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MANAGEMENT INSIGHTS

WHATS INSIDE

How to Maximize the Value of Sales Meetings, Part 2

The January/February 2017 Sales Management Insights Report featured four before-the-meeting sales techniques to share with your team members to help them guide more of their client presentations to a successful conclusion.

Part 2 focuses on techniques they can apply during client meetings.

1. **Agenda Agreement –** Although the client may respond positively to the agenda the AE emailed him or her as the fourth before-the-meeting technique, the AE should proceed cautiously.

   First, the client may have indicated that there are other topics he or she wants to discuss. The AE should add these to the agenda. Second, start the meeting with a quick review of the agenda to be sure the client's thinking or what he or she considers the most important topics to discuss haven't changed.

2. **A Pause for the Cause –** The AE should also ask the client during the meeting if he or she clearly understands what the AE has said about the topic. A client that doesn't say a word may fully understand and agrees with the point being made or his or her silence may indicate the connection has been lost.

3. **Be in Charge –** Of course, an AE can't help a client solve a problem or relieve a pain point without his or her input. That being said, the AE doesn't want to be led, but do the leading. As the AE offers solutions and guidance, he or she should emphasize the value of what he or she is offering.

4. **Always Be Assessing –** The AE should look for signals and listen to client statements that help to indicate what the next step should be. In some cases, another meeting is better than going for the close, while some signals are clear red flags that there is no deal possible.

5. **Control What Comes Next –** The discussion and the AE's constant assessment of it will indicate whether there is a future with the prospect/client. An objection or, conversely, in-depth interest is an opening to schedule another meeting. Either way, the AE should try to obtain an assurance that the client wants to continue building a relationship, or end it now.

Look for part 3 in the May/June 2017 Sales Management Insights Report with after-the-meeting sales techniques.

The Three Sales Skills That Lead to More Winning Deals

Did you know that the vast majority of companies do not train their salespeople a standard set of skills nor the level of proficiency they should attain in each of those skills? If an honest assessment of your sales organization's training program includes it in this majority, then you can correct the situation with a focus on training your salespeople three primary skills.

In its Beyond the Classroom: Trends in B2B Sales Training report, Corporate Visions calls them the three Ps of competency, or pipeline, proposal and profits.

1. **Pipeline Skills to Create Value –** The first challenge for many salespeople is that the prospect or client would rather maintain the status quo, regardless of how painful it is, instead of facing the pain associated with change.

   The salesperson's task is to help the prospect or client to understand why a change is necessary and why it will be less painful than he or she might think. In addition, the AE must convince him or her that the salesperson is best able to guide him or her through that change.

2. **Proposal Skills to Elevate Value –** In most cases, a sales is closed at an executive level. Too often, however, salespeople pitch executives with product information instead of demonstrating the elevated value of a solution.

   This occurs because many companies emphasize product training when their salespeople should be given opportunities to role-play in a risk-free environment the skills needed to converse with executive decision makers with confidence, competency and impact.

3. **Profit Skills to Capture Value –** Salespeople are so focused on closing a sale (and pressure from the sales manager to make a maximum number of closes) that he or she is too willing too soon to "give away the ranch." A better strategy, based on the research, is to set the value of the solution before the prospect or client values it too low based on alternative proposals.

   Salespeople must learn the subtle skills to maintain a certain level of tension during the pitch and reveal other needs the prospect or client has overlooked. This creates a vagueness in his or her mind about the true value, or price, of the solution, giving the salesperson more room to maneuver.

Help Them Find Their Happy Place

Consider these ideas and tips to help your sales team be happier and feel more fulfilled, which typically result in greater effort and success.

- Working remotely can create a higher rate of engagement – Salespeople, by the very nature of the job, are often working outside the office. People who work remotely, which generally means from home at least one day a week are more likely to be engaged with their work, other team members and management.
- Incentivize your sales team with more than money – Consider these less-expensive ideas that still show you appreciation, but are different enough to motivate.
  - » Greet the salesperson at the beginning of the day with an outdoor workspace to enjoy a perfect spring or summer day. Move a desk, chair and computer outside and provide power and a WiFi connection.
  - » Give your "superhero" salesperson a break with an elaborate invitation or pass to use the meeting or other room for an afternoon power nap. Alternatively, provide a two-hour afternoon movie break on a computer and supply the popcorn and a drink.
  - » Treat the high achiever with any number of food rewards: Order and buy his or her lunch and have it delivered to his or her desk. Offer an upscale, but healthy selection of cookies with morning coffee.
  - » Place a superhero figurine prominently on his or her desk.
- Share these tips with your team to close the day on a high note.
  - » Set a time to end the day, and then commit to completing as much as possible during the last hour, especially smaller tasks that can be finished in a few minutes.
  - » Choose three major items from tomorrow's to-do list (which typically includes more than three) and make them the immediate priority at the beginning of the day. Often, this leads to accomplishing more items on the list, which makes for a happier end of the day.
  - » As your salespeople leave the office, ask them to declare verbally for all to hear, "As of this moment, I am no longer an account executive for the remainder of the day, but a _________ (husband, father, volunteer,, etc.)"

Understand Your AEs' Personality Types to Manage Them More Successfully

According to well-established psychological studies, 50.7% of the population is energized from introversion and the remainder, 49.3%, from extroversion. You can expect the same relative distribution on your sales team.

Introverted salespeople are more likely to:

- Prefer no interruptions while working.
- Need time to think about proposals.
- Prefer to communicate via email.
- Be silent as a sign of thinking, not avoiding others.
- Discuss proposals and ideas in-depth with customers.

Extroverted salespeople are more likely to:

- Ask coworkers to brainstorm or discuss proposals together.
- Prefer to communicate face-to-face or on the phone.
- Communicate with contacts more frequently and briefer.
- Discuss proposals and ideas with customers from a big-picture perspective.

Just 26.7% of the population processes information intuitively while the other 73.3% does so with their senses.

An intuitive salesperson:

- Understands your products and their value for customers.
- Focuses on long-term benefits for customers at the beginning of a meeting.
- Uses a process to guide a prospect through the sales funnel.

A sensitive salesperson:

- Presents product facts.
- Emphasizes prospects' next practical step.
- Applies a plan or timeline to accomplish each step of a sale and how to complete it.

The research also shows that 40.2% of the population makes decisions by thinking, the other 59.8% by feelings.

A thinking salesperson:

- Is more interested in learning and supporting a prospect's criteria for evaluating a proposal's solutions.
- Focuses the discussion on the tangible benefits of your products and services.
- Negotiates costs and emphasizes benefits with logic.

A feeling salesperson:

- Prefers to find a common ground on which both he or she and the prospect can agree.
- Is more likely to understand and support customer needs.
- Uses positive statements to sell a solution.
- Is able to use or accept conflict or criticism constructively instead of personally.

How to Elevate More AEs to the Top

No doubt, your sales team has AEs who perform at various levels, which is OK, unless too much of the burden for achieving the team's numbers rests on the shoulders of 20% or less of the team, who are typically your A-level salespeople.

According to research from SBI, a management consulting firm specializing in sales and marketing, A-level AEs will generate 500% more revenue than B-level AEs and 1,000% more than C-level AEs. These are very good reasons to do what you can – and quickly – to elevate more B- and C-level AEs to the A level.

The following three-step plan can start to generate improvements in short order.

1. **Increase goals –** SBI has discovered that if you ask B-level AEs to increase their goals by 10%, then you can expect their results to improve 7% to 8%. This may seem like an obvious step, but you'd be surprised how many sales managers fail to implement it.

2. **Teach them to reduce their speed throughout the sales process –** B-level AEs are eager, often overeager, to drive the process forward with all speed, to prove their worth, earn bigger commissions or any number of other reasons.

   Without curbing their enthusiasm, spend some time helping them to refocus on the sales process you've been training them to use. They must flip the emphasis of their pitches from the features of your products and services to the prospect or client's problems and pain points.

   Another aspect of B-level AEs' speed problem is that they think closing a deal faster is the only goal, and will allow them to work more deals. Slowing the process allows them to spend quality time establishing a more trusting and permanent relationship with prospects and clients instead of them just being tick marks on a sales chart.

3. **Assume a buyer's mentality –** Most B-level salespeople see themselves as, well, salespeople and haven't learned how to approach a presentation/pitch with the mindset of a buyer. As mentioned in #2 above, once they learn how to recognize and understand the buyer's perspective, they are more likely to focus on the right solutions.