

How Common Sales Problems Create Year-End Catastrophes

-by Mike Shannon



It is the start of the fourth quarter and as the business owner or sales manager you are faced with the perennial question "How are we going to make our numbers for this year?"

Chances are, your fate was cast six to twelve months ago when your sales team was guilty of some or all of the following sins:

1. *They know too much*
2. *Guilty of seller-centric behavior*
3. *Try to sell to everyone*
4. *Focus on feature and benefit selling*
5. *Waste time trying to control things out of their control*

In most cases salespeople know too much for their own good. The tendency is for salespeople to "show up and throw up" while they impress no one but themselves. You demonstrate your knowledge not by what you say but by the questions you ask. Never expect to impress a prospect by simply dumping all of your product knowledge into their lap. Who ever told you they wanted to know any of that information in the first place?

No one visits the doctor to hear the doctor talk about themselves. What you *are* concerned about is how quickly the doctor can help you get better. In reality, doctors are some of the best salespeople because they have mastered the art of getting you to tell them where it hurts. Think about how this applies to your own sales process. Do you have salespeople who can talk at length about your products but know nothing about the customer's business? Why should you expect them to consider doing business with you when your salespeople do not even bother to ask them "where it hurts?" Such seller-centric behavior never allows you to get to the root cause of the customer's pain, and without that you will never know what they are willing to invest to make the pain go away.

You are a proven manufacturer of a valuable product, so why don't you qualify your customers, instead of the other way around? Whoever said "*the customer is always right*" only got half of the story. The part they left out is "... *but they may not be right for you*". The truth is you will never sell to *everyone*. So why do your salespeople spend the majority of their time trying to convince prospects to say yes? Statistically speaking, you're going to hear no more than yes anyway, so the question becomes, do you want to hear that "no" early or late in the business development process? Determine early on why people will *not* buy from you.

That will free up your selling resources to locate and develop those customers most likely to actually make a purchase.

When asked why people buy from them, nine out of ten salespeople will respond "because I develop good relationships with my customers." But if all salespeople are saying the same thing, then the reality must be something different. Upon meeting a prospect, salespeople typically launch into a feature and benefit sales pitch that can cause prospects' eyes to glaze over. Most people buy based upon emotions. They may justify their decision intellectually, but the underlying ego state that leads to a final decision is usually pure emotion. The skill required is how to ask questions which uncover the pain or problem the prospect is trying to solve, and then - how to attach emotion to that pain. If you can elicit an emotional response, you will have a prospect motivated to make decisions.

There are only two things in a salesperson's control - their attitude and their behavior. Taking personal responsibility for managing their own actions will result in far greater success than all the energy spent trying to influence external circumstances or other people. Systematic and effective prospecting behavior - something totally within the control of a salesperson - will cure virtually every sales problem. Unfortunately too many 'professional' sales people have never been taught how to prospect or how much prospecting is enough. The result is a weak pipeline of new business opportunities that results in desperate measures to close the few potential clients they do have.

If you recognize any of the five problems outlined above, perhaps it is time to focus on the sales processes employed at your business and invest in teaching your people a more effective selling process? The end of 2008 can look different!

Mike Shannon is a member of **Growth Dynamics**, specialists in non-traditional sales, sales management and general management training for manufacturers, wholesalers, distributors and rep agencies. **610-331-0610**