



Does Your Sales Team Have Performance Issues?

The most important decision we make as salespeople, managers, and leaders is how to connect with our customers. Are we effectively engaging with our clients? How your sales team performs in front of customers is crucial, since they (usually) only get one chance. Successful salespeople know the importance of preparing and strategizing before meeting with customers and prospects. Bypassing the warm-up and instead jumping right into the sales pitch can be a costly mistake for the inexperienced salesperson (e.g., “Here’s what our product can do, and here’s why it’s great. How many should I order?”).

Being customer-centric is one of the critical factors that has helped many organizations weather economic storms and endure even after decades in business. And being truly customer-centric, as opposed to merely paying lip service, will be the same critical component that will help companies meet their growth plans this year and the years to come. Being customer-centric is not an item on a to-do list you can check off. We can’t say we’ve done it and we’re ready to move on to something else. Being the very best at client services will result in long-term business relationships. That comes from research and preparation and, out of that, come the right questions to ask, as well as the ability to listen to and truly hear the responses. (While this sounds logical, for many salespeople, listening to the customer has become both an overlooked and underrated skill.)

Each face-to-face interaction with potential clients should be managed to move an opportunity forward. Not knowing what to ask the customer is one reason why customers stop agreeing to schedule time, and opportunities are ultimately lost. An inability to engage in—and, indeed, initiate—customer conversations is a tell-tale sign of lack of commitment and preparation. It demonstrates a fundamental disregard for putting the customer at the core. Recognizing and owning up to ineffective attempts to engage with customers as being the

reason the opportunity didn't advance, instead of providing timeworn excuses (poor economic conditions, indecisive buyers, crossed signals, etc.), is a far more productive way to improve the next attempt. The ability to assess one's weaknesses in addition to one's own strengths in an objective, clearheaded way is in itself a strength that can result in improved performance moving forward—and is one you should be cultivating among your teams and yourself.

All sales organizations are relentlessly searching for ways to remove administrative and other nonproductive activities from their salespeople to free more customer time. Sales professionals must not only make the time to engage with their clients throughout the sales life cycle, but they must also have compelling business reasons to meet. The focused dialogues with the customer let them jointly evaluate the impact of their solutions on the customer's business goals and objectives, as well as check customer satisfaction and detect signs of possible customer defection. These conversations then lead to new opportunities to cross-sell/upsell, introduce new products, or penetrate adjacent buying centers. Such conversations can only occur when time has been invested to research before meeting with the client to be in the best possible position to understand the needs and challenges that the solution they ultimately propose will address and, ideally, solve for.

It's not about the quantity of conversations with the customer or prospect. It's about the quality of those conversations and how much preparation has been put in beforehand in order to engage with the customer in an informed, substantive way at every interaction. Don't squander what may be the one opportunity in front of the only audience that matters - your customer. Performance matters!

Dan Nelson | dan@suncoast-partners.com | 941.320.5277