

The Complex Sale

Have you noticed that selling today is different than it has been in the past? So many of the old manipulative techniques of yesteryear, such as high pressure and quick closes, are no longer appropriate in today's business environment.

Buyers are evolving and becoming more sophisticated. And just as customers are evolving, our methods of interacting with those customers and clients need to evolve as well. As people get more sophisticated, those of us in the business of influencing need to become more skillful. We need to pay closer attention to our clients to make sure we understand what they need on many levels before trying to influence them to make purchase decisions.

To influence purchase decisions today we have to do more than simply supply products and services in neat little need-satisfaction packages. We must respond to more than simply how people buy. We need to respond to their varied communication and thinking patterns. In doing so, we can make and accelerate our own success.

If you are in the upper twenty percent of all salespeople, then what we present here will not only reinforce what you are already doing well, but it will also give you some additional insights that you perhaps knew instinctively but have not conceptualized.

If you are in the top fifty percent of all salespeople, then you have probably already built a pretty good foundation. While many things are still hit-and-miss, you are well on your way to making major leaps forward and achieving those great goals that have been just out of reach.

If you are not yet in the top fifty percent of all salespeople, then chances are you are already doing a number of things right, and there is a good possibility that you are doing a number of other things that are limiting your forward movement.

Selling imaging systems to major or national accounts is different from going door-to-door and discussing features, advantages and benefits of each product in your product line. This doesn't mean you should forget everything you've learned, in fact, what you have learned will provide an excellent foundation for the skills you will need to be successful in the complex sale. Selling at the major or national account level is viewed as a complex sale.

A complex sale is one in which several people must give their approval before the sale can take place; it

requires more than one sales call to complete. That sounds simple enough and it is simple. However, this single concept has enormous implications both for your company and your sales career. The variety of people you sell to, and the often-conflicting decisions that these people commonly have to make, mean that in a complex sale you must develop and use strategies and tactics that are quite distinct from the simple sale.

You may be experiencing change in your marketplace, technology, your product's features and your competitive position. Some of the changes may be subtle, others more dramatic, yet all are part of both an evolutionary process that happens to all markets over time. No matter what changes are going on, you can still develop effective sales strategies if you continually develop the specific skills needed to sell in a changing environment. Consider the following:

1. Whatever got you where you are today is no longer sufficient to keep you there.

This may go against the grain of your experience, but consider this: If you have had twenty years of success doing the same things over and over again, you now have a well-established comfort zone. This comfort zone may limit your ability to radically alter your approach to complex sales, which will be the standard way of doing business in the twenty-first century. You may have heard that if you put a frog in boiling water, it will jump out. But if you put a frog in a dish of cool water and slowly bring it to a boil, the frog will stay put, continuously adapting to the slowly changing environment till it dies. When you refuse to radically alter your "time-tested" methods of doing things you may end up like the second frog.

2. You can only succeed in sales today if you know what you're doing and why.

Self-awareness in the sales process is more crucial today than even five years ago. Buyers are smarter. They read the same books you do; they take the same sales and negotiation programs you do; and (as major companies have pared back total employment) they have far less time for you. If you have been relying on luck, without an understanding of your own methods, you'll be doomed to approaching each sale as a entirely new experience. If you don't develop a testing procedure to see what works and what doesn't, you'll continually find yourself at square one- while your competition receives the commission check you thought you had sewn up.

In the past, sales has often been approached from a win/lose perspective. Parties to the sale were seen as adversaries. Creating an environment in which you win and your customers win - it's what customer partnering is all about. The way you do that is make sure that your desired end result (a signed purchase order) has the customer's desired end result linked to it. If not, you may only have a short-term win. Information travels too fast to take the risk that you will never see this prospect again, or that he or she is not well connected in the business environment.

Manipulation, on the other hand, is acting without regard for the other person's desired end result. If you disregard your prospect's desired end result, they may sabotage you covertly, overtly or both. The price for being a bulldozer in sales is high and you will continually have to prospect for new clients and change jobs frequently.

People may also disagree with or have a concern about some aspect of your product or service. Salespeople create most of the objections they hear. Many objections are a direct result of communication mismatches, by moving too fast for the prospect or by not tying in the product's features, advantages and benefits to a specific explicit need.

People have been categorized into four fundamental behavioral styles. Each style responds to pressure from the outside world differently. If you are moving too fast for the behavioral style of the prospect, he is likely to raise an objection, if only to catch his breath. Knowing what the style is of the person will allow you to tailor your sales call to produce the results you are looking for.

How you frame the features, advantages and benefits to meet the needs of your customer will prevent many objections. For example your product has certain features and you say, "*Mr. Prospect, as you know our product has Feature A and Feature B.*" Mr. Prospect may respond, "*Yes, but, we only need Feature B. Having the A Feature is not needed and we don't want to pay money for it.*"

Had you framed the introduction of the features as a question ("*Mr. Prospect, what features are you interested in the product having?*") you would have allowed Mr. Adams to respond differently and he might have given you more useful information. How you present advantages and benefits is just as important as how you frame them.