

NO NONSENSE ADVICE

12

FOR SALES PROFESSIONALS

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PROLOGUE:

If you are good in the field of sales, chances are you will be richer than most people in other vocations...

Sales can be a fantastically rewarding career. In fact, those who excel in it will not even consider anything else: it is in their DNA. Many of us who started out in sales and moved out of it, miss the rush, miss the excitement, miss the challenge: but above all: miss the constant movement that only sales can give.

Also, note that when everyone else is bound to a salary and an increment and a bonus, sales is about the only vocation in the world where you can quite literally decide your income each month. Once you become a stellar salesman, you can, and you will, be your own master: and manage to earn way more than others with 'traditional' jobs. NEVER get into sales simply because of the money - but, do know that only a job in hard-core sales has a distinctive element of 'commission' which is pegged to a performance. This literally means you are now in control of how much you want to make...

Sales is NOT a career for everyone. If you are entering it, then, read this book carefully and learn the basics through it. Our aim is to ensure that you are given enough guidance to decide if sales is indeed your calling - and if so, get you on your way as fast as possible... Based on over 2-3 decades of experience of each of the writers (all of whom have had experience in the sales vocation) the book aims to be a quick read that will give you the essential insights which will ensure you fly high. Remember, however, all anyone can do is actually guide: the 'doing' is something you have to commit to...

Good Luck!
Gihan Malshan

CONTENT

Chapter 1: Before you start out on a career in sales	02
Chapter 2: Learn the basics : go through the motions	06
Chapter 3: Remember you sell yourself - as much as the product/service	15
Chapter 4: Perfect the Sales Process	19
Chapter 5: Price and Value - understand the difference	26
Chapter 6: Actively build a network	29
Chapter 7: Learn - continuously	33

Chapter 1

Before you start out on a career in sales

Before doing anything else, decide if Sales is indeed your 'calling.' Unlike many other vocations where you can 'hide' and afford to be mediocre : in sales, you cannot 'hide.' You are 'under the microscope' EVERY SINGLE DAY. This is one of those vocations where you are measured and judged DAILY, WEEKLY and ANNUALLY. There is a target : every day : and everyday, you either 'win' or 'lose' : and that can take a toll on you. If you are not one of those people who thrive on a challenge, do yourself a favor and quit NOW. A vocation in sales is different to 'having a job.' Take on ANYTHING ELSE if you want a job : NEVER take on sales because you want to 'somehow have a job.' Sadly, sales is one of those jobs that you can get into relatively easily - specially if you are outgoing and have the gift of the gab : but please please remember that sales is a hell of a lot more than just jabbering away and meeting people. You really have to be a certain 'mould' to really succeed in sales - and it has nothing to do with your personality per se - but rather - it has everything to do with your ATTITUDE and WILLINGNESS as well as a certain DRIVE that is essential for you to survive - and thrive in sales...

A. Be willing to be rejected all the time

Sales is a game of possibilities and probabilities. No matter how skillful you are, you are BOUND to go through rejection - over and over and over and over and over (repeat a million times!) again ! For every successful sale you make, you will go through countless rejections. That's the drill. That's just the way it is. Your 'probability' of success will improve as you hone your skills - but rejection is a GIVEN. If you can't deal with rejection - sales is not for you! You MUST have a thicker hide than most to make a vocation out of being a sales person.

B. Be happy to meet people

Sales is fundamentally down to human interactions: be it in person, via the phone or a mail. You must WANT to meet people. The more people you meet, get to know and interact with; the bigger the 'portfolio' of 'potential candidates' to see your product or service. If you are shy, and don't enjoy human interactions - think twice about being in sales - or, alternatively, learn to be sociable. NEVER confuse being 'sociable' with being an 'extrovert'. Its perfectly fine to be an introvert: but you NEED to be sociable!

C. Be willing to work all the time: there really isn't a 9-5 sales job

A 9-5 kind of person? Want to draw clear lines between 'work hours' and 'off hours'? Then sales are not for you. There are no working hours for a good sales person. Every day, every hour, every minute is 'open' to serve a Client or a Customer. Sure - there ARE times when you switch off your phone and take a 'holiday' - but fundamentally, sales is NOT a 9-5 kind of job. See, customers don't go by YOUR times: they go by times that are convenient to THEM - and YOU need to ADJUST to it. Unless you are willing to do this - chances are you will never really 'hit the numbers'!

D. Be happy to travel

Sales require a lot of travel (usually). Going and meeting Clients or Customers at their preferred location is part of the job - it's rare for them to actually visit YOU (yes, as always, there are exceptions to the rule - but they are few and far between!) You need to be the kind of person who thrives on taking a road trip and making an adventure out of it.

E. Be willing to be flexible

Flexibility is essential in sales - it's a must. You must be willing to put your Clients/Customers convenience before yours ALL THE TIME. You must be willing to go the extra mile. Be willing to make it as convenient as possible for the Client/Customer. You must be willing to serve.

F. Be willing to answer the same question a million times

Remember - you may be asked the same question a million times: but chances are it will be from different people. So you need to be patient enough to answer the same questions with the same enthusiasm, to the new Client/Customer in front of you... EVEN if the SAME person who asks the same question a few times over, you need to have the ability to answer them without losing your cool - or considering this a 'pain'! Remember - it is THEIR prerogative to ask the questions - and yours to answer!

G. Be willing to let go of your ego

Sales is NOT for the egotistical. If you are easily offended, easily annoyed with 'stupid questions and stupid people' and think you are 'owed' an audience because you are 'that good', chances are you are going to have a disastrous career in sales. So, be willing to let go of your ego: and be willing NOT to take YOURSELF so seriously all the time! This is NOT to say you need to be a doormat and be willing to 'take shit' from anyone - but you DO need to be able to come across as a 'nice' person whom people will 'like' to deal with. Remember - there is NO REASON they must come ONLY to YOU! After all - YOU are the one who needs to make a sale - not the other way around!

H. Be willing to 'be a pain' professionally

Following up is part-and-parcel of sales. So, you need to be 'in the face' of Customers/Clients: but you can't be a 'pain.' You need to cultivate the subtle art of being able to 'push' your Client/Customer to close a sale without annoying them, being rude or being an inconvenience.

I. Be willing to be poor for a while

Closing sales isn't easy. Until you really get the hang of it, remember that you will not get the kind of lucrative commissions you were dreaming of. Be willing to be frugal. Be willing to live simply. Be willing to go out on a limb for a while - and not give up. LEARNING to be a good salesman - like all skills - take time. Unless you really learn - and we mean REALLY LEARN the basics - chances are you will NEVER be a stellar performer. So, take the time to truly learn the trade: and not take shortcuts: because this ALWAYS pays rich dividends in the future!

Chapter 2

Learn the basics: go through the motions

So, you've decided to wear the armour and go to battle?
Congratulations!

If you have carefully read through the introduction, you already know what you're getting into. Like in any other profession, if you choose to believe it, sales too has certain fundamentals/ basics that need to be made part of your DNA in order to be successful. At the cost of repetition, it must be stressed that sales is NOT for all, but is a rewarding career through which many have found personal freedom.
All the best!

Heard of the saying, he/she can sell "ice to an Eskimo", or the popular, "sell me this pen", stunt? Many a time sales is shown to be this mysterious, magical power and shrouded in fame and glory to celebrate success, however there is more to this mumbo-jumbo than meets the eye. DON'T be fooled into thinking there is a magic spell that will make you a super salesman. It's going to take HARD work and perseverance.

A. Learn the product/service

First things First... Believe it! You are the expert. (Yes, we know that you're just getting into it but the client can't know this secret) Even if the product/ service can sell itself and there is no competition (boy, you're lucky if this is so), you need to know your product and service inside out and backwards, if you know what I mean. Just learn it thoroughly so that you can handle customers in the frontlines fully equipped with little or no reason to refer back or check something out. Remember, the more you break the conversation with, "let me get back to you on that point...", the less chances of you closing the sale.

Customers want an expert at the other side of the table, not an amateur. Please... don't bet on a pity sale, chances are it will not repeat. REPETITION is the key to building momentum and velocity in a sales career.

B. Learn about the competitive products and their relative strengths and weaknesses

No man is an island and no product (almost always) is without competition. Don't get it wrong though, competition can also be good. It keeps you alive and is a point of reference when talking to customers. Now that you know your product/ service, spend good time comparing and contrasting the offerings on paper, mapping out the key points that you can pull out to help you when selling. Every product/ service should have a distinct advantage and you should capitalize on that (of course in addition to your charisma!). Trust me, clients will not only be stunned but show respect when they see how much you know about your subject and the industry. There's simply NO substitute.

C. Learn the importance of body language

People sell to people, period! Throughout history and into the future, you will always be selling to people. As social creatures, humans send out signals/ communication through body language that you need to decode and make sense of - on the spot - to respond to them in a way that helps you redirect the conversation from time to time.

You can learn body language from the many books and videos out there, but keep in mind that reading body language is done holistically and not by a single gesture a person makes. For example, just because a person crosses their arms does not mean they are withdrawn or defensive, it could just be that the AC is a bit too cold! However, if you can master body language, which would take a while to do, you will be able to read when clients are faking it, don't completely understand, being pushed too hard, wasting your time, and much more.

Meanwhile, if you find yourself in the online or large format selling in retail spaces, body language changes to the science of mapping out buying patterns that can be easily done using tools that the tech guys can help you with.

Nevertheless, this is an important aspect of knowing your customer. The more you know about them, the better.

D. Learn the sales process

As much as sales is seen to be on-the-fly, there is a definite science to it. Many times sales people are so caught up in the flurry of activity that they miss or give less importance to the sales process. Rest assured that the flow of business will run dry and be a challenge to re-establish if the sales process is not religiously followed. There is a reason this activity is called one of the, "brushing teeth jobs" because it needs to be done daily. It's a sad state, but there are many examples of sales people who have made it big and suddenly hit rock bottom because they didn't stick to basics.

On the other hand, if done consistently you'll be looking at a strong flow of clients and opportunities that will pay you now and in the mid to long term. Don't be frightened by the many steps to follow. Once you have the documentation and presentations in place, you will have to focus mainly on connecting with people for prospecting, objection handling, closing, and after sales.



Your job is to make sure you keep filling the funnel from the top, daily, with good contacts; the more in - the more out! It's that simple. Remember, you're not alone as a sales person, the winners are those who have the most of the buyers in their funnel.

Some tips for you to follow,

1. Plan your day in pockets of time to carry out activities of the funnel.
Hustle!
2. Organise yourself by using a tool and add new contacts who you will keep pushing through the system
3. Once you gain a client, use them to get referrals and seek opportunities to up-sell and cross-sell.

E. Be tech savvy

Customers are becoming more sophisticated in the use of technology for communication. As important as it is to know the hot buttons of your clients, it is equally important to know how they consume information and process it. You need to be up-to-date on what tech they are familiar with, and keep channelling your communication through. A word of caution, though, there is no single tool that works for everyone; so, try to fit into their way, if you're serious about getting the business. This can be email, WhatsApp, Facebook, or whatever works. The world is changing fast so you need to re-tool yourself often. Do remember though, that meeting them regularly is important to keep that personal touch and to be remembered.

F. Learn the company culture and what matters to them

As important as clients are, you also have to understand the culture of the company you work in. Invariably, that becomes part of the offering. Although the client buys the product/ service from you, you need to understand that there is a team behind you to deliver value. This sync needs to be met. Laying out client demands needs to be done strategically to make sure that while the delivery is done to the client's expectations, it also meets the expectations of the company so that the relationship can last. Customers can be kings but you'd want to be the adviser who keeps his position and power with them.

G. Learn that selling is more than 'making a sale'

Sales can be thrilling when you "make a sale". The "rush" of adrenaline in your blood and happy hormones in your brain will give you a high for a while, but like in all relationships, please don't rush it. In the hurry to make the sale, many sales people cut corners and disregard the decision-making process a client goes through.

Don't you want this customer to stick with you? To buy from you till death does you part? Out of jokes... if you don't court your customers with the right information and the value that only YOU bring to the table, chances are the next "me-too" sales person is going to grab the subsequent sale.

God forbid, those in the future as well! So stay the course and make sure your selling is in tip-top shape to nail the customer down well.

But wait...does selling necessarily stop there? NO it doesn't. Selling is an art, it's an infinite game. Once a prospect becomes a client there is nothing more profitable, since not only do they continue buying, but also give solid referrals that in all probability convert to better, faster new business.

H. Learn about your customers

Although it's seldom thought of this way, as a profession, sales is not very different to other professions such as medicine, law, and the likes in terms of helping people. All of them require proper diagnostics to understand what the client wants and, at times, needs. There IS a difference. Knowing your customers well helps you navigate your sales effort better with the right information and intensity to close the sale. NEVER go into a discussion not knowing the basics of a client even if it's a cold call. At least draw something common from his/her industry, profession, current affairs or even the weather! Strike a chord. CAVEAT; leave politics, religion, race and gender out of the discussion. Here are some tips for you to draw up a summary of the client. It may sound like you're stalking them but you're not,

1. Search the name on Google and other social media platforms to find who they are, what they have achieved, their connections
2. Identify a connection through their social media information. This can be a mutual connection or even a topic of interest
3. Assess their lifestyle and what interests they may have
4. What are the products/ services they want, may want or need and study the possible alternatives they have to your offering/s

You are a beginner but it won't always be so. Building a sales profession is like tending to a garden after a while. If you don't know your clients well enough to know when they need attention and support, you'll likely lose them to competition or worse, they might forget you. Moreover, you're closing the door on increasing the sale, and foregoing strong referrals for new business. PROFILE your clients and keep in touch regularly to find out what's happening. It is true the sales may be coming through undisturbed, but you need to be connected always. You can use a simple profiling template to keep adding new information about them that can be useful in future interactions.

I. Learn about your support teams

Delivering client experience is a team effort and always will be. As a sales person you need to understand several key relationships that are linked to building a loyal client base.

Your company

Late turnaround times can be deadly for business success. As you move into sales you will find that some get their work done faster than others and face less push-back on requests. That's because they have spent valuable time building internal "RAPPORT" with related teams and departments to make sure they respect and prioritise their work. Wouldn't YOU like the same? These members of your team include unassuming people such as, the staff at the reception, at the counter accepting requests, canteen staff, admin at the dispatch and security in the office. Having cordial relations with them will ensure you have the competitive advantage you need, not only when things are normal, but also when there is a crisis situation.

Client's office

Have you ever seen movies where people walk through the office and simply wave their way through without being stopped? Okay, that's a bit dramatic, but establishing RAPPORT with those in the client's office helps you get to the decision maker faster. This includes anyone coming into contact with you, the client and the goods; such as security, reception, secretaries and the people receiving the goods.

J. Learn about how to keep abreast of market changes

As mentioned above it is assumed that you're an expert in your field. If not, why would anyone want to talk to you in the first place? Give importance to subject knowledge on priority. You can easily do this by,

1. Attending all trainings on the product/ service as and when needed
2. Subscribe to magazines and online sources about the products and industry (there's enough of free content)
3. Regularly do a Google search on the product/ service and competition to find news articles and developments

In addition to this, you will find that clients are well aware of the market and the macro level happenings. Read the newspaper, watch the news, and follow sports updates. Get into the groove so that you are well informed. If you look blankly at a client's face when he's talking, and struggle to make conversation, they would likely tune out of your frequency and tune into another's. It may not happen overnight but will gradually take place.

K. Learn the laws and regulations governing you and your product /service

Continuing the subject of expertise, it is important to have the required knowledge of any and all laws and regulations governing your product/ service, since clients purchase based on your recommendations. This means they've placed their TRUST IN YOU. The repercussions of breaking this trust will be catastrophic. Information on such matters can be found within your company first and thereafter in the news or specific industry online and offline sources. Take the time to clarify any technical jargon from those within the company since its best to falter within than in front of a client.

Getting into sales is a choice that you will not regret especially if you have the attitude for it. In closing the first chapter, the following needs to be said.

Confidence is key. At all times, you have to remain convinced and confident of yourself and the information you present. Customers WILL NOT close the sale with a person who, they feel, lacks the certainty they so desire.

Talking from the client's frame of reference. We all have a frame of reference that we use to understand the world around us. As a salesperson you have to understand your client's frame of reference, the words they are familiar with, examples they know and analogies they can relate to. This will help you increase the engagement they have with you.

Profile yourself online. The world is becoming more connected by the day, and you can be found very easily online. DON'T leave your digital foot print blank and not updated. It is also a means for you to be present more often, unlike in the past. Use the opportunity to share your thoughts and content that reinforces your personal brand and expertise.

Chapter 3

Remember you sell yourself - as much as the product/service

Remember: sales is a 'personal' thing. You must be able to convince the potential Client/Customer about YOURSELF as much as the PRODUCT/SERVICE. Most of the time, people buy a product because of the 'person' selling it as much as their conviction about the product/service. This is NOT to say that the product/service does NOT matter - it isn't an either/or kind of situation - it is both. Sure - the product or service DOES matter - as does the reputation of the organization you represent - but, never ever underestimate YOUR part in this equation. There are those, who have 'mastered the art' of personal selling who can sell irrespective of the product or the brand name - purely because they are able to convince their clients/customers of THEIR PERSONAL worth and trust.

So, grow a personal brand !

A. Personal Branding : invest in it

Understand the importance of being a 'brand.' Understand the key aspects - and start investing in it. Personal Branding is NOT about designer clothes and fancy cars - it is about creating a certain unique, authentic and personal 'image' about you - in all aspects. Remember : personal branding is about the WHOLE YOU : the way you talk, the way you walk, the way you conduct business, the values you live by, how you live : ALL OF IT ! If you are going to make a career in sales, you truly need to be a brand in your own right !

B. Build an online presence in line with your product/service

Most underestimate the importance of social media in building a brand for oneself. Take a look at what you post : each of it tells a story about you. One of the first things people will do before you are given the time to meet them is to 'suss you out' on line : ask yourself : if someone 'searches for you' on FB or LinkedIn or IG - what do you think they will assume you are like ? SPECIALLY if you are in the sales vocation, NEVER allow social media to paint a detrimental picture about you. Learn to discern between your private life and professional life : and if you are putting BOTH out there - please consider having a 'private' profile of yourself for friends and family, and a public profile for yourself for all other intentions and purposes.

Here are some simple things to consider :

- Keep politics or any controversial topics out
- Refrain from commenting unnecessarily on others' posts
 - Don't oversell your product
 - Don't run down competitor products
- Don't 'publicize' every time you have a drink

C. Dress Right - and be well-groomed

Needless to say the age-old saying 'clothes maketh a man' (or a woman for that matter) is true : and you certainly will be judged by how you dress (rather than what you dress in per se). Once again, remember - the label is less important than being clean, neat, tidy and well presented. Be well-groomed as well - there IS a difference when you are well-groomed and when you are not... So, if you are going out - make sure you are always well-groomed and well dressed.

- Ensure you are clean,well-groomed and taking care of yourself
 - Iron your clothes well
 - Ensure you always use deodorant and perfume (both - not one without the other)
 - Comb your hair
- Polish your shoes (keep a cloth to wipe dust and soot off your shoes in your bag)
- Invest in some good accessories like a good bag, pen and a watch
 - Ensure all your accessories are cleaned regularly (including your laptop)
 - Wash your car and make sure it is spotless (inside and out)

D. Carry Yourself right

Walk straight : walk with confidence - and have an air of authority about yourself. Don't come across as cocky or arrogant - but don't give out an air of being unsure either. To be a good salesman you need to have confidence - and it needs to show.

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E. Be aware of Body Language

Learn about body language: and understand they are 'cues' people pick up on - and pick up instinctively. It's a subtle art: and as with all things - you will get better at it if you are CONSCIOUS of it.

Here are some basics:

- Walk fast - don't walk slow.
- Sit upright - if you are putting a leg up - do it right
- NEVER shuffle your feet when sitting - nor shake them about
- NEVER keep drumming your fingers - or keep meddling with things when speaking
- Don't talk too fast: but don't talk too slow either.
- Try never to show negative emotions through your face publicly
 - Always give a firm handshake

F. Want to understand more? Read our book/other books on the subject

Having a good 'personal brand' is a subject in itself - and we have done an entire book on it. So, do take the time to read it too. It dives into detail about every aspect discussed here - and offers a lot more by way of tips and techniques that will be important to you in consciously building the kind of brand that is relevant to you...

There are tons of other books on the subject too - so, do your research please!

Chapter 4

Perfect the Sales Process

Like everything else, Sales is also a vocation which has a process. It is only people who understand and follow this process who become successful sales personnel. Often, sales personnel are seen as people who won't or can't stick to a predicated way of working. But this is not true when it comes to successful sales personnel. From the point of deciding to sell a product, all the way to aftersales service, there is a process you need to follow. This means that you need to have the DISCIPLINE to follow the process, if you want to become successful in sales. If you think that processes are boring and are only for people who do a conventional 9 – 5 job, think again! If that is your belief, then even though you may be a people's person, you are not cut out for sales.

A. Looking out for prospects

To make a sale, you need to have prospects or customers to sell to. Based on your industry, you need to identify your potential buyers. This can be done in many ways. For example, you can reach out to your friends and family to see whether they know any prospects (or they can become your prospects too), you can obtain help from your senior colleagues in sales, or even go from door to door, if the product you are selling has appeal to mass market. If you are selling an industrial or a specialized product, you can always reach out to old customers to see whether they want to purchase again, or if they are interested in a newer version.

B. Building a Prospect Data Base

Remember we talked about a process? This is a very crucial part of the process you need to follow, if you want to become successful in sales. You need to build a prospect base, and this needs to be done in a systematic manner. You can use tools like Microsoft excel for this purpose, or even a traditional method such as diarizing, as long as you have a method to it. The key points to note here are,

- Prospects needs to be documented based on a method – e.g. based on their potential next purchase date (if you are selling a product that needs to be purchased at certain intervals), based on the frequency that you need to be in touch with the prospect, based on the next follow-up date, etc.
 - Their attributes which helps you in making a sale / maintaining a good relationship must be documented – e.g. birthdays, anniversaries, etc.
- Past purchase data must be documented – this helps you in assessing customer value as well as making future sales
- Their preferences, likes, dislikes, beliefs, what to talk with them about, and more importantly which topics you should avoid when talking to them, how did you get to know them (who referred them to you), etc.

Remember to update your Prospects Data Base as and when required or on a regular basis. Also, most importantly, remember to save a copy of this data. Otherwise the risk of losing all your hard work due to one technical glitch is extremely high!

C. Building a funnel – how to assess the ‘possibilities’

Most of your prospects may purchase your product at some point in time, but probably not right away. It is important that you understand which prospects are more prone to purchase now. These are your HOT LEADS or priority prospects. Also, understand who will purchase after some time and who may purchase after a long time. While doing this categorization, identify prospects who are using a competitor product, using your products and customers who don't use a similar product currently. In order for you to arrive at this classification, you should have identified their purchase needs and purchase patterns.

Below are some pointers for you to consider in prioritizing your prospects:

- What product / service are they using now?
- Are they satisfied with their current product / service?
- Why should they purchase your product / service?
- Is this the right time for you to sell your product / service to them?
- What would make them purchase your product / service? etc.

In prioritizing, always go for high potential to buy, easy to convince customers, first.

Potential to Buy	High	2 nd Priority	
	Low	Maintain	3 rd Priority
		Low	High
		Potential to Convince	

D. Plan your sale

Remember we talked about the fact that being in sales is about being rejected over and over again? But what if you can reduce the number of times that you get rejected by making a successful sale? Isn't that great?

Here's a method to do that!

Always plan your Sale, before going about making it! Planning is crucial in making a successful sale. Even before making your very first call, plan your sale. Below are a few pointers as to what you should be considering when planning your sale.

- What behaviors / attitudes does my customer have? – you need to know your customer first; before trying to get in touch with them, do your research to understand them.
- What is the objective of this call / visit? – e.g. is it to make an appointment, to inform them about your products / services, to provide them with samples, to close a sales deal, etc.
- Why should they purchase your product / service? – identify the benefits they would get by switching to / purchasing your product service. These are the needs / wants that you are trying to fulfil with your product / service.
- What are the possible objections they could come up with? – this could be an exhaustive list of questions. You need to think of all possible objections that they could come up with and you need to be prepared with your answers to counter them.
- What techniques would you use to close the sale? – think about at least two or three possible ways to close a sale.

E. Making contact – Getting an Appointment

This is the chance you get to make a 'First Impression' with your prospect, either through the telephone, or physically. Either way, make a lasting impression as your chances of making a sale rides on this impression. Your prospect would want to know why they should give an appointment to you. This is where your planning comes in to play. You must give them a compelling reason for which they wouldn't be able to turn you down. This compelling reason could be a need / want of your prospect, that your product is going to satisfy.

But remember, DO NOT divulge all the benefits during this call itself! The purpose of this call is to obtain an appointment. Otherwise the chances are that your prospect may not give you an appointment as they already know about everything that you have to offer.

e.g.

- if you are selling financial products like fixed deposits, credit cards, insurance – you’re providing your customers with peace of mind
- if you are selling industrial solutions – you’re going to reduce your customers’ costs by increasing efficiency
- if you are selling Fast Moving Consumer Goods – you may be helping your customers save their money, helping them save time / effort, provides them personal satisfaction of using a particular brand

F. Closing the sales

This is an area where most people fail and as a result, lose their sale; more often than not, to the competition, if the competitor salesperson knows how to close a sale properly. You will never be a successful salesperson, until you understand how to read BUYING SIGNALS and until you are able to CLOSE A SALE effectively. Below are few examples of buying signals: e.g.

- Customer inquiries about price
- Asks a question about why your product is superior versus the competition
 - Requests for samples
 - Enquire about durability / warranty periods
 - Enquire about aftersales service
- Mention about a competitor quote that they have received etc.

All above are situations where customer is providing you with an opportunity to close your sale by highlighting why they should purchase your product.

There are many techniques of closing a sale and the preferred technique to be used varies based on the product / service you sell. Irrespective of the technique you use, you must have thought through, and practiced a minimum of, two or three sales-closing techniques as things may not always turn-up the way you intended during a sales call.

Also, the technique to be used in countering objections differ, based on the type of objection.

G. Keeping in touch / Aftersales service

Here's another thing that most successful sales personal practice like a ritual – keeping in touch! Remember, if you have decided that sales are going to be your career, you are not there to sell a product JUST ONCE and THEN VANISH! You will not find a career (or an industry) in sales that you get to sell a product just once during the entire lifetime of a customer. You will always have opportunities to sell more -, newer versions, similar products to the same customer. Even if you don't have an opportunity to sell a product immediately or for some time, be in touch with your existing customers, because you will always get another opportunity to sell a product to them. Making a call occasionally to see how they are doing / how your product is performing, wishing them at their life events, informing them about events that interest them, etc. are some examples of how you can be in touch with them.

Would you go to a place for a second purchase, if you have been ignored by them after making the last purchase? You would probably feel being exploited, right? Guess what, customers also feel the same way That is why 'keeping in touch' is important!

You can use the same prospect database (by updating it) or create a new database of your customers, to manage and to be in touch with them.

H. Obtaining referrals

If you are already in sales, you know how difficult it is to get a lead of a good prospect. Here is an easy way to obtain good leads. Obtain referrals from your existing customers. Obtaining referrals is a great way of progressing in your sales career.

- These referrals are provided by your existing customers – this means you get their endorsement and also support, when closing a sale with a referral
- You would get 'HOT LEADS' – these are prospects who have been on the lookout for your (or a similar) product / service
- You don't have to go through the motions of convincing them of the need of purchasing your product / service, as they have already been through that phase

I. Cross-sell / Up-sell

What can be easier than selling again to a satisfied existing customer! Remember, the use of the word SATISFIED here is not by chance, it is intentional. It is needless to say that you need to keep your existing customers satisfied if you're aiming for a successful career in sales. You can use these satisfied customers to make more sales by means of 'cross-sell' and 'up-sell'. This means you can recommend and sell similar products or better versions of the same products to these existing customers. But, always remember, not to impose on them as customers are not stupid and they will eventually understand whether you have been helpful to them or whether you have been exploiting them.

Chapter 5

Price and Value - understand the difference

Often sales personnel get into the misconception of understanding customer expectations wrong. The thought, “low price is the most powerful motivating factor for customer to buy” is not right. Once having understood the customer need, we should explore to further understand his/her expectation. Confused? Don’t be. There is always a difference in the customer need and the expectation. This gap is what we attempt to fill with the solutions we offer. Competitors will also bring in their solutions whilst we offer ours. The solution that comes closest to customer’s expectations will win!. Does this ultimately boil down to our individual capabilities in selling? Wrong again! It's our capability in getting the customer to see the value of our offer.

Remember, there still hasn't been a solution that matched customer expectations 100%. This is the domain of innovation. Everyday day we are exposed to something new, that gets us a little closer to what we really want. Expectation is a moving target, as is innovation.

A. If you have to discount things - YOU are not selling

Every time you offer a discount you will need to sell more to capture the revenues lost. The more value you create, the less discount you will have to offer. Or, customers won't really value your discount. This is the art of selling. Do you remember how meaningless the 30-40% discounts offered by tyre dealers? It is of no attraction as everyone make that offer. Probably we end up buying the tyres at exactly the price dealers wish to sell.

Create value for the discount!

B. Understand the BRAND promise - and how to position it

Selling is about uncovering the need, exploring the expectations around it and offering your solution as the closest to what the customer expects. Let's take few examples of brand promise.

Volvo for safety, Mercedes-Benz for class, BMW for driving pleasure.

iPhone is known for reliability/security, hence the positioning as the business phone.

Do you know the brand promise of your product? If you don't, go find it.

If you know, be absolutely clear of it. This will boost your confidence with which selling will get easier. You will enjoy selling. Remember, with strong positioning comes brand identity!

C. Create Value through superlative service

Do you know the beauty of customer service? It is the one thing under your total control in the whole selling process. You can choose what to do with it. You can tailor make it. It is not produced and delivered on the spot. The way you engage your customer, he/she will know if you genuinely care for him or not. When you promise, you'd better deliver. And if you can't, don't keep away from the customer. This is a common practice of sales personnel. Perhaps this is one reason why customers do not wish to engage with us. Engage the customer and keep him posted upfront. Even if the customer may not like it, in his eyes you build reliability. Invaluable, yet an extremely scarce resource in today's sales personnel.

D. Connect with marketing to support sales

(Selling is to differentiate?). Differentiation is about marketing. One word that link sales to marketing is differentiation. The time you spend to understand the brand positioning, its purpose of being, strong claims you make about your brand with support evidence, this is connecting with marketing. Imagine the plight of salesmen knocking on customers' door without a clue of any of these. We find them in loads out there in the field. Never join the bandwagon if your aspiration is to become a professional salesman with excellent salesmanship.

E. Challenge yourself to sell what does not sell

Take the automobile industry. Both the best car and the worst car in your view sells right? Though you know one is the best and the other is the worst, still they sell. Every product has a value offering. It is intended for a certain customer segment. We need to first know the product well as captured previously, and segment the market, target the segment where our product is most appealing and position it. The golden basics of sales and marketing, the STP; segmenting, targeting and positioning. Take a challenge. Go pick that product which doesn't sell and try the STP along with all discussed in this chapter.

Enjoy selling. Its an art and a science.

Chapter 6

Price and Value - understand the difference

The opposite of Networking is Not Working!

Building a strong network is essential to building your career. It's not about asking favors. It is about building relationships that last a long time. It is about exchanging ideas and information with others. This is not everyone's cup of tea, but if you can make the effort, it certainly will go a long way!

A. Meet people all the time

Coffee meetings, Corporate functions and Conferences are NOT the only place to network. Networking is meeting people without hidden agendas, so you can network pretty much anywhere. In fact if you just take your eyes off your mobile phone when you are out in public, you will certainly make eye contact with someone and start a conversation –
That's networking!

B. Make a habit of taking people out - NOT to make a sale - but just for a chat

When you do meet someone and build your network...it does not end there. Keep in touch. Networking is a continuous activity. Use whatever medium is available from Skype calls to coffee chats.

Where possible, meet people face to face and have that coffee moment or even a meal, if possible. Drop by their office, just to say hi. The more you do it, the stronger the relationship and the network. Genuinely make the time for people.

C. Make use of all social gatherings to meet prospects

The trick to building a strong network is to ensure that it is diverse. Any gathering is an opportunity. Never underestimate the power of connections or people. Meet as many people as you possibly can...- from family members to friends, from suppliers to customers, from classmates to former colleagues. Meet people even at your place of worship. You are NOT discussing business, but genuinely meeting people and learning about them...it's a start!

D. Work the cocktail circuit (but don't become an alcoholic!)

Cocktail functions, like other corporate functions and conferences are a great opportunity to meet new people and to understand them, their work, etc. At a cocktail function, people are more relaxed and are happy to talk in general.

Remember you are not obligated to consume alcohol at any function...and you don't need alcohol to network! If you can hold your drink, then feel free to have a glass or two. The objective is to meet people and learn about them and their businesses...and remember it later on! The objective is not to get drunk! So if you cant hold your drink, then by all means enjoy something that's non-alcoholic.

E. Have all your contacts in an excel sheet or a data base - never have it only on your phone

Being prepared and having a backup are all part of the game. As you meet people, ensure that you update your records as soon as possible. If you only have a name and number, ensure you follow up so that you get the rest of the details of that individual. If you exchanged a business card, then ensure you capture all the details into your phone or an app.

While it is convenient to have the contacts saved on your phone/cloud, it is important to ensure that you have a backup for that data and also have the same data maintained elsewhere too...may be an excel sheet or even a CRM (Client Relationship Management Platform).

F. Update your data base with comments and updates

Once you have the data, you need to ensure that there is a regular exchange of ideas and information. Make sure that you are able to capture key points and also to update the database with comments regarding the date and time of the chat, key points, ideas, etc.

This will ensure that you have some reference point when you have the next chat. Also to ensure that you don't repeat the same question and waste a good opportunity. Besides, when you are able to continue from where you left off the last time, people will respect the fact you remembered the conversation. This will further strengthen the relationship and network.

G. Connect with the overall network regularly - in person or online

Keep in touch with your contacts regularly. Write a message to at least 3 contacts a day ... that's over a 1000 in a year! If you are on social media, use the platforms to post general messages that will add value or strengthen that connection. As much as you make the effort to keep in touch, it is important that they remember you too!

Your Network is your Net Worth!

Chapter 7

Learn - continuously

As with any vocation, become an eternal student. Always, always, take the time to improve yourself. Once you have your basics in place you need to be able to grow: and for that you will need support and guidance. Never be too egotistical not to be able to learn from others - no matter how junior they are to you. If you continue to actively learn and grow you will realize you actually DO become better without you even stressing about it: and it will show in your performance as well.

A. Learn from those who excel in sales

Look out for those who are doing really well in their sales - irrespective of what trade or industry they are in. Ask them for advice and tips, and make a habit of touching base socially and asking them to help you out. Most WILL help. It helps to learn from different fields - and always learn the concepts and tools - and modify them to suit your particular context/product/service/organization. NEVER simply 'copy' an idea : make it your own. What works well in one circumstance rarely works exactly the same in a different situation/context.

B. Learn from your bosses

Look at your superiors (your own and others). What can you learn from them ? Seek 'good' bosses who are good at what they do and see if you can spend an hour or so regularly, talking to them about how they are in their careers and what little tips and techniques you can learn from them. Your superiors are a fountain of experience and expertise : learn from them (even if you don't like them !)

C. Seek a mentor/coach

Once you have mastered the basics, and are getting results, spend a little money and get yourself a professional coach. Yes - it DOES cost you - but it is well worth it. Remember though : seek a coach who has a solid track record in both selling and also, coaching. NEVER take on a coach who has not done sales themselves. The coaching you want is NOT life coaching (look at that separately if you want) but specific sales coaching - and this requires a specialist - NOT a generalist.

D. Take on a professional course of study

Invest a little time, money and effort in being professionally qualified as well. We are NOT saying that qualifications are the be all and end all of things : but they DO matter - specially for your growth in your career. NEVER take on a course for the qualification only please : take it on to grow your knowledge and skill base. The tools, techniques and concepts taught in professional courses are MEANT to help you in your work situations : and are designed with industry specific input as well. So, take it on - and ensure you gain the knowledge and expertise as much as the qualification.

E. Get feedback from key Clients

Always, always, get feedback... Your Clients can tell you what you are doing right and what you are doing wrong - and be hugely helpful in ensuring you learn from your own experiences. You don't need to do this formally through questionnaires etc - do so over a cup of coffee and talk to them about how you can serve them better - and then, ask them for feedback about how you can improve as a person. Choose the people you speak to carefully - and ensure they will not take offense in it. Also, be mindful that they also have time commitments - so, never intrude on their time unnecessarily. However, done right, it will not only give you invaluable feedback, you will also stand out in their eyes as someone who is 'serious' about your own improvement - which goes a long way in establishing mutually trusting relationships which are the bedrock of sales in the long term.

EPILOGUE

If you have ever stepped into sales and know of a GREAT Salesman (or woman), you know that making a sale becomes a second nature. If you observe them closely enough you can almost see the cogs churning in their minds assessing and calculating their next possible sales pitch. They are definitely a new breed of professionals when it comes down to it!

Sales professionals are steeped in motivation, drive and process so that every deliberated interaction amounts to a gain, even for the long run.

They are architects of dreams, lifestyles, and endless possibilities!

They are teachers who educate and provide information.

They are trouble shooters who provide you with solutions.

They are procurers of opportunity and trust!

They are creatures of habit and continuation.

Every GREAT Salesman knows that success is a sum of efforts, repeated day in and day out! A GREAT Salesman NEVER rests! He/She never lets their team rest - there is constant movement and the direction is always forward!

The best way to predict the future is to invent it! So aspire and be inspired!

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