



TRADE SECRETS PART 3

SECRETS

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

ATTITUDE FIXERS No. 7, 8, 9

A client asked me recently whether sales results can be improved – and sales targets met – even in what some call a “soft economy.” The answer is an unqualified yes. But first, we have to stop blaming the economy.

Sure, the economy plays a role in sales success. But it's only one element, and definitely not the most important one at that. At its most fundamental level, sales performance is about one thing and one thing only: performance. Today's top sales performers understand that fact, just as they understand that their performance is a direct result of how they demonstrate attitude, integrity and caring towards their customers, each and every day.

Yes, some clients have a poor perception of sales people. But that, too, can be changed. Don't believe me? Then read on – and please enjoy the last of our three-part series on how you can re-align your sales tactics, to fuel your success in any economy.

>> QUICK FIX #7: HONESTY SELLS

Successful sales people come from a wide variety of backgrounds, sales styles and techniques. But almost without exception, there's one thing they all share: successful sales professionals understand that honest communication is the secret to increasing sales effectiveness.

These sales people focus their efforts on creating a positive customer experience, based on openness and trust. As a result, 98% of their customers never even think of looking elsewhere when they need to reorder.

As the old saying goes, there are two kinds of lies: those of commission, and those of omission. If you want to establish a reputation for honesty, never lie to your prospects or clients either by what you say, or what you choose NOT to say. And no matter how tempting it may be, never rationalize a lie by telling yourself that it's "no big deal" or that it "won't affect the outcome of the deal."

Take my word for it – it will! Sooner or later, the customer will realize that they've "been sold," and once they do, they'll turn the tables and start playing games with you. Once that happens, your relationship will become based on distrust, and re-establishing trust can be a nearly impossible task.

As Steven Gaffney (www.justbe-honest.com) and I discuss in our upcoming book on Honesty In Sales, the easiest way to have a more honest and open working relationship with your customers is to first learn how to separate the facts, from what you simply imagine or assume to be true. For example, say a prospect hasn't returned your phone call in two weeks (FACT). You imagine it's because they've decided to buy a competitor's product instead of your own (ASSUMPTION). But there could be an almost endless number of equally plausible reasons why they haven't returned your call, including:

- >> **They bought from someone else;**
- >> **They've been too busy;**
- >> **The contract or funding was cancelled;**
- >> **They're sick or on vacation;**
- >> **They haven't made a decision yet; or**
- >> **They're ignoring you.**

These are just the first six possibilities that came to mind. Spend a few minutes, and you could easily come up with a dozen more. The point is, we sales people are particularly vulnerable to the mistake of making decisions and taking action based on what we assume, rather than what we really know. Sometimes we're right. But all too often, our assumptions are wrong, and the consequences of acting on an incorrect assumption can be severe.

So how can you avoid making this mistake? By changing your mindset to allow for the possibility that you may be wrong. Try entering your next sales call by saying to yourself: "you know, I might be right that Colleen is not interested in my product, or I might be wrong. Either way, I'm going to find out." Simply allowing yourself to admit that your assumptions might be wrong will ensure that you get to the truth before you make a firm decision, or take action. Has a customer ever been less than open with you? If so, step back and look at your own behavior. If you've ever lied to them, then your communication style may be to blame for their dishonesty.

>> **QUICK FIX #8: YOUR NET IS WORTH YOUR NETWORK**

There are two types of people in this world: Life Givers, and Life Suckers.

Life Suckers complain constantly about their problems, yet never seem to want to do anything concrete to solve them. They're exhausting to be around, can ruin even the most beautiful day, and will literally "suck the life" out of you if you give them half a chance.

Life Givers, on the other hand, understand the power of reciprocity, and use it to their advantage. Life Givers know that what goes around, comes around. They're always in the top 10% of all sales people, because they understand the impor-



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tance of building, maintaining – and especially sharing – their network.

Don't hoard your contacts. Open your proverbial Rolodex, and start making introductions. Be the first at an event or party to provide a contact to someone you've just met, rather than waiting for them to give you something first. Once you start sharing your contacts and making connections with and for others, your clients and contacts will soon start returning the favor, and you'll find your network will grow – and your business soar – faster than you ever thought possible.

Speaking of networking, here are a few ideas to help you connect with those who can help your business succeed:

Go to the same events over and over again, to become familiar with – and to – the other attendees. After all, no matter how efficiently you can “work a room,” you're not going to meet all the important people at an association event the first time out.

Offer to help first. Instead of going into a conversation to see

what they can do for you, ask: “If I could do one thing that would help your business, what would it be?”

Go to every event with a clear goal. Plan to meet five people, collect five business cards, and make five introductions. Then, when you get back to the office, send a hand-written thank-you card to everyone you've met.

**>> QUICK FIX #9:
EMPATHY,
COMPASSION –
AND SALES**

Finally, remember that the very best sales people always display a balance of focus, and empathy.

Successful sales people are goal-oriented individuals who want to win business. But they are also people who genuinely care for their customers, and want to help them above and beyond closing the sale.

To demonstrate that you care about your customers, ask questions, take notes and lean in to show that you're engaged in their answers. Be innovative in finding

ways to help them with problems, even in situations that aren't related to you and your business. Be sincere, because no matter how good an actor you are, faking it just won't work. And take a genuine interest in your customers. Because when you take an interest in people, they remember you – and when people remember you, it's good for business.

THE BOTTOM LINE

More than ever before, buyers today are looking for trusted partners, with whom they can build long-term relationships. They want to know that you're being honest, that you put their needs first, and that you really do want to help them.

The bottom line is, customers look at your actions, not your words, to see whether or not they can really trust you. So in every interaction with your customers, ask yourself: is what I'm doing right now enhancing trust, or eroding it?

In other words, ask yourself: if I were them, would I buy from me? ■

**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.