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Let your fear about sales during recession work for you

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

Anxiety and fear have driven many buyers into hibernation. But that's only a temporary fix if businesses are to survive and grow in these unsettling times.

Paralysis, avoidance and inaction likely will doom many sellers as well. Pent-up needs eventually will move buyers forward, and it will be necessary for sellers to address buyers' fears. To do that, you first must address your own. Sellers can't afford to lose hope or confidence, or to fall into despair and inaction. Hope, along with action, is needed to succeed in this market.

Fear can paralyze or energize, so let it energize you to make changes, to face challenges head on and to experience stronger, healthier growth and gain market share in the long haul.

T.C. North, president of Catalyst Performance in Lafayette, says, "Top performers don't always know how they are going to do something, they just believe they are going to do it." It's a part of top performer's belief system and their day-to-day action.

As a seller or sales manager, keeping confidence and optimism high is critical to overcoming market fears. Everyone is far more effective when feeling confident.

Have you ever noticed that sales often come in clusters? Clusters occur because confidence increases after one or two sales, and contributes to the ongoing string of success.

After a dry spell, it's easy to become insecure and wimpy, and to display the traits of a beggar more than those of a confident solution provider.

Keep your personal confidence high by revisiting past successes often, and by keeping your funnel extra full to compensate for the likely event of fewer buyers qualifying.

Second, you must play the sales game with better skills in the new economy. Not everyone is going to be able to sell the same way they did in the past. It's a different world. Begin by breaking down your sales process, presentations and selling techniques. Track what's working and what isn't. If it isn't working, change it. If it is working, do more of it.

For starters, be more aware of the buying phases prospects go through when making major purchases. Most buyers first assess the degree of their problem or need, wrestling with the decision of whether to make a change or stay with what they already have or are doing. For example, you may vacillate between fixing your current car and buying a new one.

When the prospect is evaluating possible change, it's too early to give presentations or proposals, because it's too soon for them to buy. Instead, use your confidence to help the prospect clarify and assess the significance of their need. Talk through the best- case and worst-case scenarios of changing or staying with what they have now.

Save the investment of resources, time, energy and presentations for those who are ready to buy. This allows you to cast a broader net.

Differentiate your offerings with presentations and proposals given only to those who are ready to buy. The signs of that are when they admit they're making changes (not just considering), have established a budget or committee, or are putting out formal requests for proposals.

Increase your chances of closing these opportunities by first determining and influencing their decision criteria before blindly presenting. In this market, buyers are more discerning, cautious and picky. If you offer more than they think they need in features and benefits, you'll surely encounter price objections and lost sales.

Meet their exact criteria as closely as possible. Even better, help them determine decision criteria that are in your favor. Always remember that vague differentiators, such as claims of service, are less favorable to you than clear differences, such as length of warranty, size, color or other easily discerned differences.

You can't ignore the buyer's fear. You'll have less control over their feelings than your own, but you can influence them.

Pressure and urgency won't work. Instead, move buyers forward with reassurance. Share testimonies and offer references. Extend warranties if possible, and spend ample time covering warranty details when required.

Second demos, site tours and introducing current customers are examples of ways to increase comfort and convey reassurance. Have direct, open conversation about their reservations.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Don't waste life in doubts and fears; spend yourself on the work before you, well assured that the right performance of this hour's duties will be the best preparation for the hours and ages that will follow it."

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