

# 14 Ways To Sabotage Your Sales Career

By  
John Graham

Sales managers scratch their heads. “Right from the start, I was so sure Carl would be a top performer. I would have put money on it. But before I knew it, he crashed and burned.”

It’s an old story, one that often ends with the same words, “I wasn’t cut out for sales.” Maybe. But probably not. Poor training, inadequate support, and unrealistic expectations can each play a role.

Even so, what causes potentially good salespeople to fail has little or nothing to do with poor sales skills. The real harm is self-inflicted. Salespeople sabotage themselves. And here’s how they wreck their sales careers:

- 1. Tell a customer they will take care of something and then don't do it.* Why worry about it? It’s nothing an “I’m sorry,” a little schmoozing, a bouquet of flowers, or a gift card can’t correct. Anyway, it wasn’t *that* important. That’s not how customers see it. Their actions reveal the truth of who they are.
- 2. See themselves as special.* The “salesperson’s disease” is catching and it’s transmitted by rubbing shoulders with other salespeople. The major symptom is the belief that they’re the reason for the company’s success so that gives them permission to break the rules, and to look down on everyone else. Oh, yes, the disease is fatal.
- 3. Puff up their record.* No salesperson needs to take a course in “The Fine Art of Amplification.” Whether it’s with customers, each other or the boss, exaggeration comes naturally for too many salespeople. And, then, they come to believe their own baloney.
- 4. Avoid asking for help.* Many salespeople see themselves as operating on their own, beholden to no one, and totally responsible for their destiny. And that includes asking for help, which they view as a sign of weakness and something they can’t live with—even when it costs them customers.
- 5. Criticize but don't contribute.* You know these salespeople, they’re quick to tell you what’s wrong in every part of the company: why revenues are down, what’s wrong with the product line, or who in management should be dumped. Yet,

when asked to contribute their ideas or make suggestions, they have nothing to say. Such behavior pushes them out the door.

*6. Do enough to get by.* They're guided by some preset internal gauge that sets strict limits, letting them go only so far before banging on the brakes. These are outliers to be sure. They're ignored when there's a crisis or unexpected crunch. In a word, they're superfluous to the company's success.

*7. Ignore deadlines.* It started out early in life. Their school projects were always late and they always arrived with an attached excuse. Now their reports are predictably late, along with customer proposals, along with just about everything else, even expense reports. It's as if deadlines were made for others, not for them. And they can't figure out why the boss has it in for them.

*8. Always make sure they look good.* Whether it's customers, associates, or the boss, their goal is to make sure that, at all cost, they come out looking good. They avoid taking responsibility (a sign of weakness) at all cost. Although they don't see it, their behavior is so transparent no one trusts anything they say or do.

*9. Sell what they want to sell.* Salespeople always have favorite customers, but many also have pet products. They're not complex, don't cause problems, and they're easy to sell. Some come with a robust commission. Whether or not they're a good fit for customers is not the issue.

*10. Cut corners.* Shrinking the job to reduce work is a disease that infects many sales careers. "Forget it. It's just means extra work," "I don't have time to do that," or "Frankly, that's crazy. Who comes up with such stupid ideas?" Every salesperson heard such words whispered in sales meetings or seen eyes roll. Selling success comes from enhancing the process, not cutting it down to your own size.

*11. Think that they've got it made.* From all indications, they've worked hard, done a good job, and enjoyed the rewards. As they see it, they've paid their dues. Now it's time to cut them some slack so they can set their own pace. It's time for a little preferential treatment like getting some of the better leads. If that's what's going through their mind, they're on your way—out, not up.

*12. Lay on the jargon.* They believe using all the right words impresses customers and wins them over. So they get the jargon down pat and stay on top of the latest corporate speak. Yes, customers want to be impressed, but not with jargon. What they want is a salesperson who takes time to understand them by asking good questions and who makes sure they're comfortable with their buying decision. That's impressive.

*13. Decide who will buy and who won't.* They may be smart, savvy, and have lots of experience. They've come face-to-face with just about every type of customer and they think they know who will buy and who won't. All they need is a couple of seconds. It's as if they have a sixth sense about customers. Some salespeople have it and some don't.

It sounds so good, it's almost convincing. But it's just plain nonsense, an exercise in self-deception. In selling it's what the customer thinks that counts, not what's floating around in a salesperson head.

*14. Believing that customers love them.* It's The Great Sales Con Game. It's easy for salespeople to think customers love them: "You *are* the best." "I don't know what we'd do without you." "We're so lucky you came along." It's enough to make the ego do somersaults. It's feel good stuff, but here's the question that counts: Do your customers respect you?

When you think about it, it isn't easy to sabotage a sales career. Yet, if you put your mind to the task, you can do it.

John Graham of GrahamComm is a marketing and sales strategy consultant and business writer. He is the creator of "Magnet Marketing," and publishes a free monthly eBulletin, "No Nonsense Marketing & Sales Ideas." Contact him at [jgraham@grahamcomm.com](mailto:jgraham@grahamcomm.com), 617-774-9759 or [johnrgraham.com](http://johnrgraham.com).