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SALES 16.2

The Not-so-Magic Formula for Sales

We always look for shortcuts to success and sales people are no exception. We'd love to find a magic formula or that special knowledge which builds the client base, increases sales and has clients charging back for more. And believe it or not, there is a magic formula — it's called hard work and being brilliant at the basics. We have found that when salespeople have gone off track or become complacent, revisiting the basics with them always turns their results around.

Step one: Focus on doing the basics.

Step two: Get the team more effective at the basics.

So, in today's business world, what are the sales basics?

Cold calling

There is no doubt that regular cold calling, as much as most sales people dislike it, grows your client base — dramatically. Having a system to keep your people on track and knowing what to say are the two basics here. Remember, the objective of a cold call should be to make an appointment, and only make an appointment. Many people make the mistake of trying to sell your company and its products on a cold call and this is a mistake. You don't know what they're up to on the other end of the phone or if they're really listening. And it's far too easy to get rid of someone on the phone. Make the appointment and sell the company and products face to face.

The Art of Asking Questions

This is today's most vital sales skill. Asking questions doesn't just give you information on the client, it builds trust, uncovers needs, identifies problems and builds empathy. Many sales people only ask questions to get the information they need. They aren't focused on the client, they are focused on their own needs or on selling their product. So they ask closed, leading questions and the interview or the uncovering becomes a one-way interrogation. This does none of the above.

Effective Proposals and Quotes

Most sales people either have to write proposals or have to tender and quote to get the work, or they may write direct marketing letters. Surprising as it seems, as soon as they start writing, they forget everything they do successfully face-to-face. When face-to-face, they talk about the client and his or her needs, they talk in benefits instead of features and they try to add value rather than focus on price. Read your sales people's quotes and proposals. Many talk exclusively about your company with not even a personalised quote at the start about what the client wants. They usually talk in features rather than benefits and they usually focus on price. Remember, that many times your proposal or quote goes to a third party, someone who has never met your sales person. He or she won't have heard all the good work your salesperson has put into the presentation but only gets to read the document you have sent. This document has to be a stand-alone salesperson for

you. Does it stack up?

Selling your product or service

Selling your product or service to the client relies very heavily on being able to identify the client's needs and match specific benefits to the client. Sounds simple but it's amazing how many sales people go into automatic and reel off all the benefits their product has to offer instead of targeting one or two powerful ones for that client.

Asking for the order

I find an alarming number of sales people do a great job up to this point, but expect (or hope) the client will ask for the order. They create an uncomfortable silence as the client waits to be asked to buy, and the salesperson waits for the client to say yes to a question he or she hasn't been asked. What usually happens then is the sales person continues to sell and talks themselves out of a sale. I recently identified a sales person who wasn't asking for the order every time. When we addressed this, his sales jumped 79%! Immediately!

Getting referrals

Most sales people would rather cold call strangers, which they hate doing, rather than asking existing clients for referrals. Make sense? No. But it can feel to sales people that they are 'using' their clients to get more business. What they don't see, is that if you have a good relationship with your clients, they are happy to refer you to other business people. If they enjoy doing business with you, they know that others will get good value out of working with you, too. Every client should be asked for referrals at the point where they are happy with their purchase.

Conducting a monthly training session with your sales team where you cover the basics, will re-focus your team on the aspects of selling which are vital to their success. If they are asking for discounts, claiming that your prices are too high, inconsistent with achieving budget, then they do not have strong sales skills and need training. If you haven't found a great sales trainer in your area, McKinnon Sales Centre offers sales managers the "Sales Manager's Rescue Kit" which trains the sales manager to train his own people in the basics.