether you do any of the following things when on a sales call; avoid them, and you'll see a dramatic increase in your sales success.

1. Thinking it's all about you

Going into a sale thinking it's all about how well you present the material or how convincing you are will never give you the success you're looking for. That kind of thinking leads to over-talking, intimidation, exaggeration, and other annoying behaviours that can turn customers off. The best sales strategy is to listen more than you speak. Hear where your customers are hurting, find their point of need, know what it is they want. Only then can you genuinely offer something that will inspire a purchase. Put sales quotas out of your mind when you're in the moment with your customer and focus on them. If you do that, you'll have no trouble fulfilling those quotas.

2. Giving too much information

This happens when you don't pay attention to the first point. If you listen, you can zero into a more precise product or service offering that will meet a precise need. If you don't listen, you may be tempted to try to tell your customer about everything you have available, assuming that in that

broad spectrum there's got to be something they want. The more specific you can be in addressing their needs, the more successful you will be in selling something that can meet those needs.

3. Making judgments on your customers

While salespeople who are adept at reading their customers tend to have greater success, making assumptions too quickly can prevent you from gaining a sale. When hearing objections or even outright refusals from your customer, try to discern what's underneath those objections rather than make the judgment that they're a lost cause. Is it really a money issue, or is it fear of trying something new? Is it about not wanting to buy from



you, or is it about a bad experience they had with someone else? Persevere to find the real need, and you'll be closer to your sale.

4. Disregard relationships in favour of making a sale

It's been said that people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. This is especially true in the sales process. You can have the best, proven, inexpensive, quality item on the market, but if your customer doesn't feel you care about him or her, they won't care about your product. They will go the competitor down the street whose product is more expensive and maybe not even as good, because that competitor values his relationship with the customer. Choose building relationships over making the sale every time. You may risk losing the sale in that moment, but it guarantees that someday down the road, that person will consider you when it comes to making their purchasing decision.


5. Failing to do your homework

If you're rushing off to a sales meeting and haven't had time to do some research about your customer or prospect, you might as well reschedule the meeting. The more information you have going into the sales meeting, the more success you are likely to have. Who is your customer? What are his/her values? Where have they purchased before? What do they do for a

living (or in the case of a company – what does the company do)? What are some of the purchasing trends of the consumer group that customer represents? Having this information helps you to anticipate objections, be prepared for questions, and be closer to discovering that need. Don't cheat on this one because if you do, you'll get more failing grades than successful sales.

6. Giving the reins to your customer

If you allow your customer to lead the sales process, you lose credibility and the ability to be effective in the sale. If your customer is asking all the questions and putting you on the defensive, you'll be too busy trying to think up intelligent responses rather than understanding what they want. Be in control of the process and lead by asking questions (both those you've prepared in advance and those that come out of your conversation during the sales process). Listening closely to their answers will generate more questions, bringing you ever closer to that core understanding needed to make the sale.

We all make mistakes, and if any of these bad habits have been part of your repertoire, don't beat yourself up. Just acknowledge it and do it differently next time. The key to becoming a great sales person is a willingness to learn and grow and change in changing times, and anyone can do that! 



Successful Speaking = Successful Selling

Most sales people would never think of themselves as public speakers, but in fact, they are. They may not be facing large crowds like public speakers do, but they are communicating a message with their words to another person or people. The principles used by successful public speakers can also benefit salespeople because the better you are at communicating your message, the more likely you are to make the sale. So even though you may not be Jack Canfield or Steven Covey addressing thousands of people every year, in your own corner of the world you are communicating your message. Learning how to do that better will not only make you more confident, but will also help you increase your bottom line – and give you a higher sales quarter.

Principle #1 – You Can Never Be Too Prepared

Anyone who is successful at delivering public speeches will tell you how important it is to prepare before you ever set foot on the stage. Public speakers almost always prepare their own material; the exception is politicians who have an army of people to brief them on what they should say and how! Good speakers prepare by researching the city or community in which they will be speaking and become knowledgeable about their audience. They prepare by being aware of what's going on in the world so that they can bring relevant examples and stories into their presentation. They prepare by taking care of themselves physically and emotionally, especially in the days leading up to the speaking date. That kind of preparation allows the speaker to enter a room confident that they will be able to deliver their message, minimizing distractions and the potential for things to go wrong.



As a sales person, the more you prepare before you deliver a presentation, the greater your confidence level will be, and the more likely your prospects or customers will want to make a purchase. Like public speakers, prepare by knowing your audience. Who are they? What's important to them? What will make them want to listen to you? Prepare by knowing your product or service inside and out – so there's almost no question or objection you can't answer. Prepare by knowing what's going on in your industry so that you can draw on examples and use references about what your competitors are doing. Going into a sales presentation without sufficient preparation is a surefire way to make your prospective clients or customers lack confidence in you, and lose the sale.

Principle #2 – You Can Never Rehearse Too Much


The more times you practice, the more entrenched the material becomes in your brain, and the less you have to think about the facts. This allows you to spend more energy on the dynamics of the presentation. Great speakers rehearse their material constantly – many do so in front of a mirror – and always find ways to improve how they're going to deliver their message. Rehearsing helps a speaker realize when a phrase or a word might be cumbersome. It helps them to figure out the timing - whether their speech is too long or too short. It helps them to become comfortable with the words they're using, the stories they're telling, and the flow of the message they're trying to deliver.

Practice your sales presentation – it's that simple. Stand in front of a mirror and watch your gestures. Are you doing things that are distracting – like jingling keys in your pocket, or saying “um” too much? Do you have trouble maintaining eye contact? Do you wave your arms around or shuffle from foot to foot a lot? Do you have trouble getting the words out because they're too technical, or too awkward? The more you practice, the more confident you'll become, and the more polished your presentation will be.

Principle #3 – You Can Never Be Too Genuine

The best public speakers in the world are the ones who make you feel that every word that comes out of their mouth is 100% authentic. They're the ones whose stories are completely believable. They're the ones who can get you juiced up, or bring you to tears – because you BELIEVE them! They're the ones who infuse their speeches with warm stories and real-life examples so that everyone in the audience can relate to what they're saying. They're the ones who, when you meet them on the street, are exactly the way they came across on the stage. That's called integrity. Those are the speakers who have major impact.

As a sales person, you may already be at a disadvantage because our culture mistrusts salespeople. You have to work extra hard to earn their trust. That's why it's so important for you to be 100% genuine. If people sense falseness about you – that you are different than what you're portraying on the outside – they'll run quickly in the opposite direction. If you are able to convince them that you're a real person – that you have friends and family just like them; that you've had bad sales experiences too; that you've experienced successes and failures in life; and you've had doubts when making purchasing decisions - then you will win them over and earn their trust. Don't be afraid to let your clients or customers see the real you. It's much more compelling than any “fake” person you're trying to be. Authenticity is vital to the sales process.

So, take a lesson from the pros – the ones who talk for a living and you may just find that your sales success improves. Remember these three principles the next time you walk into a sales presentation or are getting ready to meet a new client. Preparation, practice and authenticity will make you a better sales professional. 

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