



Be Prepared

A look at how salespeople get in their own way

by: Troy Harrison, Troy Harrison & Associates

“**B**e Prepared!” That is the Boy Scout motto and I have spoken about it before. So many sales are lost not because the customer does not want to buy, but because the salesperson is not prepared to sell. Every salesperson thinks that he (or she) is prepared to sell, but few actually walk through the steps and define what it takes to make a sale happen. What is worse, too many salespeople are the first to pump the brakes on the sales process. The customer should always be the first to pump the brakes. Being prepared is not applying artificial pressure; it is simply moving at the customer’s pace.

What is your sales process? By “sales process,” I mean: What are the steps involved in making a sale? Walk through it, start to finish, with the objective of understanding the “catch points” and seeing what you can do to eliminate them. You also need to understand the customer’s interest curve, which we will address first.

Think of the customer’s interest as a bell curve. On the left (the beginning) of the curve, your customer’s interest is typically low. Then, as you move forward, discovering needs and showing how your product or service can address those needs and generate a positive result, your customer’s interest increases until it hits the peak of the bell curve. That moment in time when the customer’s interest is highest is the best moment to complete a sale. But how do we know? Actually, it is easy — the customer usually asks a question: “So, how much does that cost?”

When your customer asks for a price, he is usually at the peak of his interest curve. Every word you use, every day that goes by before you answer that question only moves the customer back down the bell curve. This is one of the places that good sales go to die. It is not the only one, though. There are other places and other ways that we hurt our sales potential through not being prepared to make a sale happen. Here are five moments where salespeople get in their own way:

(1) Not having good questions: Sales is an activity of questioning and intellectual curiosity. You need to want to know about your customer’s needs, defined result and defined “win” from the sales call. It is not enough to have a list of questions in front of you (Although you should have one. I have made thousands of sales calls and I still have a basic



list of questions whenever I make a sales call.). You must be prepared to create good questions on the fly. Remember, 80% of your chance to win or lose the sale is determined by the questions you ask. The question that can lose the deal is the one that you do not ask, so be comprehensive.

(2) Being your own worst objector: Salespeople are guilty of this one all the time. You have probably done it, too; gone into a sales call thinking, “There is no way they will buy today,” or something like it. This becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you do not think your customer will buy, he won’t. This manifests itself in many ways, including being your own worst price objector, thinking negatively about your ability to carry out the sale, etc. This results in the salesperson artificially slow-playing the sale while your competitor walks right past you and grabs the deal.

(3) Not taking sales tools into the call: There is really no excuse for this one. All the time, I see salespeople who are scared to death to take sales tools into a sales call, including necessary sell sheets (paper or electronic), contracts and order forms. The explanation I hear most commonly is: “I didn’t want to intimidate the customer.” Really? Your customer knows why you are there — even if you do not. Do not be that person. When you go into a sales call, be prepared to make that sale happen.

(4) Being unprepared to price: Look, I know that not every salesperson can be fully prepared to price every piece of

business. Some needs are complicated. Some are complex projects. Some require quotes from manufacturers. And, if your situation is truly one of those situations, you are excused from this comment. That said, too many of you are not excused; you have the tools, price sheets, etc., available to you to quote price and, yet, when the customer asks “How much?,” you immediately retreat to the Batcave to develop the magic proposal. Why? If you have the tools, quote the price. Because if you do not quote the price, you cannot close. Which leads us to ...

(5) Being unwilling to seek commitment: Notice that I did not say “being unwilling to close the sale.” Not every appointment can end with a closed sale, but every appointment should end with a commitment for a next step. If you can close (i.e., you have identified needs, presented and proposed), then by all means, ask the closing question. If you really do have to

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continue the sales process in another appointment, then set the next appointment right then and there. If you do not, you have no one to blame but yourself for the customer losing interest.

Don't get me wrong — many, if not most, sales will not be closed in one call. However, by being prepared, you can shorten the sales cycle without annoying your customer. ■

Troy Harrison is the author of “Sell Like You Mean It!” and “The Pocket Sales Manager,” and is a speaker, consultant and sales navigator. He helps companies build more profitable and productive sales forces. To schedule a free 45-minute Sales Strategy Review, call (913) 645-3603 or email troy@troyharrison.com. Visit www.troyharrison.com.

