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10 Sales Competencies That Are Keys to Building a Sales Culture

These aren't the 10 sales competencies you read about and listen to all the time. No way! These 10 are hardly ever discussed, seldom, if ever written about, and the most difficult to learn. Ready?

1. IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU.
2. PREVENT HAPPY EARS
3. THE ENEMY IS RESISTANCE.
4. YOU CAN TALK - IT'S YOUR MIND THAT HAS TO SHUT UP.
5. GET AND USE A SALES GPS.
6. SLOW DOWN TO SPEED UP.
7. PRESENT NO OPTIONS.
8. IT'S ONLY A NUMBERS GAME IF YOU USE THE RIGHT NUMBERS.
9. PRACTICE MAKES PERMANENT.
10. THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS AN OBJECTION.

If your salespeople can learn the fine art of these 10, they will outsell everyone they come up against.

#1 - IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU!

Believe it or not, there are a lot of people in sales who mistakenly believe that the world revolves around them. If my previous sentence said "show business" instead of "sales" it would make sense but this isn't show business.

Roles and titles make no difference on this one. I have developed and coached salespeople, managers, VP's and CEO's alike whose biggest challenge was learning that it's not about them. Some of the things they've had to learn are that prospects and customers (and employees) don't care about:

- what they did over the weekend
- their hobbies
- their opinions
- their likes and dislikes
- their reasons to buy
- why their company is so respected
- why their product/services are so cool
- why they do what they do
- their excuses
- their problems
- their value proposition
- their goals
- their desired outcomes
- their expectations
- their process
- their quota
- their end of the month/quarter pressures

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- whatever it is you usually tell them
- what they just bought
- how much money they have
- where they vacationed
- them.

I've seen sales managers who put their own needs ahead of their salespeople, failing to develop, encourage and support them.

I've seen salespeople who just don't hear their prospects' positions, instead stating and standing by their own positions with more vigor and volume than their prospects.

It's terribly shocking to those who make it all about them - that ***the only thing that truly matters is what their prospects and customers care about.*** And they don't care about self-centered salespeople.

So if prospects and customers don't want to hear about any of it, what's left?

Ask questions. Lots of questions. Good questions. Tough questions. Timely questions.

Use questions to develop a relationship, to build trust, to demonstrate expertise, to show you care and to show that you're listening.

It's all about them.

#2 Prevent Happy Ears

What exactly *is* a case of Happy Ears? A salesperson has Happy Ears when she hears what she wants to hear. Example: Your salesperson asks her prospect about the budget and the prospect says, "we'll try to find the money". Your salesperson hears, "We have the money, and we will spend the money, and there isn't a limit." Another example: Your salesperson asks his prospect who is making the decision and the prospect answers, "I'll be involved." Your salesperson hears, "I'm the decision maker!" A third example: The prospect says, "We should do this." Your salesperson hears, "We're going to buy."

Here are some of the things salespeople with Happy Ears tend to do:

- make assumptions
- accept vague statements
- fail to question things
- not ask specific questions
- fail to make sure the answers are to the questions they asked
- fail to make sure the answers were as specific as the questions
- draw false conclusions
- not ask the right questions about incumbents and competitors
- not ask the right questions about motivation, incentives and reasons
- not confront
- never have the actual amount of money a prospect will spend
- never have the time line for the decision right

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- never quite understand the concept of what can go wrong
- see the world through role-colored glasses
- be too optimistic

Ugly. So what can you do about it? Understand that many of the people with Happy Ears also have Need for Approval. You have to help them overcome that before you can solve the problem with Happy Ears. The fastest way to overcome Need for Approval is to have them use the SalesMind CD twice daily for 3 weeks. Then begin interrogating your salespeople (who have happy ears) during post-call debriefs! Ask every skeptical, doubting, question you can. Be consistent with the questions and the frequency of your interrogations. Make your salespeople so uncomfortable that they start asking these questions themselves, just so they'll have the answers to the questions they now know you will ask. And then, finally, their happy ears may just begin to disappear. If you are the salesperson for your company then sales coaching will stop happy ears.

#3 The Enemy is Resistance.

The gist of Resistance is this: Selling would be far more simple for many more of your salespeople if they would focus on recognising the resistance rather than attempting to overcome the many forms it takes:

- lack of interest
- happy with who they're using
- price
- quality
- features
- benefits
- claims
- satisfaction
- problems
- reputation
- service
- questions
- put-offs
- timing
- perceived need

Rather than dealing with these objections individually, if your salespeople could just recognise the earliest stages of resistance...

- a certain look
- a change in posture
- a nod
- "well..."
- "maybe..."
- "I'm not sure..."
- "but..."
- a shoulder shrug
- a stated objection

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- a loaded question
- etc.

...and deal with it right then and there - at the earliest stage - by simply:

- agreeing ("Yeah, I would have reacted that way too" or "You're right" or "You didn't react too well to what I just said...")
- acknowledging ("I understand")
- questioning ("Out of curiosity, why do you feel that way?")
- questioning ("Can you explain?")
- questioning ("What if it (or I) could?")
- etc.

Resistance itself is pretty easy to deal with because you can lower it very quickly. But if your salespeople aren't able to recognize it early, or worse, they ignore it, then they'll have to deal with the objections. When they deal with objections, as soon as they attempt to overcome them, by using:

- reason
- logic
- facts
- figures
- features
- benefits
- selling points
- explanations
- validation
- rationalizations
- charts
- graphs
- testimonials
- defending

...they will be seen as putting on the hard sell, resistance will go up, not down, and their position will worsen!

#4 - You Can Talk - It's Your Mind that Has to Shut Up

For more than 40 years, sales authors, experts and trainers have been telling their readers, subscribers and clients about the importance of talking 30% of the time and listening 70% of the time. That ratio is not etched in stone. Even 50/50 is acceptable. The stage of the sales process dictates the ratio more than the ratio itself. For instance, if your salespeople are following the Baseline Selling process, they would talk 100% in the earliest phase of Getting to 1st Base, and probably 10% in the later phase of Getting to 1st Base. They would probably talk 10% of the time while Getting to 2nd Base. They might talk 50% of the time on the way to 3rd Base and 90% of the time when Running Home.

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So it's not how much they can talk as much as it's when they can talk. But more important than whether they talk or not, is whether their minds are active. When they talk to themselves, several things might be going on in their minds:

- plan several questions ahead;
- strategize on the fly;
- create solutions as they hear problems;
- qualify in their heads;
- worry about lack of progress;
- get excited as they react to progress.

Their active minds will cause them much more trouble than talking too much. If they are in a talk 10% of the time stage of the sales process and their minds are actively engaged in one of the activities above, they **won't hear what their prospects are saying**. When that happens they won't be able to ask the right follow up questions. Instead, they'll ask the next question on their list, an appropriate question to ask at some point, but not as a follow up to what they likely just missed. This important miss will cause them to be ineffective at going wide and deep, preventing them from uncovering the real problems and identifying the compelling reasons to buy from you.

So what can you do? Send them back to school for the 3 R's.

- Role Playing
- Repetition
- Reinforcement

The 3 R's will help **IF** they have been taught, shown and demonstrated the proper listening and questioning skills in the first place. And if they have any of the following weaknesses, the problem might be complicated further:

- Need for Approval
- Getting Emotionally Involved
- Difficulty Recovering from Rejection
- Being Too Trusting
- Outlook Problem
- Excuse Making Problem

#5 - Get a Sales GPS

These days you wouldn't think about getting into your car and driving to a new destination without typing the address into your car's navigation system. Why? Several reasons:

- fear - you don't want to get lost
- first impressions - you don't want to be late
- stress - you don't want to worry about it
- progress - you want to know how far away you are
- safety - you want to watch the road, not read directions
- control - you don't want any surprises
- efficiency - your GPS knows the way to carry the sleigh

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There are probably more but you get the gist of it. And selling is the same way. Each one of those 7 reasons for using a GPS applies to a sales cycle, so it makes sense that your sales force should have a sales GPS or a process.

Objective Management Group's statistics on assessing more than 450,000 salespeople and 8,500 sales forces shows that **fewer than 15% of them have and/or use a sales process!**

In an age where so many of us are talking about Sales 2.0, most businesses haven't even adopted the simple Sales 0.0 best practice of having a sales process.

Surprised? You shouldn't be. Most companies still see selling as something that the sales folks should intuitively know how to do but the statistics prove that not to be the case.

Even with companies that are well-known for their efficiencies, controls and processes; even in the divisions led by executives who had successful sales management careers; even when leaders told us that they had implemented sales processes; the evidence just isn't there. The data still shows that even when companies believe they have introduced a sales process, the salespeople and the sales managers don't use it. There are several possible reasons:

- They introduced an inefficient process that wasn't intuitive, memorable or applicable
- The process could not be utilized in their business - it didn't fit
- There was a lack of commitment to follow the process
- The company failed to integrate training and reinforcement on how to apply the process
- The trainer was ineffective and failed to make it easy and fun

There are 5 things that companies should be doing right now - whether it's about sales process or excuse making.

1. Invest in your people
2. Assess for strengths and weaknesses
3. Develop your sales force and its capabilities
4. Topgrade your sales force and get the right people in the right seats
5. Position the sales force now to take advantage of the upturn that is coming

6 - SLOW DOWN TO SPEED UP

Your salespeople can't wait to do the things at which they are:

- most competent
- most comfortable
- having the most fun
- in control
- in the spot light

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The problem with all of that is with what they do:

- present
- demo
- tell your story
- provide capabilities
- give references
- do proposals
- give quotes
- use company resources

and when they do it:

- as soon as they can!

When your salespeople do what they are most comfortable with and most adept at, and they do it early in the sales cycle, they fail to develop any urgency for action and the result is an opportunity that doesn't gain traction, move, or close.

In the process I introduced in Baseline Selling, all of the above activity would take place between 3rd Base and Home Plate, but your salespeople are doing it between 1st Base and 2nd Base.

So what should they be doing between 1st and 2nd Bases?

- slow down
- ask more questions than anyone else
- ask better questions than anyone else
- ask tougher questions than anyone else
- listen
- care
- identify problems they can solve
- develop a relationship
- demonstrate their expertise (through questions, not presenting)
- develop trust
- slow down some more
- when they think they've asked enough questions, continue asking questions

The slower they go between 1st and 2nd Base, the more quickly the sales cycle will flow. If you want to shorten their sales cycle, get them to slow down!

Competency #7 - Present No Options

Salespeople love to present options. It makes them feel like they have more chances to win the business. It's such a popular approach that it's one of the few parts of the sales process that is universally accepted and named. You know it as Good, Better and Best. Companies actually have alignment on Good, Better and Best, sometimes using it in their retail stores and

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catalogues to provide category options. How many times have salespeople presented you with 3 options?

So, what happens when you present 3 options to your prospects and customers? Do they think to themselves, "Wow, isn't this great? - I have options"?

To understand what happens with options we need to differentiate between salespeople who sell the right way and those who don't.

Salespeople who don't sell the right way typically spend most of their time presenting, talking about capabilities, giving demonstrations, presentations, and tours, creating proposals, giving quotes, and explaining features and benefits. They do it almost from the beginning of the sales call, meeting or cycle. The typical reaction of a prospect that is provided with 3 options, after being presented to in this way is, "I'm confused, I don't know what I need, I don't even know if I need this at all, at least right now, so I need time to figure this all out and better understand my choices." That's right - your salespeople either get a "think it over", a "no" or a put-off. As you can guess, when it was time for me to sign the paperwork last week, I was presented with my 3 options. I was in a hurry, and I'm not smart enough and certainly wasn't focused enough to process everything I heard in a two-minute presentation of the 3 options. As a result, I was not able to decide what was best for me at that moment. So, unable to decide, I said, "None of the above", and simply drove my new car home.

Salespeople who do sell the right way spend time doing what I talked about in Sales Competency #6 - they slow down to speed up. They build a strong relationship, demonstrate their expertise and create a sense of trust and credibility. They ask lots of good, tough, timely questions and learn about the issues and problems they can solve. If they continue to work their way through the sales process by asking questions, stimulating productive conversation, and thoroughly qualifying their prospects, there can be only a single, ideal solution that is both needs and cost appropriate. If salespeople who sell the right way present 3 options at closing time, not only would they turn an easy decision into a "think it over", they will have contradicted the notion that they are experts. If your salesperson is an expert, and fully understands his prospect's issues, problems and finances, yet ignores all of the data points collected and presents options instead, then what kind of expert could he really be? Only one of those options could possibly address and solve the issues and problems at the right price point. So it must be another salesperson who doesn't listen to his prospects!

#8 - It's Only a Numbers Game if You Use the Right Numbers

We received a bank reconciliation statement yesterday - not the checking account statement, but the statement that justifies their monthly fees. Take a look- they charge us:

- \$1.00 each time we make a deposit
- \$50.00 for having a digital deposit device attached to my PC
- \$ 0.05 for each online deposit
- \$ 0.15 for each cheque we deposit
- \$ 0.14 for each credit card deposit to the account

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I expect to be charged for cheques and debits for money taken from the account but our bank has found 5 ways to charge us when we put money **into** the bank! Believe me, it's not about how much this accounts to each month, it's about their stupidity in two areas:

1. They are paying attention to the wrong numbers. We expect banks to charge us for using **their** money. We don't expect banks to charge us when they get to use **our money!**
2. They are successfully **unselling** the commercial customers who choose to do business with them. Airlines have figured this out too. Not only are most of them charging to check bags (creating a chronic scenario where there is never enough overhead space anymore and it takes longer to board and deboard planes), but this week I was charged \$50 just to get on an earlier flight. Instead of "happy we could accommodate you - thanks for your loyalty" I heard, "that will be an additional \$50". If it was a bargain economy fare to begin with, I could understand it. But this was a \$538 one-hour round-trip between Brisbane and Sydney! More **unselling** at its ugliest.

Is selling a numbers game? Not the numbers your grandfather used to pay attention to!

Key Performance Indicators or KPI's abound for sales. However, most companies choose to pay attention to the wrong ones. They look at lagging indicators like:

- revenue
- margin
- number of accounts
- average sale
- revenue by salesperson

Instead, they should be looking at leading indicators that can be used for coaching, accountability, motivation, recruiting and development, like conversion ratios:

- attempts to contacts
- contacts to conversations
- conversations to appointments
- 1st meetings (suspects) to prospects
- prospects to qualified
- qualified to closable
- closable to closed
- length of sales cycle
- new opportunities in existing accounts
- new opportunities in new accounts
- new opportunities in new markets
- opportunities from inbound marketing
- opportunities from advertising
- opportunities from referrals
- opportunities from trade shows
- opportunities from cold calling

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Those KPI's will tell you more about what **will** happen than numbers that tell you what already happened. Additionally, these statistics will tell you who **is** selling versus who is taking orders, managing accounts and living off their past efforts or worse, somebody else's efforts.

Where do you begin? You must start with the pipeline. Using a monthly goal, average sale, and closing percentage, you must determine, for each salesperson, the quantity - how many opportunities and how much in dollar value - must be in each of the four stages of the pipeline at any given time, in order for the goals to be achieved or surpassed. Then, staging the actual opportunities using the criteria established for each stage, compare what is necessary for each stage to what is actually in each stage. You'll be shocked - frightened and angry - when you do this comparison. Then, you must determine what each salesperson must do - each day - to fill the first stage of the pipeline with the number and value of opportunities required each month.

If you pay attention to the right numbers, the game is on and you guarantee your sales force repeated wins each month. Look at the wrong numbers and it's game over. You lose again.

#9 - PRACTICE MAKES PERMANENT

Permanent. Without question, the biggest challenge for me, my colleagues, associates, and the salespeople and sales managers we develop is the permanent problem. All of the stuff they have been doing, including the order in which they have been doing it, is usually wrong when we begin working with them - and permanently so. It's harder to stop doing the permanent stuff than it is to learn a more effective way. Think of an elastic band. The information from the new lesson stretches the band a lot. Then the natural tendency to do what has become permanent snaps the band back into its original shape. Solution?

- Repetition - as with exercising
- Let go - as with a massage
- Reinforcement - as with variations of the same messages
- Role playing - as in practice
- Mistakes - as in golf or tennis
- Coaching - as in private golf or tennis lessons
- Commitment and Discipline

Now comes the Practice part. What exactly does one practice so that excellence becomes permanent?

- Strategies - only the effective ones please
- Tactics - only the ones that work consistently
- The difficult scenarios - not the easy stuff - like:
 - resistance
 - push-back
 - ambivalence
 - pricing
 - competition
 - incumbents
 - relationships
 - renewals

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- delays
- complaints

How often should one practice "selling"? Most salespeople never practice - ever! Let's take a look at some of the top professional athletes in the world. Not only do they all have coaches, but their practice schedules and disciplines should embarrass you.

Tiger Woods, the best golfer of all time, practices 6.5 hours a day - *after* he works out!

- 1.5 Hours fitness
- 4 Hours of ball striking
- 2 Hours of playing
- 2 Hours of short game

Michael Jordan used to take from 125-300 practice shots, sometimes *after* the actual game!

So if the best professional athletes in history practice *more* hours than they spend performing, how can salespeople complain about practicing for 30-60 minutes per day?

Practice makes permanent.

#10 THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS AN OBJECTION

There is nothing worse than when salespeople handle objections. Not only does it cause them to rack up reverse progress, they are usually not even handling the real problem.

Here are the things you need to know about objection handling that should cause you to stop handling them forever:

- if you handle one you'll get another one
- they object when you get too close (to closing time) for comfort
- handling objection increases their resistance
- the objection is not usually the real problem
- objection handling, by nature, is a correction and people don't like being corrected
- how often have you handled an objection, only to have the prospect say, "then let's do it!"? Right.

So if you can't handle objections what should you do instead?

First, it's even more important to stop getting objections all together. Sounds good, doesn't it? Just the simple act of identifying an objection will cause trouble for you. Every time your prospect says something and you say to yourself, "@#\$%, a !@#\$% objection", you'll tend to become emotionally involved, and then go into some kind of presentation mode (bad), and while causing an increase in your prospect's resistance, attempt to solve the wrong problem.

Do you remember the singer formerly known as Prince, who before that and after that WAS Prince? Do the same thing with objections, except skip the formally known as part. When your prospect says something that you used to identify as an objection, simply hear it as their

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opinion. You don't *handle* opinions, you engage in discussions. So if your prospect has an opinion that is different from yours, you can ask any of the following questions:

- why do you feel that way?
- when did you start feeling that way?
- what if that wasn't the case?
- how does that manifest itself?

And you would use words like:

- Of course
- I agree
- I understand
- You're right

The other thing you can do to eliminate objections is to sell the right way!