

Slow Down Your Sales Process

... If you want to Sell Faster!

Salespeople are under tremendous pressure these days to sell more and sell faster. Many sales managers harp on salespeople to close more deals, and push the customer along faster and faster.

But what matters isn't what we are doing in our sales process. It's what the customer is doing in their buying process.

Ironically, that means the key to speeding up the sales process is to actually slow down each sales conversation. Salespeople have to take time to get in sync with the customer's buying process early on, to adopt the perspective that their job is not to push for the sale, but to help customers buy.

Working closely with customers through each step of their buying process gives salespeople a clear advantage over their competitors. So instead of urging salespeople to move faster, managers should be helping them focus on what customers need to learn and do at each step of buying.

Here are 10 tips to help salespeople and managers effectively guide customers through each step of the buying process:

Talking too soon about your solution gives your competitors an edge... Plus you leave the picture just as the customer starts comparison shopping.

- 1) **Avoid talking too soon about your solution.** That just gives your competitors an edge because the customer is likely in the middle of their buying process. Essentially, you reach the end of your sales process just as the customer arrives at the point when they start comparison shopping. Instead, early in the sales process get your customers to do the talking—about their needs, problems, and opportunities. That knowledge will help shape a solution

better fitted to their needs and create a greater urgency for them to take action.



Don't dance only with the one who brung ya. Cultivate multiple sources of information.

- 2) **Don't just dance with the one who brung ya!** Most major purchasing decisions these days are made by a team of people. You can hit a lot of speed bumps if all your knowledge comes from only one customer contact. Identify all the decision makers on the buying team. Ask your contact, "What other key people should I talk with to gather more information about these issues and concerns?" Get to a second and third decision maker as quickly as you can in the process.
- 3) **Always seek to identify a second customer need.** Why? The first need a customer mentions is likely something they think they understand (even if they don't). By getting them to think about additional needs, you're nudging them out of their comfort zone. By uncovering a second need the customer will likely see you as a true consultant. Also, the first need may have been identified by your competitor (in their terms and biased towards their vision of a solution). By identifying a second need, you have a chance to re-define the customer's solution requirements in your favor.
- 4) **Go down the corporate ladder before going up.** Have you been taught to get to executive-level decisions makers as quickly as you can? That's not bad advice... unless you go there with nothing interesting or important to say about the customer's business! Going down the organizational chart to talk to users about their challenges and needs can give you insights that will help you deliver a more compelling message to executives.
- 5) **If you are brought into the customer's buying cycle late in the game, try to diagnose a need that your competitors have missed.** Coming into a sales opportunity late means you have a lot of catching up to do. All of the customer's thinking will have been shaped by the competitors who got there before you. Engage the customer in a discussion of their needs, focusing on the impact and especially ripple effects of the problems. If you can uncover a need that the others missed, that will help you go from laggard to leader in the customer's eyes.



Don't pitch a differentiator if you can't link it directly to a customer need.

- 6) **Don't "pitch" differentiators that have no connection to customer needs.** Pick your company's top five differentiators, and mention typical customer problems those differentiators solve when you talk to a prospect. See where you get a strong reaction. For a differentiator to become a competitive advantage it must be connected to an explicit customer problem.
- 7) **Keep close contact with the customer, especially when they are in a comparison mode (evaluating solutions from multiple vendors).** If you are asked to deliver a proposal or presentation, the odds are high that the customer is asking other vendors as well. Talk to your sponsor ahead of time to see if anything has changed. Immediately after a presentation, schedule another appointment with your sponsor so you don't get shut out of the picture just when your competitors are making an appearance.
- 8) **Help your customer define realistic expectations.** Ask them: "Six months from today how will you know this decision was a success?"
- 9) **Convert intangible customer criteria into tangible criteria.** You cannot make a case that some feature or capability of your solution is tied to a customer need if you don't know how the customer defines that need. Ask your customers to describe what they will see or notice if a particular nebulous criteria is met. For example, how will they evaluate whether something is "on time" or "easy to use"? Use their answers to develop more tangible criteria (such as "on time" means within one-hour window, or on the promised delivery date).
- 10) **Have your sales managers make a list of customer actions that typically occur during the buying process.** Get managers to ask salespeople about customer actions that are being taken, before asking about sales rep actions. Measure the success of a sales call based on what actions the customer takes, not by what your salesperson did during the meeting. When planning a sales call with a salesperson, ask "what specific action do we want the prospect to take after this meeting, and by when?"

It's becoming harder and harder to differentiate yourself based on **what** you sell because products and services are becoming increasingly alike. Today's most successful salespeople and organizations know they need to stand out based on **how** they sell.

Salespeople who slow down each sales conversation end up spending more time with each prospect. Now, when relationships are so important to sales success, having a higher quantity and quality of time with each customer is going to result in higher sales.



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