

Sharpen Your Axes

Business is an unforgiving arena where companies vie for position and seek to steal away one another's customers. On some level, the competition is good, as it forces us to perform and improve so that those same customers being targeted by our competitors will always realize our worth and stick with us. On the sales side, the battles are fought every day, and like with most things, if you're not striving to get better at what you do, you wind up, by default, going backward. This article is all about sharpening your sales axes. The sharper you are, the more deals you can cut.

There are many skills a successful salesperson needs to have to constantly keep those orders coming in. Some of these skills are personality driven, such as being outgoing and enjoying working with people. Others are fundamental skills, like being a good listener and communicating well. And finally, some skills are learned, and need to be relearned and sharpened on a continual basis. This article is about the learned skills and how you can keep yourself sharp and getting sharper at all times.

There are five skills that if honed and constantly challenged, will serve any salesperson well. They are:

1. Step Outside

No matter how good a salesperson you are and how comfortable you are selling, there is a comfort zone beyond which you prefer not trending. We all have our comfort zones, and while some of us have broader zones than others, we all need to work hard on expanding the zone further. The way to expand the comfort zone is to step outside of it, forcing yourself to deal with clients or potential clients that force you to be a little less at ease. By challenging your zone you will gain comfort within the new boundaries, which of course is the time to go on out and expand your zone even further.

2. Express Thyself

Communication is the key to all sales and the better you are at communicating, the better you are at selling. The notion that communicating means getting your message across is accurate, but only a partial answer to what comprises good communication. The other aspect of good communication is, of course, listening. So while it is important you share with your customer the benefits your products deliver and why you're better than the other alternatives, it is more important that you listen first to what the customer's needs are and what solutions he or she is seeking. So sharpen your communication skills - both listening and presenting your case - and keep sharpening them, because failing to communicate is the number one cause of sales gone bad.

3. Motivate Your Customer

Being a salesperson can often be like a cheerleader in that one of the tasks that come with the job is to motivate your customer to confront certain challenges in their business. We all know that salespeople today are more than mere peddlers. Good salespeople have an excellent understanding of their market and the needs of their customers. They understand how their products resolve certain business challenges, sometimes even before the evidence of the challenge (or the pain of the challenge) become apparent to the customer. The sale of products to companies seeking to alleviate an ill is not a

particularly difficult task provided you demonstrate that you have the solution. The sale to a company that is only starting to learn they have a need can be somewhat more challenging. The ability to motivate customers to be more pro-active and more aggressive in confront their problems makes for great sales. This is a skill that needs to be sharpened through practice, knowing the customer and demonstrating a genuine concern for their success.

4. Qualify Your Leads

Nothing wastes more time than (to use a Tudog phase) barking up the wrong tree. The idea that a prospective customer qualifies as a potential customer merely because they exist is a recipe for a whole lot of running around. The best sales practice is to know your prospect and ascertain ahead of time whether, (a) they have an ill you can cure, (b) recognize they have the ill, (c) are interested in addressing it, (d) have the resources to do so, (e) are inclined to consider your solution, and (f) are willing to make the buy decision. Once you have correctly qualified your prospects, go see them, communicate well, motivate them...and cut the sale.

5. Have a Good Time

People can tell when you enjoy what you're doing, and the fact that you enjoy it goes a long way in establishing the credibility of your products. The thinking is that no one has a good time selling something that is hard to sell, but someone selling something that does what it's supposed to – a great product, well that person must be one happy camper. So forget the pressures of sales targets and get out there and enjoy interacting with people, helping them solve their problems, and making them more profitable. Your joy will be their measure of your success, which will bring you more success.

Sales is one of those difficult jobs that people who are good at it love. The better you get the more you'll like it, and the more you like it the more you should strive to get better still. You need to make sure your axes are as sharp as they can get, so that when your skills are challenged you pass the cut every time.