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July 2022 Monthly Sales & Service Tip

Training Becomes The Vehicle To Communicate Change In These Interesting Times!

This is the time of year to reflect on your performance over the last six months as well as moving forward, making adjustments to hit or stay ahead of plan. This is also the time when I post my "Top Ten Training Truths."

So, Sales Leaders, take heart that this monthly tip is for you and your sales team. There are similar truisms that occur with most salespeople regardless of industry or profession. Here are my 44 years of "Top Ten Training Truths" that should be a good reminder and reinforcement as you still have time to plan your sales training for this year.

TRUTH #1 - Today training becomes the vehicle to communicate sales strategies and initiatives! All too often, sales training is provided without a common focus or goal. Communicate your strategic initiatives through a training forum for better acceptance and successful implementation. Let your sales team know exactly what is expected and the outcome to achieve. When you communicate this to your sales team, everyone is in alignment with your sales objectives so the progress can be tracked accordingly. Structure must follow strategy, so use the training format and disciplines to help explain the "why's" and your sales goals will be better accepted and executed by the sales team.

TRUTH #2 - Sales cultures are dependent on standardizing a selling process! One of the biggest mistakes I witness with sales management is not adopting, structuring or standardizing a selling plan for pre-call planning. A sales process provides a common sales language that reps can relate to. You get consistency of message in the field and best practices start to evolve with repeated use and preparation. Overall, you deliver a better value story in a shorter amount of time so you can call on more customers. Productivity and performance are enhanced which leads to increased market share. I worked with a food service manufacturer who attributed their sales growth and national footprint to using our 5 A's Selling Process for over 10 years. It helped them to stay focused to achieve their sales plan and raise the bar on sales excellence throughout the industry.

TRUTH #3 - Relationship selling first, product selling second! Sales Leaders, why are your reps in such a hurry to give their pitch? I was recently in the field with a salesperson, and the buyer, on a "routine call," said to him, "Let's cut to the chase and give me your pitch." The seller was astonished, looked up at the customer and said, "Not yet. Right now I'm catching." What's

the hurry? After hello, the salesperson goes right into a sales pitch and ends up "puking" all over the customer. Remember, it's no longer about the seller; it's about the buyer. So take the time to establish rapport and get to know your customers. When you create the "mind share" and the customer thinks of you first, you've done your job. Discipline reps to develop relationships in order to sell deeper and wider in existing accounts. That's where the low-hanging fruit is...ready to be picked!

TRUTH #4 - Understand customer needs first, before providing recommendations! When I train "rookie" salespeople with the "deer in the headlights look," I simplify this statement, "Listen first, talk second and you never go wrong!" Why do salespeople continually violate this practice? How can we make recommendations without doing a diagnosis first? We're no different than doctors today. So as a "Doctor of Selling," no more sales malpractice! No more recommendations without doing an analysis first. It's our due diligence or rite of passage as a Sales Professional. Leaders, please continue to coach and reinforce.

TRUTH #5 - Asking questions is our finest selling skill, but the weakest skill applied! There is an art to probing. Again, why do so many reps get trapped starting out with "close-ended" questions, giving the customer an easy out to say, "No?" Question like a servant and not like an attorney. My Dad was a master at probing. He could carry on a conversation just by probing, allowing the customer to respond freely and willingly. He developed a concept that I call the "layering technique" in probing: OPEN - OPEN - CLOSED - OPEN - OPEN - CLOSED. He got the customer accustomed to saying "yes" by creating the right selling environment with probing. Sales Leaders, develop your top open and closed-ended questions, document them and provide them to all of your sales reps. Their calls made to calls closed ratio will improve.

TRUTH #6 - Salespeople continue to sell features, but not benefits! Hang in there Sales Leaders, it's downhill from here! This is the big difference between transitioning from a seller perspective to a buyer perspective in Next Generation Selling. Benefits are not old fashioned, passé or a sign of the past. Benefits still create the perception of value in the mind of the customer. Without benefits, all the customer thinks about is price and the battle begins. I was on a call with a rep who handed the customer a benefits sheet as a handout and went through the presentation methodically, talking benefits and advantages and ended up with the features of his products specific to the customer. By the time the rep finished with the product, the customer had his hands out saying, "Give it to me!" Leaders, think about it. When was the last time you had a "benefits clinic" on your products and services? It's never too late for a refresher!

TRUTH #7 - Salespeople must learn to sell value and not price! It's the old saying, "If you live by price, you die by price!" Who created price sensitivity? We did! I always use the opportunity of talking with purchasing while training in sales organizations and ask them, "What don't you like about sales reps?" The response is that salespeople talk too much, are not prepared and that they "cave in" on price. One buyer shared with me that she handed a rep a competitive quote and said, "Match this price, and you've got it!" The rep not only matched it, but went back to management for additional discounts and concessions that the buyer didn't expect. Never lay your cards down until you ask, "What do you want?" The customer's expectations may be less than what most salespeople are willing to give away. How much money have you left on the table?

TRUTH #8 - Eliminate the fear factor of answering objections! I love watching and critiquing salespeople handling objections in the field and role-playing while being taped. The good ones go right to the answer immediately,

without hesitation and end up defending it while being cornered by the customer. Why do we fear objections? Don't we ask the customers questions? Why can't they? Just what are objections? They're opportunities that lead to buying signals, which means you go for a trial close. When you create this positive mind set, you welcome objections, anticipate them and even come to expect them. I get the same objections over and over. How about you? Do you use an objection handling method or technique to develop best practice responses, document in a log book and distribute to all salespeople? Shame on you if you don't! Sales Leaders, sounds like a good topic for your next sales meeting: Develop best practice responses to your most frequent objections, especially the one on price. Eliminate this "fear factor" once and for all and be ready to close!

TRUTH #9 - It's never too early to ask for the order, commitment or go for sales action!

"Are we there yet?" Sales Leaders, we're almost home! I'll never forget what a buyer once told me about a salesperson, "I would have given him/her the P.O. if the rep had just asked me." The end result was a plant shutdown because they didn't get the parts, the buyer got reprimanded and moved to a new location while the sales rep was "let go." Both parties suffered because of this. Never feel that it is premature to ask the customer for a commitment. Remember, interaction dictates our actions, so close and keep closing until the customer says, "Yes!" How many times can you ask? As many times as you want, as long as the customer continues to interact through the stages of the buying process. If you feel you've asked enough, change the subject, go back to relationship building and keep the door open. But, before you leave or hang up, set the next call objective with that customer to keep the stages of the buying process moving. Too often, we miss the opportunity when the customer says, "Let us think about it and we'll get back to you," and later you can't even reach them. So set the time and date now, during the call, for the next meeting, with your eye on the objective, "I'm going to close 'em!"

TRUTH #10 - Training brings the sales team together, united as one!

Sales Leaders, have you had a sales training "bootcamp" lately? Maybe it's time to bring 'em together and "huddle up" to create some synergy and ignite them to exceed their sales plans for 2022. Today we just don't train for skills and knowledge, we train for high performance and sales excellence, just like the pros do, week in and week out. Remember, the team that executes, ends up winning. It takes drill, practice and repetition to master the sales fundamentals to move the customer through their process. Learning is a three-step progression: TRAINING + PRACTICE = HABIT. Are your Sales Professionals able to sell their value story instinctively, automatically and by habit? It's never too late for a refresher!

It's hard to "jump start" after a long holiday weekend. I hope it was a nice, long break and time well spent with family and friends! There's still plenty of time to do something about it. Call me if I can help you identify your sales challenges and solutions to solve them. We've helped others, so how can we help you?

Please join us August 15-18 for Level 1, via Remote Training. Four, two-hour session 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. EDT from the comfort and security of your home or office. Why not send a couple of your sales reps to witness, firsthand, the benefits of Remote Training and acquire the sales skills for a lifetime of selling. Give me a call at 937-298-7462 or register on line at www.butlerlearning.com

Good Luck with your Sales & Service Excellence!

Bob Butler, TSP

And the BLS T.E.A.M.
Together Each Achieves More

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