

10 Tips For Salespeople Tired Of Losing Sales

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There are a lot of things about selling—and especially about losing a sale—that can seem mysterious. How you can deliver a well-received sales presentation only to learn a few weeks later you lost the sale to a competitor; why an almost-sure sale dries up at the last minute, because the customer decided to do nothing; why a formerly enthusiastic buyer goes silent, and doesn't return your phone calls, just as you think you're about to close the deal...the list could go on.

If you find yourself losing more sales than you can afford, here are some tips to get you back on track:

1. Be the first in the door

Studies have shown that customers, managers and executives will often buy from the first person who helps them understand their needs. Step up your prospecting. Think high *persistence*, not high pressure.

2. Listen before talking

Salespeople have been taught how to get through the steps of their sale quickly and sales managers often encourage them to close a deal faster. What salespeople *haven't* been taught is how to slow down and get the customer to do more of the talking.

3. Identify more customer needs

The first need a customer mentions may be at the forefront of their minds, or it may be something one of your competitors planted in their brains. When the customer is talking, listen for additional needs. Probe some more. The more needs a customer recognizes, the greater urgency they will feel for taking action.

4. Go down the chain 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 their 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 sales message to executives.

5. Don't just dance with the one who brung ya!

Most major purchasing decisions 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 problems and needs?" Get to a second decision maker as quickly as you can in the process.

6. Link your differentiators to priority needs

For a differentiator to become a competitive advantage it must be connected to a customer problem. The customer will see you as the best choice only if the things that make your solution different from your competitor's are directly connected to what they see as their most important needs.

7. Figure out what step of buying the customer is in

When a prospect calls, many salespeople fail to ask a vital question: "What steps have you taken thus far in your decision-making process?" You need to learn whether the prospect has just starting thinking about this idea, perhaps wondering if they have a need to do something, or if they have already been meeting with some of your competitors and are now shopping around for a good price.

8. Measure success based on customer actions

You may think a sales call went great, but what did the customer do *afterwards*? Did you have them commit to take a specific action by a certain date? If not, why not? Every call should get the customer to move forward another step, or at least another inch, through their buying process.

9. Schedule a follow-up

Customers often start to have second thoughts after they've heard all the presentations or read all the proposals submitted to them. This is *not* the time to back off. Stay in touch so you can address any concerns the customer raises about what you're offering.

10. Slow down

Good salespeople are enthusiastic and knowledgeable—it's very hard to fight the urge to rush in and fix everything with your good advice! But you'll get farther with the customer, and faster, if

you fight the urge to sell on your timeline. Think instead about helping the customer through their buying process.

Now more than ever, sales leaders will be those who differentiate themselves not by what they sell, but by *how* they sell...and how they treat customers after the sale.

About Kevin Davis

Kevin Davis, president of TopLine Leadership, is the author of *Slow Down, Sell Faster! Understand Your Customer's Buying Process and Maximize Your Sales* (Amacom Books). His company provides custom workshops based on the "Slow Down, Sell Faster!" sales model, as well as a 2-day Sales Management Leadership workshop for sales managers. Contact Kevin through his website at www.toplineleadership.com.