

LET'S TALK SELLING

Selling In Challenging Times

Dear Friends,

We hope you are well and that the first quarter proved to be manageable. It would be disingenuous not to say that these are indeed challenging times...for almost everyone.

Many of our clients and partners have been traveling on a difficult road thus far in 2008. Buyers are cautious, managers are reluctant to make major decisions and most people are... simply waiting. A reluctant environment pervades all that we do, with an underlying understanding that most people are just not willing to pull the trigger. For now.

Whether it is a temporary slippery slope, a slowdown, a mild recession—or worse, we still need to be out there beating the bushes. Many of us expect things to turn around soon, and we need to be primed when our customers are ready.

With that in mind, this quarter's newsletter is entitled *Selling in Challenging Times*.

We would love to hear from you. Hang in there. And of course, suggestions you could offer regarding this newsletter are always welcomed.

Yes, things have slowed down. That is not a sparkling revelation. In some business and industries they have slowed to a quiet standstill. That said, even if your top five customers are purchasing at even close to 80—90% of what they bought last year, they are still buying. And somebody is getting their business.

So we might as well be the ones to win the business in play. It is out there and it's a bit tougher to get it. But someone will win it—and there is no reason why it should not be you.

The question, of course, is how. With that in mind, we would like to suggest some actions that you can take and behaviors which you can demonstrate that will give you that all important edge in these challenging times.

Be Visible

Too many salespeople disappear or lay low during tough times. They know their customers are reluctant to see them and that any news is likely to be bad news. Consequently, they spend more time in the office or "safely" communicate via voice mail or email—it's easier that way.

As you likely know by now, we are believers in communicating through various media (see article on page 3), but nothing, nothing, compares to face-to-face meetings. We need feet on the street in the marketplace, to put on our game face, get the customer talking, learn what we can, and figure out innovative ways to help.

There is just no way can we truly maximize our understanding of our clients' needs if we are not face-to-face — able to read their emotions and understand the world they are living in today.

The simple and uncomfortable truth remains—our customers don't think about us as much as we think about them. So we need to be out there. All the time.

Appear Interested, but not Desperate...

Nobody wants to do business with people who seem desperate. By all means, express interest. Let the customer know that you wish to do business and pursue opportunities, but never give the impression that you or your company may be in trouble.

People like to do business with successful people. Never give the impression you are not. That means walking that fine line between showing interest and becoming a nuisance. And letting your customer know that how you feel about that is perfectly reasonable.

Be Gracious, Even When the News is Bad

Customers do not like to deliver bad news, particularly if they like you. And we all know how hard it is to learn that we didn't win a piece of business, lost business we had, we were underbid, or replaced by someone else. Regardless of how you feel, if you receive disappointing news, be sure to thank the customer for the opportunity and the candor they displayed. Acknowledge their time. Guilt trips, negative responses and whining all work against you—permanently. Think long-term. They will remember your reaction, so be sure to make it a classy one.

Surprise the Customer

If things are slow and there is not much to discuss, call or email your customer with something they are not expecting. It could be an article, white paper or research piece that you think might interest them—or simply an idea, suggestion, recommendation or perspective. But a brief email or voicemail from you gives them "something for nothing" and will remind them that you are out there and serve to shed some favorable light in your direction.

(continued...)

Selling in Challenging Times

Think Long-Term

Remember, things will always eventually turn around. This will not last forever. Hopefully, it will be sooner rather than later—but regardless of when things pick up, we need to continue to think long-term. Ask more strategic questions about where the company is going and what they anticipate down the road.

Broaden your base of contacts, determine key issues and continue to have conversations with your customers about their vision, strategies and long-term goals. Plant seeds for the future. Arm yourself with information so that you will be well prepared when things eventually improve.



Use Your Resources

If you are part of an organization, tap into available expertise. This is the all-time worst time to be a “rugged individualist.” Call meetings with your colleagues to identify opportunities and share ideas and insights. Benefit from their expertise.

Teamwork is all about helping each other and this is a great time to ask for help. You will be amazed at the quality of ideas that you will hear from people who know little about sales and marketing—and, for once, you actually may have the time to invest to learn from the subject matter experts in your organization.

Say “No” When You Have To

Face it, we never like to turn down customer requests, but sometimes it becomes necessary that we do so. Just because business is slow does not mean that we must cave in on price, terms or constraints. But how we say “no” is what really matters in the moment—and the long-term.

Take responsibility for the decision. It is not the “guys up at headquarters...”—it’s you. Blaming others never works. Let them know you heard them, acknowledge what has been requested, tell them what you can do, and then—in no uncertain terms—tell them what you can’t do. Be clear and specific; let them know why, and in the long run, you will earn their respect.

Use your Creativity

The status quo won’t work here. Einstein said: “The same thinking that solved yesterday’s problems can’t possibly be used to solve tomorrow’s problems.” Push the envelope, look for new ways to do things and offer your customer ideas—even if there is no material short-term benefit for you. Explore alternatives such as how we provide service, how we deliver product, how it is packaged, warehoused, distributed or communicated.

Every time you face a challenge, ask yourself how you can approach it differently or more effectively and creatively and infuse innovation when the opportunity presents itself. It can be risky, but as you know, with risk... comes reward.

Be Upbeat

We don’t want a bunch of giggling idiots representing us—and we always want to be real. But that does not mean we don’t bring positive energy to every client interaction, whether face to face, on the telephone or even in written correspondence.

Be the person who brightens up the room when entering it, not the person who does so when leaving it. Think about someone that you know who is always moaning, rarely smiles and has a perennial cloud over his or her head. Is he or she someone that you like to go to for help? Of course not. We are much more likely to seek out assistance and advice from people who are upbeat and positive. This is the person you want your customer to see whenever you interact.

A Final Word

It is impossible to minimize the challenges and frustrations that we are facing today in the marketplace. It is tough out there. That said, we are the face of the company we represent, and we need to do whatever we can to creatively encourage customers to do business with us. There are opportunities out there and someone is going to win them. It might as well be you.

Staying Visible

We said it in the main article—your customers don't think about you as much as you think about them. So we want to be visible. And of course, we can only see them so often.

Voice mail can be effective if it is short, crisp, customer-oriented and interesting. Think of a 30 second voice mail as if it was a 30 second radio commercial. Capture attention quickly (refer to something of interest to them), relate what you are able to offer to what they want (a specific benefit statement) and do it in a way that captures their attention (enthusiasm and confidence).

You can make a good case for leaving your key customers an unexpected voice mail once a month. It can be a quick update—reference something going on in the business, or you can reach out with an idea or two or suggest something that you would like to discuss with them when an opportunity arises. Do not forget the power of the client hearing your enthusiastic voice offering them something they didn't expect.

Of course email is much more prevalent today—and, to some, less intrusive. Further to that, we are observing more and more that some of your customers are more willing to take the time to respond to email rather than voice mail.

Your message subject line is critical. Intrigue them with it so they will open the email. “An idea from Joe Hartan” or “Some news that may be of interest” or “Something I read I want to share with you...” You will figure that out. But let them know it is for them. “Hello from Harry Binder” isn't bad if they like Harry, but you can do better.

The email should follow the same guidelines as a voice mail—short, crisp and customer focused. Start with the need, tell them what you have to say and let them know why it may be in their interest. Remember, it is always about them.

Email affords you the element of surprise. Attach an article that you know they will appreciate or a paper that will help them do something better. Offer an idea or suggestion based on a previous conversation, or just let them know you were thinking about them and look forward to doing more business when additional opportunities present themselves.

Remember to always want to walk a fine line between being visible and demonstrating interest...and being a nuisance. Trust your instincts—you will be right more than you will be wrong. If you are not sure, ask the customer how things are progressing—they will let you know whether you are maintaining the right balance of visibility.

The bottom line remains the same—continue to consistently and creatively differentiate yourself. We are all selling commodities. The key is to let them know you are different. As David Maister famously said, “Clients don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

Be the one who cares, the one who is visible... and results will follow.

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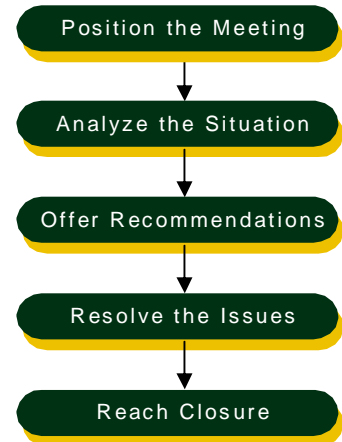
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**We infuse
consultative selling
with creative
problem-solving
skills,
elevating your
relationships from
vendor to trusted**

Consultative Selling Skills

At the conclusion of this two-day course, participants will be able to:

- Understand the connections and similarities between problem-solving and selling in order to transform the sales call into a problem solving opportunity.
- Determine both the obvious and not so obvious needs of their clients.
- Use state-of-the-art skills to determine needs, including: questioning, listening, interpreting understanding non-verbals and paraphrasing.
- Provide recommendations with benefits linked to specific client needs.
- Present ideas in addition to products and services as answers to client needs.
- Resolve objections using a problem solving mentality.
- Apply facilitation techniques in selling situations.
- Plan and follow-up their sales calls in a professional manner.



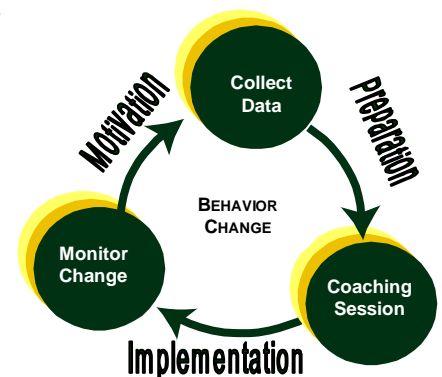
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Schedule for balance of 2008:
• June 5-6 • September 11-12
• December 4-5

Coaching for Improved Sales Performance

At the conclusion of this two-day course, participants will be able to:

- Observe their salespeople in selling situations with an understanding of what to look for and how to capture key points.
- Give feedback in a balanced, helpful, and non-threatening way.
- Offer a salesperson ideas as to how to be more effective in the selling role.
- Manage the resistance salespeople demonstrate when a manager suggests changing or modifying their sales approach.
- Gain commitment by getting the salesperson to develop an action plan.
- Apply the process in other situations to help people grow in their jobs.



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Schedule for balance of 2008:
• September 25-26 • November 6-7