

Denver Business Journal - May 16, 2005

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DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, May 13, 2005

Helping salespeople to climb out of that slump

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

Nothing is working. Those sure sales have gone away and the funnel is thinning.

Worse, it seems impossible to get in front of new prospects because past approaches aren't working. The most used word in your prospect's vocabulary is "no."

Does this sound familiar? Rare is the salesperson who hasn't experienced a dry period. A natural response is to work harder.

But it may not be the right answer. Instead of doing more of what's not working, try something new.

First, make sure you are eating right, exercising regularly and finding time for outside mental stimulation. Sometimes the longer and harder you work, the less effective you become. Attitude and energy sag when we are feeling rundown, stressed and unhappy.

Next, examine your self-talk. Three common internal broadcasts that hold us back are (1) externalizing, (2) universalizing and (3) negative self-talk.

- Saying or thinking, "It is the market," or "My territory has no potential" or "Our prices are too high" are examples of externalizing. Blaming outside conditions or others isn't the answer. Taking personal responsibility is the first step to getting out of the doldrums. Repeatedly thinking such thoughts becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Break the cycle by writing down any solid evidence you have regarding such claims. Observe if others are being successful with the same challenges. Ask yourself, "Do I have competitors who sell for more or who have the same market and are still successful?"

Chances are excellent you'll find little or no evidence to support your externalizing.

- Universalizing is turning an isolated incidence into a general rule. Every prospect doesn't buy, love us or treat us with courtesy, much less keep their word. When we have a negative personal experience, it's easy to project that experience into the future.

You wouldn't assume all people behave alike, so avoid assuming one experience represents them all.

Just because one person was rude doesn't mean everyone will be. Keep negative events in perspective. Beware of the way you talk to yourself and the use of all-inclusive words such as

"everyone," "always" and "never."

- Negative self-talk's most common result is increasing self-doubt and diminishing confidence. Listen to what you're telling yourself. Immediately stop self-talk such as, "I can't do this," "I am not good at this" and "I don't know how to do this."

Another destructive form of negative self-talk is "I should" and "I need to" because they aren't solid commitments to change or move forward.

Keep your self-talk positive and in the present tense.

Examples are: "I am good at finding new opportunities" or "I am capable of making up my shortfall" or "My technique is improving."

Another way to accomplish positive self-talk is by asking yourself "why" questions, such as "Why am I getting better at prospecting?" or "Why do I have such a good territory?"

These strategies will keep your subconscious from fighting you. Your mind is like software. You have to program and direct it. Remember that even with the right programming, you still have to take action.

Prospects have antennae that immediately pick up wavering confidence. Some salespeople benefit from creating a personal fuzzy file containing achievements, rewards, accolades, prizes and successes. Reviewing these can help you reclaim confidence and belief in yourself. You must first believe in yourself before the prospect will.

Working smart will change a slump more quickly than repeating mistakes in greater numbers. The magic formula is being in front of the right people, making enough contacts and saying the right things.

If activity is high and sales are low, the most likely reason is not being in front of the right people.

A review of a sales representative's appointment book revealed a high number of meetings with networking contacts, friends and existing clients. Although activity was high, time wasn't being spent with the right people. The right people are decision-makers or people who can get you in front of them.

Finally, tweak your skills. Failing to listen intently or becoming complacent in the delivery of your message is easy to do because we hear ourselves so much.

Question your questioning skills. Are the people you're presenting to really qualified? Have you gathered the right information? Have you uncovered a compelling reason important to the prospect to buy from you? Do they have a budget? Do you know who and how the decision will be made?

Smart sellers continually self-assess and work to improve.

Garry Duncan is principal of Denver-based Leadership Connections, a sales training company. Reach him at 303-462-1277 or garry@leadershipconnections.com.

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