



Friday, July 9, 2004

We can learn sales lessons from the 'ghost hunter' (wolf)

Denver Business Journal - by [Garry Duncan](#)

Wolves are a wonderful analogy for sales and sales management, and can provide many useful lessons. Reintroduction of wolves into some states evokes strong emotions on both sides of the issue, just as salespeople and the profession often do.

Both are often misunderstood and labeled with undeserved reputations. Wolves are actually one of nature's best examples of individual excellence contributing to team strength -- the very heart of sales success.

Successful sales "pack leaders and managers" build strong teams around the strengths of individuals, without giving any one salesperson too much autonomy or authority. The strength of the individual is the pack. The strength

of the pack is the individual. Other lessons we can learn from the "ghost hunter" are:

- Risk, courage and controversy. Mankind's greatest accomplishments are rooted in controversy and passion. A maverick with a novel idea and the willingness to see it through will trump the play-it-safe crowd any day. Much as wolves stir controversy and passion, sales teams should pursue their prospects passionately, being willing along the way to stir the pot.

While this won't always ensure immediate sales, it will differentiate you from the crowd and lay the foundation for a possible future working relationship.

- Cutting-edge communication. Wolves are excellent communicators. As might be expected from such a social animal, wolves have a highly developed system of communication that includes facial expressions, body language and vocalizations. Subtle or overt movement of eyes, ears, mouth, tail and even fur can convey a wolf's social mood.

Knowing, watching and understanding the language of the buyer and using the most effective sales speak will help you close more deals and keep more customers.

- Qualification. A pack qualifies its prey before attacking. Attacking the wrong animal requires enormous amounts of energy and often ends in failure or injury. Likewise, too much effort and resources often are spent on prospects who aren't well qualified for need, decision process and criteria, and willingness and ability to pay.
- Focus and perseverance. Wolves are extremely efficient, persistent and skilled pursuers of goals, able to size up a challenge quickly and develop a realistic plan for achieving their goals.

Working as a team, successful salespeople define attainable goals, then map a straightforward strategy to get there. Daily plans, activity, prospecting and referral goals are characteristic of top performers.

Wolves are renowned for their ability to stay on track, whether in search of food or shelter. Instinctively, they know that distractions could doom their survival.

Sales teams need to view their survival the same way, avoiding distractions at all costs and doing whatever it takes to stay on track toward their sales goals.

- Methodical movement. Wolves understand that nothing gets accomplished by standing still. Just as their hunt for food is a lifelong endeavor, so is the hunt for sales success an ongoing process. Solitary wolves hunt methodically, covering the area systematically and strategically. Similarly, to be successful in building sales, we need a systematic way to prospect that can penetrate the learned defenses other salespeople have created for us. To achieve excellence and mastery, those skills must be practiced and applied consistently.
- Skill sharpening. Wolf pups and adults practice their skills daily, seemingly never content with the state of their abilities. Similarly, sales team members -- newbies and veterans alike -- need to continue honing their skills, including knowledge of industry, new products and services, and new strategies for sales success. You're never too old or too young to get better.
- Perception and alertness. Wolves have keen senses and intuition, and often size up challenges or circumstances by relying on all their senses. Salespeople need to have strong senses as well. Skilled professionals in sales develop their listening sense, have empathy and sensitivity to others' feelings, and see opportunity and obstacles with clarity.
- Nurturing relationships. Wolves inherently nurture the young and infirm. Nurturing and understanding are critical to sales success. Relationships are the foundation of success in a pack and in the sales process.
- Knowledge. Wolves represent wisdom to Native Americans. Wolves learn readily and retain knowledge for long periods of time.

Some biologists say wolves are able to recognize a person they haven't seen for more than two years, a phenomenon documented in captive populations. Wolves are able to associate events and have remarkable ability to adapt to different environments and conditions.

In sales terms, we call this knowing our product, industry and customer as well as learning from our mistakes and managing our own

behavior. These are all characteristics of success.

If you want to sleep, count sheep. If you want vibrant, successful sales teams, count on the wolf.

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