



1995 Sales Strategies

If they worked back then, will they work today?

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Let's revisit the past and talk about the activities (and the order they were done in) that made a person successful in office equipment sales in 1995. Note that this article talks about my own experience. I know other successful people who probably were not doing it my way, but this is the blueprint I followed, and I will share why I think it worked.

Thirty years ago I moved to Louisville, Kentucky, from my hometown of less than 10,000 people in a rural area in the southeastern part of the state. I was 21, newly married and had not yet completed my college degree. I did not know anyone in Louisville; I did not have family connections or college friends there. I also had no prior knowledge of marketing or sales, so there was no reason to hire me for that type of position. I had a very Appalachian accent (which I still have today) I could not hide, and a small frame of reference when it came to people and the world.

My husband Earl and I moved to Louisville because my cousin, who was a branch manager in a Toshiba dealership, mentioned needing a technician at a family reunion. Earl, who was a coal miner at the time, had finished two years of technical training at our local tech school, so he was qualified. The pay was much less with fewer benefits, but the job was safer and it promised a better future. He was skilled and brave enough to make the move, and I reluctantly agreed to go along.

I was attending college and intended to continue at night, all while getting a job to supplement our income since Earl would be taking a drastic pay cut in his new position. On top of that, the cost of living would be much higher in the city.

I had some experience as an office clerk and spent a couple of months working at a heavy equipment dealership as a receptionist. I was miserable. I had to answer not just a phone, but a switchboard. The people were very nice, but sitting still in one place and having to tell someone when I needed a break to go to the restroom was not who I was made to be. Earl came home excited every day about what he had done that day, the people he met and his new company's enthusiasm for growth.

When my cousin offered me a position at the dealership, it was not in outside sales, but a telemarketing position. Believe it or not, I jumped at the chance to sit in a closet and make 100 dials a day, six hours a day.

Within six months, I was offered the opportunity to try outside sales. Based on my résumé, I did not have what we usually look for in a sales rep. I did not have a degree, I did not know a lot of people, I was not known in the community and I was not even familiar with the area.



So, what made me successful? Why did it work for both me and the dealership? What I offered the company was a strong work ethic. I could follow directions, enjoyed learning, was curious and strongly desired success. Because I could follow directions and was curious, I asked questions, watched, listened and created a routine based on what I was told would turn into success.

These are the six steps I took every day for 60 to 90 days:

- (1) I stopped by businesses in person, visiting at least 20 new companies per day.
- (2) I took notes of what equipment each business was currently using and who made the decisions.
- (3) I went home in the evening and made quotes for the companies I thought had an interest or may have a need they did not realize yet.
- (4) I entered each stop in my CRM (Act) with all the information — the business's name, address, phone number, decision maker, current equipment and detailed notes about the opportunity. Was there room for something new? Was the company happy with its current provider? What was it paying? Did the company have a lease or did it purchase its equipment? What models did it have and how many? Did it have a need for more? Would a staple option be enticing?
- (5) I scheduled the next step in the CRM — a reminder to call the decision maker, to stop by again in three months or maybe provide a quote.
- (6) I would get up the next day and check my schedule, deliver quotes and call decision makers in the hope of making some appointments. I might also drop in on the previous day's cold calls to see if the decision makers were in their offices. Then I would start a fresh batch of cold calls.

In the beginning, it was not easy because I had been told it was a numbers game and some days I made a lot more cold calls than the suggested 20. There were days I made 50.

Then I realized quality mattered. Good questions were important. I began listening to Norman Vincent Peale and Zig Ziglar daily, and my mindset started shifting.

It started working out just as I had been told. All of my efforts resulted in about 20 quotes to deliver per month. An average rep could close at least 25% of those. I found I got pretty comfortable and learned my competitors' strengths and weaknesses so, over time, I had to make fewer and fewer brand-new calls.

The data entry got less cumbersome because I built the base up and could update it instead of creating it from scratch every day. My closing ratio improved and I started to recognize real opportunities before I jumped straight to a quote. I was successful. My job got easier and easier as I built a territory. My closing ratio improved so much that I got very comfortable.

So, if it worked in 1995, will it work today? Cell phones, social media and email are widely used today. But have these technologies just given us more options to do exactly what we did then? Are our efforts and options overwhelming us like my

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50-plus cold calls per day had been overwhelming me? I think all modern things can be wonderful when sprinkled in, but the bottom line is 20 real conversations that often require hearing “no” and “not right now” done consistently with good notekeeping and follow-up will lead to success. Emails and social media are often the path of least resistance, not the path to success. You can do a lot of that type of activity and end up overworked and underpaid. So, focus on the right thing. ■

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