



TRADE SECRETS PART 2

Top tips and insights for making your mark in sales. **BY COLLEEN FRANCIS**

ATTITUDE FIXERS No. 4, 5, 6

Entrepreneurs and executives alike increasingly want to know how they can sell more, in less time, at a greater profit. With that in mind, what is the single best thing you can do to immediately improve revenues, and raise your bottom line? Focus the bulk of your energy on your greatest revenue generator: sales!

Of course, when it comes to multiplying sales revenues, there are no magic bullets. After all, if increasing sales were that easy, everyone would do it – including your competition. But as we began discussing in July's issue, there are nine quick fixes that can do wonders to help you break loose from all those good old sales techniques that just don't work anymore, set yourself apart from the pack, and start you on the

road to consistently performing at the top 20% of the industry.

>> QUICK FIX #4: TURN A SELF CENTRED PRESENTATION INTO A TWO-WAY DIALOGUE

Over 20 years ago, Neil Rackham concluded a 12-year study analyzing some 35,000 sales calls conducted by 22 companies in 23 countries. The objective of the study was to determine the precise behaviors of successful sales people.

What did he find? That mediocre sales people make statements. The best ask questions.

During sales meetings, your golden rule should be to talk no more than 20% of the time. This means listening for at least 80% of the conversation.

The next time you make a sales call, try one of the following simple exercises:

>> Turn all your feature and benefit statements into questions. For example, instead of just telling the prospect that your product is web-based, try something like: 'I understand that a web-based application is important to many companies. Is that the case with you?' By asking questions rather than making statements, you will ensure that your next sales meeting is a two-way dialogue rather than a one-sided – or even self-centered – presentation.

>> Create a list in advance of all the questions you would like to ask. Then, carry that list into the meeting with you, and commit yourself to asking all the questions before you leave. In addition to improving your sales skills, having a prepared list of questions will also demonstrate to the client that you are diligent and well prepared for the meeting.

>> Practice using the word 'why'. Why is that important to you? Why do you need a 10% discount? Why do you want free shipping? Why do you need the quote tomorrow? Asking 'why' can help you get to the true meaning behind what the customer is asking for.

>> Plus, aim to ask three questions every time the customer makes a statement. These could be expanding questions such as, 'Please tell me more about that.', clarifying questions like 'why' or 'what do you mean,' or closed questions such as, 'Is that feature mandatory to your requirements?'.



>> QUICK FIX #5: START A CONVERSATION, NOT A SALES PITCH

Too often, sales professionals set their primary objective as: 'I am trying to sell you something.' I know this may sound backwards, but adopting that mindset is one of the worst – and most common – mistakes you can make.

Instead, before every sales call, replace that objective with: 'I want to start a conversation.' This will help you instantly overcome two very important call obstacles.

First, it will relax you, and take the pressure off your client, freeing them to stop looking at you as an adversary and start viewing you as a trusted advisor.

Second, adopting a conversational frame of mind will encourage you to ask more questions, and bring you closer to that 80% listening 'golden rule.'

>> QUICK FIX #6: THE PROSPECT IS ALWAYS RIGHT

Nobody likes to be told that they're wrong – especially someone you want to buy your product or service.

Take it from me, the prospect won't change their minds simply because you want them to. They will only buy from you for their own reasons – not yours.

To discover what their reasons are, you need to support and

acknowledge their objection, rather than becoming defensive. So the next time a prospective client tells you that 'we already use ABC to do that', instead of telling them why ABC is a bad choice, just respond by saying: 'That's OK, many of our clients use (that product). The reason they want to talk to us is to ensure that they're always (insert a value statement). When was the last time you reviewed your system?'

After the question's been asked...

Finally, while we're on the subject of questions and conversations...

have we forgotten the most important part of any conversation – listening to the other person? ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Colleen Francis is a respected speaker and trainer, working internationally with companies and individuals. Driven by, and singularly focused on, sales success, Colleen's innovative sales methodologies are helping experienced and new sales professionals achieve maximum results. In 2001, after 15 years of direct selling and sales management within the technology and financial sectors, Colleen founded Engage Selling Solutions, a firm dedicated to sales success.

Most people say they are excellent listeners. But when is the last time you actually felt truly listened to? To hone your all-important listening skills, try one of the following techniques during your next sales call or meeting:

>> **Take notes.** This will show your prospect that you're paying attention, while also ensuring that you don't forget any important details.

>> **Pretend you're Columbo (without the scruffy trench coat!).** Remember how Detective Columbo would always ask that one last, revealing question before leaving the room? Take a lesson from his successful track record, and ask clarifying questions such as, 'What do you mean by that?' or, 'How is that working?' You'll gain a deeper understanding of your prospect's needs, and instantly enhance your credibility.

>> **Last but definitely not least, don't interrupt.** Resist your urge to complete your prospect's sentences, and never, ever – ever! – cut them off mid-sentence. In other words, when it's their turn to talk, keep your mouth shut!

