

How to Mess Up a Company's Sales

By
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When salespeople can't do their job

Thousands of salespeople work in conditions that are stacked against their success. Even though it's 2019, the belief persists that "nothing happens until someone sells something." Repeated so often, no one challenges them.

Yet, those six words help explain why salespeople are given "special treatment" by management and barely "tolerated" by others. Salespeople are frequently viewed both as separate and more than equal. When co-workers complain about the sales department, someone says, "Hey, they bring us the business, so suck it up and smile." This dismal view has long passed its expiration date. Even so, it's disturbing since so much depends on the successful performance of the salesforce.

Closely related is another problem and that's marketing. Unfortunately, it's still viewed as the handmaiden of sales in many companies, even though it long ago ran out of gas. In this view, marketing does what it's told to do. When this happens, marketing is rudderless, all tactics and no strategy. Marketing departments become a "do this" dumping grounds, throwing one-thing-after-another against the wall hoping something sticks.

Unfortunately, marketing's unique mission is often misunderstood or disregarded. Its critical task of creating customers, those who want to do business with a brand, gets ignored. Or, as Seth Godin, the author of *This is Marketing*, says, "Marketers don't use consumers to solve their company's problems; they use marketing to solve other people's problems." Unfortunately, marketers don't have a chance to do it.

If marketing is unable to do its job, salespeople can't do their job of closing sales. To put it another way, when marketing comes down with the flu, the sales force calls in sick.

Letting marketing and sales do their work

Here are three principles that can help anyone in marketing and sales do a better job and be more successful:

1. Get over the idea that "nothing happens until somebody sells something"

Forty years ago, those in sales had a point. Salespeople were *the* link between companies and their customers. Looking back, it's no exaggeration to say customers were their captives. They depended on a salesperson for product or services information, troubleshooting, and support.

The salesperson had a dual role, educating customers and closing sales. This may help explain why customers were often far more welcoming to salespeople than they are today. They were not only needed; they were essential.

Today, the sales role has been upended. When it comes to accurate sales information, customers are often better informed *before* they ever see a salesperson. That's not all. Sales are now so transaction-driven the salesperson's role continues to erode. On top of this, the task of identifying and accessing prospects is so frustrating, it borders on the impossible.

All this points to a marketing-driven environment quite different from times past. It's one in which *nothing happens until someone decides they want to do business with a company or a brand*. Then, the salesperson may arrive to close the deal.

2. Have a clear understanding of why customers should do business with you

Caution! Don't blurt out the usual trite and self-serving nonsense: "Our people really care," "We give great service," "We've been in business since 1979." It's all hype. End of discussion.

Take it seriously because a lot's at stake. What separates you from the competition that makes a difference to your customers? What is your value statement; what your brand stands for? What do you bring to the customer's buying experience that creates credibility and confidence? Unless your brand makes sense to customers, there's no sale.

Jeff Short, the VP of Sales for K&W Tire, the Cooper Tire distributor, tells of a meeting with a Connecticut tire dealer. Included in the meeting was a counter salesperson who asked Jeff, "What does Cooper Tire stand for?"

Somewhat caught off guard, he replied. "Tier one quality at a tier two price...more tread patterns and designs than any other manufacturer...an American owned company." Knowing that she liked selling Nokian tires, Jeff asked her what Nokian stood for. She said, "Safety. They are the safest tires you can put on a car."

As Jeff tells it, "Right then I knew I was done. She won that round hands down. She was more perceptive than all the other dealers I'd run into on this important point." And then he adds, "Someone needs to wake up as to what resonates with customers. I'm so sick of hearing about rebates, road hazard warranties, and PRICE." Jeff isn't alone. He has lots of friends. We call them customers.

Got it? Now, why should customers do business with you?

3. Make a commitment to execute perfectly. “We’ve got to get this out tomorrow.” “They need it now.” “I know, but it’s a rush.” Such words do more damage to sales than just about anything else.

Of course, there are exceptions. But, far too often, the exceptions take over and become the rule. “Just get it done” is a mindset, an attitude that permeates too many companies—it’s the new normal.

The #1 enemy in all this is cutting corners. It sabotages the best practices and the best intentions. When everything is rush, rush, rush, cutting corners is inevitable. There is never enough time to execute perfectly. We settle for “good enough” and it isn’t.

Cutting corners gives someone else a competitive advantage. Here are examples of what happens:

- A proposal is due tomorrow. “Just repurpose something you used last week.”
- The presentation date gets pushed up. “Don’t worry. Go ahead and wing it.”
- There’s no time for having the needed planning meetings. “Just squeeze it to one meeting.”
- The intel isn’t complete. “Run with what we’ve got.”

Here’s the point. *Cutting corners puts a salespeople at a major disadvantage. Tolerating or permitting it to occur, taints their reputation, impairs performance and, ultimately, costs them sales.*

If you want to be increasingly successful, then make a commitment to execute perfectly.

Messing up a company’s sales is easy and it doesn’t take a lot of time or effort. It occurs without thinking.

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