

10 Errors to Avoid in Sales



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Regardless of how long you have been in sales or how skilled you are, none of us are perfect and errors do happen. Even the best salespeople make mistakes from time to time. However, if you know where you went wrong and why you failed to close that deal, it's easy to learn from your mistakes and change your strategy.

In these ten chapters I will go through ten common mistakes salespeople make – from inefficient time management to not knowing your competition well enough and everything in between – and provide additional tips on what you can do to avoid them. If you remember the following examples and start to practice these tips, I guarantee that you will see an increase in your sales.

John Boddington

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1. Not Asking for the Business

One of the most common reasons why people fail to close a deal – and possibly the one that is the easiest to rectify – is not asking for business. But what does that mean exactly?

I have shared this example many times in the past, but I personally can tell you that I learnt about this because I was making this error myself. When I was quite new to sales, I started working for an office automation company (printers/copiers/faxes etc.). After a couple of weeks of training on the products, we were finally allowed out into our respective territories.

I uncovered a lead, and went in to do a formal presentation for the company owner. It had been researched properly, I knew what our competitor's machines could do, and I was all set. I delivered the brochure about the particular machine that would solve his requirements, and sold the product fabulously. What I did not do, was ask for the business. After doing the presentation, we carried on talking. Eventually, it required him to ask: "So, what will it take for me to get this machine?"



I realised my error, and we went through the various options of either paying cash, credit terms etc., and then I asked which he would prefer, and started the paperwork. But it took him to ask me in order to get started. Why had I not just asked him? I knew that he had been keen all the way through the presentation! It is an error that I was careful to avoid after that, but dealing with many salespeople since then, I can tell you that they all make the same mistake.

They give you the options, do a great job of presenting the product, and then almost

leave it to you to ask. I have heard one salesperson field an inbound telephone call, and instead of simply making the sale, went through so many options that the person ended the call going away to think about the options. Not once had the person asked for the business!

Sales trainers and sales coaches that either attend meetings with salespeople, or listen to recorded calls, all give this as the single biggest reason for people failing to close the sale. If you are in sales, ask yourself: do you ask for the business every time? If you own a business or run a sales team, ask yourself: what are our closing rates? Do I know if our team is asking for the business every time? Can we improve sales by doing this?

If you answered that you are not doing it every time, or your staff are not, you can improve sales easily. If you know your closing rates, get people to focus on this and watch those rates go up.

So, if you want to avoid the mistake that I had been making, of not winning sales because either you or your staff are not asking for the business, then this is something that you can attend to straight away.

2. Not Actually Selling

The best natural salesperson that I have ever met is a personal trainer, Steve, in Cape Town, South Africa. I do not think that he would even see himself as a salesperson, but without realising it, that is all he does.

He is in great physical shape, and enters bodybuilding competitions every now and then just to stay motivated, and so his body basically sells his product. But it is his way with people that really makes me see him as a salesperson. He listens, and gives good advice, but does so in such an assertive, natural way that people cannot help but buy the food products, supplements and gym apparel that he suggests. He is not even making money from any of it, but people all buy what he suggests.

Now, the reason why I say he is the most natural salesperson is because of his manner. People listen to, and follow his advice. If he was in real sales, I am almost certain he would be an absolute star. But why am I only almost certain?

Building rapport with people, and getting them to commit to what you are offering, is a very large part of sales. But I have seen other people almost as good as him at working with people struggle when it comes to a full time sales role. Why is that?

In many cases, these people have gone into sales because somebody has seen them in action, whether it be socially, or in some other job role, and told them that they would be great in sales. They then get themselves a sales job, and suddenly it is not as easy as people were saying it would be. The problem is more often than not, that although they can sell really well, they are not actually spending enough time selling. Things just keep getting in the way.

The single biggest focus that any person in a sales role should have is to maximise the time spent actually selling. Unfortunately, sales does seem to generate additional activities. There can be paperwork. There can be training that you need to provide to clients who have just bought your product. There can be reports, giving feedback to management, forecasting and so on.

The key: find as many ways as possible to minimise the time lost on non-sales activities. To give you another example, I have worked at a company that had many salespeople. When I started there, they were responsible for everything related to their own sales. We first identified one sales



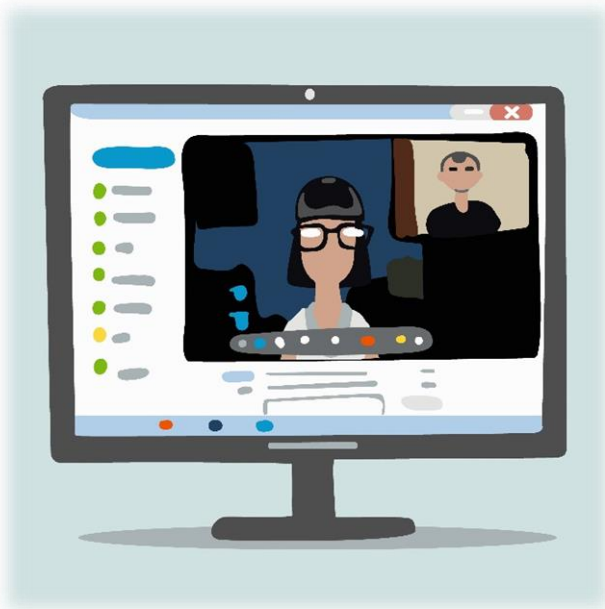
lady that was so good, any time spent on admin was potential revenue lost. So we hired her an assistant. If she obtained commitment over the phone, the assistant prepared and sent out the paperwork. The extra revenue, and profit, more than made up for the admin lady's salary.

That taught the company a lesson, and while the other salespeople were not as good and could not justify the salary of an assistant on their own, we hired three admin staff to do all the paperwork for the balance of the sales team between them. Every single person was now on the phone to clients more, and closing more deals. They had not been slacking off or anything, just not using their time as well as they could have been.

A secondary benefit arose from this, though. While training the new admin people on what they needed to be doing, it provided an opportunity to re-evaluate processes, and actually cut out and remove some of what was no longer felt to be necessary. It then made the admin staff more effective and time-efficient, so they could do more admin, and even take over some other of the chores, like Customer Service calls. Even less for the sales staff to worry about.

How do I spend more time selling?

Firstly, strive to do everything that you can to maximise the time you can spend selling. Is there something that you do not need to do, or do out of the core times when you can be reaching your clients? If you can, do that so that you can be on the phone when you need to.



Secondly, can you think of quicker ways to get things done? Could you have a conference call or video conference, rather than drive an hour each way to meet with somebody in person, and lose two hours of travel time? Think of what you can do yourself, and ask for help from other people who can give you some guidance on what else you can try. Sometimes people not familiar to your situation can come up with the best advice, as they are not sitting with the same blinkers on as you.

If you are in management, or are a supervisor, the best way to maximise your results is by ensuring that the staff are as productive as possible. This might mean improving people's sales abilities, but it might also mean providing the coaching and training that will allow them to use those skills more.

Can you, as a manager, do anything to remove admin, or simplify procedures? Can you coach people privately to make them each more time efficient? I think that I was a reasonably good salesperson personally, but I certainly improved when I was put through time management training and learnt how to batch my work. I was now using those skills with more clients. I had not intentionally been inefficient, I had just not been shown a better way.

Other people might be the same, they may be working very hard, just not smart and efficient. Give them those skills that will allow them to actually be selling more, and then they can close more. We all know sales is a numbers game, so enable people to talk to as many people as possible, and you'll have more opportunities to win business. And if you do want to bring in support that can think outside your little box, bring in outside help that can provide people with those skills to use. Everybody will benefit if your salespeople are actually selling.

3. Giving Away Your Profit

How to maximise profit when selling

I must admit, I have a taste for fast food. If I was left to my own devices, I would eat far too many take away meals. While I now strive to keep that in moderation, it means that I have made the occasional visit into a McDonald's. And I really respect their business model. Without fail, they try to upsell. If you order a burger, they offer you a meal combo. They are always trying to increase their profit.

And this is not just something McDonald's do. Almost every food chain now does a similar thing, and it is something that is instilled in the staff's initial training. Every client is offered the chance for them to buy more. They are trying to upsell to every client. It is a habit.

So why do all salespeople not try to upsell to every client? Regardless of the industry you are in as a salesperson, I bet there is something that you can add. While in office automation, if people bought a copier from us, we tried to offer the service agreement. The same can be done in motor vehicle sales, with services included, and they can also offer things like sports packs etc. I have even heard dentists upselling, while doing one job, offering veneers, for example.

For every client that is not offered the chance to upgrade, or buy an extra service or product, you are giving away profit. There is another way to lose profit though, and that is through discounting. Every company or trader has a set price, and that price is usually systematically worked out based on things like target profit margins. Any reduction in price, or discount offered, means that you are missing the profit intended. Even big deals, if discounted badly, can mean no profit gets earned by the company.

The effect of giving discounts

There are going to be situations when you feel that discounts might need to be given. But if so, are there ways to minimise the profit loss?

Many years ago I used to sell websites, as well as a software package that both hosted the site and also allowed the client to make manual changes to their website. The client bought two things, the site design itself, and then the accompanying software, which they paid for monthly. It was a number of months before I was in a position that if I did not give



some kind of discount, I was going to lose the deal. I offered to take off a portion of the monthly fee for the software. After the deal was done, my boss went through the numbers with me. It actually made more sense for us to give what appeared to be a bigger discount on the site design itself, and retain the full monthly fee. By discounting on the monthly fee, over two years we lost more than if I just gave a discount on the site design.

It was a lesson that I learned at the time, and one I strive to avoid to this day. Ever since, I have ensured that I understood what made up my costs, my profit etc., on any product that I was selling. That way, I could always look at ways to ensure that I tried to retain as much profit as possible.

My simple rule of thumb is, try not to discount. But if you do feel obliged to offer something, for whatever reason, try to find ways to retain as much profit as possible. Perhaps keeping the price the same but adding something small on top means that the client still feels they have got something more for their money, but so have you!

So, as a salesperson, are you retaining profit by doing everything you can not to discount? Are you making extra profit by trying to upsell to every client? If not, you need to start now.

Help your staff understand what makes them profit

If you are a sales manager, do your staff understand what makes them profit? If not, explain it properly to them. Are your salespeople trying to upsell or cross-sell on every deal? If not, train them to do so. Have it instilled as part of their initial training, like McDonald's and the other fast food chains.

If this has made you think about ways to make more money yourself as a salesperson, or to think about your staff selling more, why not look into sales courses that specifically add value in this way? Your staff might seem fully competent, and are closing deals, but can they close at bigger profit margins?

4. Not Asking Enough Questions



Another common mistake salespeople tend to make is not asking enough questions from their clients. However, this is a crucial part of understanding their needs and being able to provide the best possible solution.

How do I ask a client the best questions?

Ten years ago, while working for a computer training company in South Africa, I received a call from a client that was looking to be trained on Microsoft Access. I arranged for him to come in and meet me at our office.

Over an extended meeting that lasted about two hours, I asked every possible question that I could think of. It turned out that the reason he needed Access was because he had planned to learn how to do SAP database development. The course with SAP was to cost R60000 for two weeks, but they had suggested to him that he do an Access course first, so that he understands the fundamentals of how databases work first.

It also turns out that the money was coming out of his trust fund, and that he was terrified of spending R60000 on a course that he then could not cope with.

What he ended up booking with us was the Access training, for R2995, and courses that would make him a Microsoft Database Administrator, for another R18000. The aim was then for him to get into the IT industry as a database administrator, and there was more work using Microsoft products than with SAP in South Africa. When he had then gained a couple of years of experience, he might then relook at the SAP, but at least he would be earning money by then (so might not need to use more from his trust fund), and he would have more of an idea if he could cope with that two-week intense course.

We were both extremely pleased with how everything had transpired, and even his father was pleased, hearing that he was about to risk a lot less of his trust fund. It benefitted everybody.

But what if I had not asked all those questions? If I had been just an order taker, and booked him on the Access courses? Firstly, I would have lost the R18000 sale for the MCDBA that he bought. Secondly, seeing how he struggled with Access and the MCDBA, he definitely would not have coped with the SAP course (and he became aware of this very quickly), and that would have been R60000 down the drain.

So, what are some of the overall problems that can arise from a salesperson not asking enough questions?

- You do not thoroughly understand a client's needs. This could cause you to lose the sale to a salesperson from another company that does understand those needs, and provides a better solution.
- Again, you do not understand the client's needs, but you still win the deal. Then your solution does not fix their problem. That can just become a whole range of problems, from being accused of misrepresenting your product, to companies not wanting to work with you again.
- From the client's side, if they do go with what is the wrong solution, they have now spent money and still have not resolved the problem. Will they keep trying to rectify it?
- Perhaps the client feels that nobody is listening, and looks at a different solution altogether. They might choose a totally different strategy, such as selling off a problem area, outsourcing something, rather than just fixing it themselves.

So both the salesperson and the client can lose out. Is that something that you want to happen, just because you did not understand the client's problem properly?

In order to avoid making this mistake, ask as many questions as you can, get clarity from the client, and understand why they think this is the problem. This will mean that the solutions you offer will be more focused, and that will give you a much bigger chance of winning that deal. Or like my example above, not just closing the deal asked for, but win more business than was originally on the table.



5. Not Presenting the Benefits to Your Client

There is a wonderful restaurant in the town of Hermanus, along South Africa's coast on the Indian Ocean side. A large portion of the restaurant has large windows that are sea facing, and positioned at the top of the coastal cliffs, it affords a spectacular view across the bay.

This particular bay is one in which whales, making their seasonal migrations north and south, stop to frolic in. If you eat at this restaurant, at either of those two periods, and sit at a table at the windows, you can whale watch while you eat. It is an incredible experience.

What is even more incredible though, is just how easy it used to be to get a seat at the window. And the reason for that is that not enough people were aware of this. The entrance to the restaurant was not on the same side of the building, and so if you were in the parking lot, or the road passing by the front of the restaurant, you might not have guessed at the views on offer.

Throughout almost the entire summer holiday period one year, the restaurant had a sign outside that said, "Ocean view seating available!" The last summer that I holidayed there was one just after I had gone into sales, and had been trained about selling the advantages of your products, not listing the features.

Every time I visited the restaurant, and saw how easy it was to get a table with this stunning view, it amazed me that they were just listing a feature. Yes, they had ocean view seating. What they should have been putting in the sign was the benefit of that, that you could whale watch while you eat. I bet that would have got far more people through the doors!

Learn to present the benefits to your clients

Over the years, I have met many salespeople who made the same mistake. They listed the features of whatever widget they were selling, without explaining the advantages that it gave, and then the benefits this gave to the client.

The last motor vehicle I bought, while taking a car for a test drive, the salesperson rattled off an entire list of features, including one about features of the gearbox. Talking to him later, it turned out that he was new to sales, which might have explained it, but he did not list one benefit of these features as the driver. He was lucky, and we liked the car and bought it anyway, because my wife had driven a similar car before.



If that was not the case though, he would have had a far better chance of selling the car to us if he had told us what benefits there were, such as the low road tax that I benefit from because of the low emissions. People are far more inclined to buy something if they can see how they will benefit from it. Or eat at a restaurant if they know that they can watch whales play while they eat.

So, if you are in sales, when was the last time you checked to ensure that for every feature you listed to a client you gave a corresponding benefit to them? If you are a sales manager,

when have you listened to see if your sales people are giving the benefits? And are you doing it naturally? Does the conversation flow, or does it sound like you are listing just features and benefits? If it does sound like you are just going through a checklist, you need to practice so that it sounds natural.

If you, or your team, are not successfully explaining the benefits of your product to your clients, make sure that you avoid the mistake that restaurant in Hermanus was making, and learn to explain the benefits of your products to your clients in a natural way. I guarantee it increases sales.

6. Not Knowing Your Product Well Enough

How does product knowledge improve sales?

In early 2013, a well-known South African businessman, Louis Luyt, passed away. While he was alive, he had been a very controversial character, and much of what he achieved in his life has been argued about both privately and publicly.

Because of the controversy surrounding him, when he released his autobiography in the early 2000s, I read the book to hear what he gave as his side of the story. While you have to try and balance out both sides of a story, one thing that he had to say has struck me as useful ever since.

As a young man, he had been a rugby player, and had been very close to becoming a Springbok. This was prior to rugby being a professional sport though, so he did have to also work for a living. Because of his name as a sportsman, he had been able to obtain employment as a salesperson for a large fertiliser company.

Upon starting at the company though, and being given the territory that he was to manage, he quickly discovered that it was in a very dry, arid part of the country. Most of the farming performed there was with livestock, and not producing crops. None of the farmers were buying fertiliser, and the area had traditionally been the worst sales area for the company. At a loss to see what he could try sell to them, he went through all of the company's products, not just the fertiliser. Among the items was a product that really did not sell well at all, and that was an insecticide. He approached these livestock farmers with that, and they all started to buy the product, as insects did irritate all of their animals.

Even though nobody was expecting him to, he had managed to find a product that he could offer to people because he learnt in-depth what products he actually had to sell. Similarly, when I first went into office automation sales, we had spent two full weeks learning about our products before we were let loose on our territories. Some of the more experienced salespeople were starting to get "cabin fever", and just could not wait to be let loose, but the compulsory training benefitted every single one of us.



When we did finally go out and meet clients, because we knew our products so well, we were able to exactly match the client's needs with the best of our machines. They always felt that we provided the right equipment, rather than some of our competition who were just trying to get clients to take the biggest machines possible. For example, one of my colleagues won a deal purely because he knew that our machines would be compatible with the legal industry software that the client used.

Our opposition were trying to get them to use a machine with more features, and had discounted down to a lesser price than ours, but they could not guarantee that they would be able to use the machine as a network printer. The client had to play safe, and went with my colleague, who had benefitted because he knew precisely what our machines could and could not do.

If you have been in sales management, I bet you can relate to this next illustration. A sales person is giving his manager feedback on why they lost a particular deal. The sales person says that the reason that they lost out was because an opposition company could do X. The sales manager is astonished, and says, "But did you tell them we can do that too?" To which the sales person replies back, "Really? I didn't know we could do that!" At that point, the sales manager often wants to pull their hair out, but as I have often explained to these managers, whose fault is it if their salespeople do not know all that they can do and offer? Perhaps the fault lies at the door of the manager, who can ensure that their team knows all there is to know.

So, do you know all the features of the products that you offer, or your company offers? Do you know the benefits that those features can provide to your clients?

If not, make sure that you upskill yourself on your own product knowledge. While those obscure products and features might not come up every day, those will be the ones that come in occasionally and will turn an average month into a great month, that small difference that makes you a cut above the rest.

7. Not Knowing Your Competition Well Enough

Similarly to the previous point, you need to be aware of your competitors and what kind of products or services they offer. Knowing your own products and they could benefit your potential clients is essential for success, but is not enough in itself. You need to know what you are up against.

How does knowledge of the competition improve sales?

At one of the training workshops that our company offers, a young salesman gave an example of a deal that he had lost. He admitted that he had considered the deal to almost be done, and approached the potential client to fill out the final paperwork. He was then completely blown away when he was told that the client had chosen to go with a different provider.

Following the training that he had received from his boss, he asked why they had lost the deal and to whom. This was at least so that as a company committed to growth, they could still learn from



any deals lost, and see if anything ever needed to be re-evaluated on their own side.

When told, he was even more shocked. He knew the company he had lost out to, but he did not know that they even offered what he was trying to get the client to buy. His own response to his manager when he gave feedback on the phone later that day was: "I didn't even know they did that!"

He was young, and we all learn from our mistakes – but is it possible to learn from others before they happen to us? Can we learn from this and make sure that we know enough about all of our competitors, that we do know the risk of this happening to us?

So what would we actually need to know?

The most obvious question is, what other companies are in the same market as you? You need to know who they are – but what else?

- Do you know what they offer?
- Do you know their pricing?
- Do you know the way that they work, and what they focus on?
- Are you just competing on price, or are there other issues at stake, such as follow up service?

How do you differentiate yourself from the competition if you do not know them well enough? And differentiating yourself is the key. So many markets these days are extremely compact when it comes to pricing, that it is what else you provide that will make the difference.

Know their weaknesses

Added to all of these factors that make up differentiating yourself from your competitors is another crucial aspect of knowing your competition: do you know their weaknesses?

Knowing your competitor's weaknesses can help in many ways. If you know that your potential client is looking at the competition already, you can focus even more on your strengths that will play up their weaknesses.

While selling websites and software many years ago, our company had a rival product that was marginally better than ours in certain aspects. Their weakness, though, was that they were based in a city almost 1000 miles away, while I was a local rep in their area. We stressed to clients that should they have any problems, I was literally just around the corner from them. If they went with the opposition, they would have to try have issues resolved over the telephone, or wait for somebody to justify flying down to come resolve the issue. That was a key weakness that we could exploit. And the more weaknesses you know about, the more you can take advantage of.

Be aware of the alternatives

Slightly more difficult to know about, but that you should, are companies that do not offer the same type of product as you, but an alternative product. A really good example of this is the music industry. As the digital market increased, with people downloading tracks, retailers that only offered sales of actual CDs were not just competing with other companies selling CDs or DVDs, they were now facing digital sellers. That is a simple example, but one used in almost every university business management course.



Another example of this is a friend of mine. The only way to put it is that he was having a bit of a mid-life crisis, and was looking to add to the family vehicles with something a bit sportier. He had narrowed things down to a couple of really good second hand cars, both at the same dealer. That dealer thought that he would get the business whichever of the two cars my friend bought. He was stunned when my friend walked in to politely tell him that he had decided to buy a quad bike instead. It gave him the same exhilaration as the sports car, but could also use it with his teenage son.

So I am sure you agree with me that it's crucial to know about your competitors and what they offer. Where can you get that type of information? I would suggest that you look wherever you can. Ask your colleagues, set aside to do some research on the internet, do a bit of telephone mystery shopping for yourself - just keep up to date with your competitors. That way, you will not get blindsided, and lose a deal because you did not know enough about a competitor.

8. Not building Rapport with Clients

Ten years ago, the owner of a company that I worked at made our entire sales team watch a film called *Door to Door*. It is the true story of an American salesman, Bill Porter.

Bill Porter was born with cerebral palsy. Rather than accept his handicap and receive a disability pay-out, he struggled to find work, and eventually did so as a door to door salesperson. He eventually became a top salesperson, but what really brought him to the attention of the public was a series of newspaper articles.

The company he worked for had planned to change the way that they worked, and were no longer going to use door to door salespeople, rather focusing on other channels. The people on his route wrote into the newspaper, as over many years they had all developed relationships with him and wanted to deal with him.

The reason why our boss had wanted us all to watch the movie was that he perceived we were not building relationships with our clients well enough. We were potentially losing sales because clients were not buying from us as individuals.

The company had recently started to follow the Action Selling approach, which stated that the first psychological decision a buyer makes is about the salesperson. If they do not like you, they are not going to buy from the company. This movie was to serve to emphasise that. They will buy from a competitor that they *do* like.

So, the obvious question is, how do you get your clients to like you? It all starts with building rapport, finding some common ground. If you fail to do that, you are going to fail to get them to like you, and then you will fail to get the sale. Have you done enough to convince them that they should buy from you?



How to build rapport with people

If you were wondering whether there are practical ways to build rapport, here are some of the easier ones to start with.

1. Show an interest in them. If you show a genuine interest in them, they will think that you are trying to solve whatever issue they are looking to resolve, not just “sell them something”. Have you displayed that you understand what they want and what their problem is?

2. Ask questions. There are many types of questions. People refer to open or closed questions, but also things like situation questions, or problem questions, which are all aimed at finding out what the actual situation is, what the problem is, etc.

3. Listen to them. Are you really listening to them? Hopefully if you are asking questions, you are



listening to their answers. But I have met salespeople who, as you are answering their questions, you can already see that they are thinking about what to say next, and not really listening. Listen properly. That might then cause you to ask even more questions, not say something yourself.

4. Find common ground. You might be totally different to your potential client, but if you can find common ground, show that. Make sure that they know you have common ground. I have a colleague who is different to some of her clients yet is brilliant at uncovering what their likes and dislikes are. If you find out what

people like and dislike, it is easier to say, “Oh, I love that too!”

5. Solve their problem. If you have really listened to them, and you have asked questions to find out what their real problem is, you should be able to solve their problem. Sometimes it might not be what you expect, but if you build rapport well and get them to like you, you might have a client for life.

To give you an example, my brother’s mother-in-law had been in the market for a motor vehicle in the 1990s. She met with a dealer (after meeting several others first) who, instead of trying to sell her a new car, suggested a cheaper second hand one. It felt like somebody had actually listened to her needs and she bought the car from him. When I returned to the country after working overseas, and was in the market for a car, she recommended that I go see him.

It turned out that I was the fifth person that she had referred to him, and over the years, I know of more than 10 cars that have now been bought by our friends and family through him. In each case, he just listened to what people needed, and provided the correct solution. On a couple of occasions he has even bought the cars back from us as our needs have changed.

6. Tell people that you like them (and be genuine about it). I have a colleague who tells people that she really likes them. At first, I thought it sounded cheesy, and could not have imagined myself doing it. But I did start to realise that she always meant it, it was not forced or contrived. And I have never seen a person be able to build rapport better. If you are a bit of an “uptight bloke” like me, find some casual, humorous way to say it, but let the person know how you feel. That will make it feel less awkward.

If you start to practice these 6 things, I guarantee that you will build rapport with your clients better. And that is the first stage to closing that sale, making your customer like you. Not only will they buy from you, but they will keep buying from you.

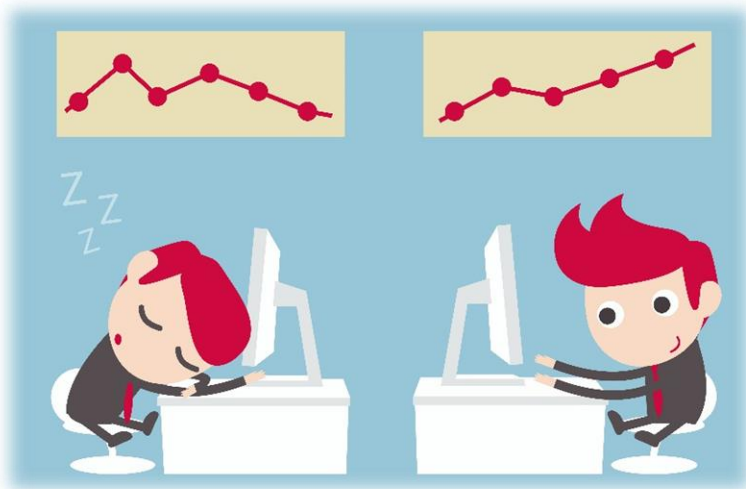
9. Resting On Your Laurels After Success

How to avoid dips in sales

Many years ago, I had a colleague who almost everybody in the sales team knew had a weakness. He would never admit it, but almost without fail, after closing a deal, the rest of the day he took it easy. You just knew that his drive back to the office at the end of the day would not be by the most direct route. He would be taking the scenic route, and if it was summer, he would have his roof down and taking a route that followed the coast so that he could smell the ocean.

No matter what management tried to do about it, in all the time I worked with him, he never once found a new possible lead on the same day that he had just closed a deal. Management could not actually fault him too much, as he did regularly hit his targets. But although he did hit targets, he was not a star, and could have made so much more money. He was losing 7-8 portions of a day, out of a 22-23 day working month. He was costing himself massively.

Not exactly the same, but at other companies, I have seen staff that have just had a fantastic month and earned themselves loads of commission, take their foot off the gas the following month. They are too busy enjoying spending the commission or relaxing, thinking the pressure is off them.



Let's compare these people to what they could be achieving. My colleague at the office automation company, while he was living comfortably, could have been achieving all of his family goals. Meeting his wife at a company social, I knew that her real dream was to take the family to Disneyland. For her, it was just a dream. But knowing how our company's

commission structure ramped up the more you exceeded target, it would not have taken too much for him to earn that amount needed to take the family of 4 to Florida. The top salesperson in the company was already making enough in commission that if he emulated her, he could take his family on the trip. She was no better a salesperson than he was, she just did not ease up after each sale. If he broke that habit, within a year I am certain he could have been delighting his family and taking them off on their dream vacation.

An acquaintance I knew that did seem to ease off after every good month followed each good month with an average one. She could not understand why some of her colleagues won annual trips away for hitting the yearly target, not just the monthly targets. By simply not allowing herself a

comfortable two weeks every couple of months, she would be having annual holidays paid by the company.

So, while the temptation is great to bask in the glory of your success and enjoy the moment of the deal being closed, or having a really good month and earning lots of commission, would it not make you so much more money if you just kept your foot on the gas and kept pushing yourself as hard?

Use that energy that you have, and all those endorphins that are flowing through your body, and make even more calls, or see even more clients. If you do keep pushing, rather than follow success with mediocrity, you can keep up at that same lofty height. Your success will be followed by even more success.



How to keep focused on selling

So how do you keep your foot on the gas? How do you stay focused straight after closing a deal? Here are some things that I have found useful.

1. Never change your routine. This takes discipline, but the more you practice, the easier things get. As tempting as that drive home along the coast in the sun is, stick to the quickest way back to the office. That will keep you productive longer.

2. Plan properly. Depending on the nature of your industry, and whether you are doing face to face sales or doing business by phone, find ways that do not allow you to ease off. One person on one of our courses gave an example that when he did have to go and meet people face to face to sign contracts, he tried to plan a few meetings on the same day. That way, regardless of how one went, he had to plan to get straight over to the next person. He had no time to relax between meetings.

Another of the staff at the office automation company tried to arrange deliveries straight after signings meetings, so regardless of how the first meeting went, he was going straight to another client to deliver either the physical product or training on how to use the machine.

3. Keep incentives in sight. Is your goal to buy a new car? Go on holiday? Move into a bigger house? Whatever your goal, is it always ahead of you? Have a picture of the car somewhere you can always see it. Or a picture of the place you want to go to. Or whatever it is, have some way that as soon as you could be distracted, you are brought back on track by a reminder.

4. Push your colleagues. There is nothing like a friendly rivalry to see multiple parties benefit. If you know your colleagues, or subordinates have a habit of taking their foot off the gas, do not let them get away with it. Call them out, make a bet about something, but push them. If you need to push yourself, close the deal, and then needle your colleagues, telling them how you are about to get even more. That will keep you as focused as it keeps them.

If you are in management, and want to prevent your staff taking their foot off the gas, that will require different skills, and is done best the better you know your staff. Do you know what drives them, what buttons to push? Are there things that you can do to manage people individually that keeps pushing them?

Maybe money is not the motivator with a particular person, but they want to finish top of the board. If that person closes a sale, let them know what colleagues have done that morning too. They might have brought in even more. The clue here is: get to know your salesperson and what personal motivators you can use.

10. Not Building in the Quiet Times

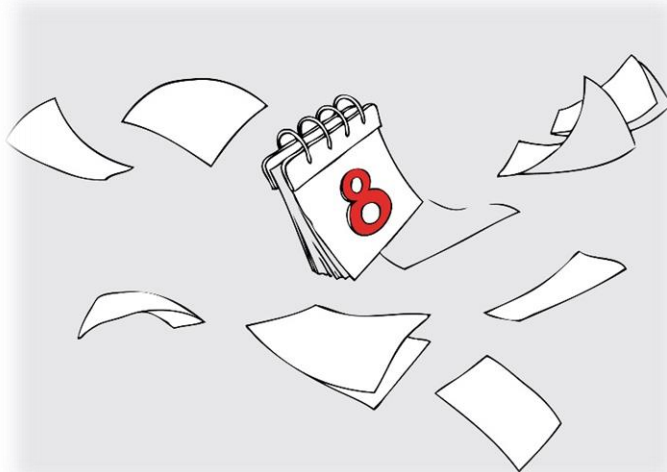
How to use quiet periods in sales productively

Almost every industry has peaks and troughs when it comes to business. I have yet to see a single company that expects to make the same money every month of the year. Simple examples of this are many companies in the retail industry that expect major peaks over holiday periods like Christmas. In the film industry, most big releases occur in the school holiday periods, with quieter periods in between. In construction, the rainy season tends to be quieter than the warmer, dryer seasons, and in tourism, you obviously expect to see more tourists in the warmer months, unless you are gearing specifically for winter weather, like skiing.

So, for most companies, a couple of questions arise. Firstly, do you know what your busy periods are/should be? This might seem obvious, but some industries are not as clear as others. In other industries, while there are still peaks and troughs, they are not significant enough that you can reduce staff during the troughs, so you do still need a full staff complement.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, what do you do in the quiet times? Let us assume that as a company owner, or sales manager/director, you do know your industry well enough, and that you do know when your quiet times are. Or perhaps you are in sales yourself, if you know your industry, you should know when things quieten down, and when things pick up. What do you then do about it?

From the company's perspective, you can encourage people to take leave over quiet times. I have worked at many companies, but not in retail. What this has usually meant is that many of the companies closed completely between Christmas and New Year, or went down to skeleton staff. In Johannesburg in South Africa, it seems almost half the city migrates down to the coast over Christmas and New Year to enjoy a nice summer time holiday. Most staff with families at the company were given leave, and the single people stayed on as the skeleton staff.



But if you are going in and working, do you just laze around? If you are in sales, you will obviously be trying to close what sales are possible, and if you are smart, you are planning ahead and building for when things do pick up again. I have worked in a company that struggled to get people to make decisions over December, as people are still at work but in a holiday mood. We spent the month of December building and arranging times for exact calls, or visits,

once the people were functioning again in January. So the January peak was added to by the planning and meetings arranged in the quiet December weeks. You could get January off to a bang as you had planned ahead, rather than having to start fresh in January, and see a gradual pick up.

So, if you are in an industry that does see some seasonal adjustment, and want to make sure that your peaks are as high as Everest, take advantage of the quieter times and start to build ahead. Be as proactive as you can be in those times, and the rewards will be just around the corner. Fail to do so, and your possible Everest can become just a hill in the Cotswolds.

11. Conclusions

You don't have to be the best salesperson out there in order to close more deals. If you try to remember the tips I have shared with you in this e-book before you make your next sales call, I can guarantee your efforts will pay off.

When talking to a potential client, always make sure to ask enough questions. Find out what their needs are and what problems they are facing – this way, you will be able to offer a more focused solution and have a much greater chance of winning that deal.

It is equally important to familiarise yourself with the features and benefits of the product you are hoping to sell, as well as being aware of your competitors and the products *they* are offering. Find out their pricing, how they work and how you could differentiate yourself from them. Understand their weaknesses and take advantage of this knowledge.

You also need to be aware of the effects of giving discount and how to maximise your profit by trying to upsell to every client. Always offer a chance to upgrade or buy an extra service before closing a deal, otherwise you run the risk of losing profit.

Think about how much time you spend on paperwork or other administrative tasks each day and come up with ways to keep this to a minimum. Similarly, learn how to use quiet periods productively and always try to build ahead.

Sales is a skill and like everything else, it *can* be learned. With some training and practice you can improve your skills considerably and, if you pay attention to some of the most common sales mistakes I have covered in the previous ten chapters, you will see an increase in your sales in no time.