

The Biggest Mistakes Salespeople Make

Mistake #1: Thinking that servicing accounts is more important than selling new ones

I once had a coaching client show me a stack of folders and say, “This is why I can’t be out calling on new clients.” When I asked what had to be done, she picked up the first folder and said, “I’m waiting for a number from the State of Rhode Island on this one.” To which I responded, “Really? A salesperson is sitting in the office waiting for a number from the State of Rhode Island? No one else can handle that?” That is akin to a pilot saying they don’t have time to fly the plane because they are back serving customers drinks.

I’ve heard every excuse for servicing accounts from “they’ll only deal with me”, to “I want to make sure it’s done right.” These are simply excuses to avoid the hard work of going out and making calls. Salespeople are hunters, service people are gathers. Outside of renewals, scheduled service calls, and emergencies, clients should be dealing with CSRs and other support people. Not only are the support people more readily available than the salesperson, who should be out chasing new business, they also handle the day-to-day service items more efficiently and effectively than a salesperson. As a salesperson your job is to sell, not service. If you are hiding behind the excuse that your clients will only deal with you, that’s because you’ve trained them to do that. Time for retraining. If you think you are the only one who can do it, you’re wrong, get over yourself. Any time you are servicing, outside of renewals, scheduled calls, and major issues, you are doing yourself, your company, your client, and your future clients a disservice. It’s what we call a lose/lose/lose/lose. Go sell and stop hiding behind service.

Mistake #2: Majoring in minor things and finding other time wasters

I once had a sales manager remark to me, “During the major snow storm last week, when people were confined to their houses, my top salesperson was calling people at home because he had a captive audience. My other salespeople were baking cookies and posting pictures on Facebook.”

This along with chatting with friends and colleagues, checking e-mail more than four times a day, taking ten coffee breaks, and, in general, finding things to do other than calling on prospects and customers, are examples of time wasters. Spending two hours looking up prospect information before you call, servicing clients on routine items as in Mistake #1 above, and spending time practicing your call 400 times before the call, are all examples of majoring in minor things. Your highest priority is to spend time with prospects and “sometimes” your top 20% of customers (again, renewals, scheduled calls, and emergencies). You should be talking to, or on your way to talk to, prospects and customers 80% of the time during prime calling hours.

Mistake #3: Focusing on reactive versus proactive marketing

The fastest and best way to build business is by making phone calls and knocking on doors. It is the most effective and only one in which you have almost complete control over. Going to a Chamber of Commerce Event, BNI, or some similar networking event, hoping to get a lead is reactive. In those situations you are relying on others, whose first priority is to get business for themselves, to give you business. Worse yet, hanging out on social media or sending blind, unsolicited e-mails in hopes of getting business.

Mistake #4: Not being prepared for and not practicing sales situations

If you are in leadership, I dare you to walk up to one of your salespeople who has been with you a while and ask, “What do you say when someone says...” and then give them a common, every-day objection they get like, “they’re not interested?” I promise you that 9 times out of 10 the first verbal sound out of their mouth will be “Ahhhh”. It happens to me *all the time*. Just last week at a sales meeting at an insurance agency, I turned to an agent who’s been there 17 years and asked, “Joe (name changed to protect the guilty), what do you say when someone says I can get my insurance cheaper down the street?” The response? You guessed it, “Ahhhh.” Game over.

You have to be prepared for every sales situation you’re going to encounter and you have to practice ahead of time. Ideally with another human, but if not, with yourself. Each and every answer has to be scripted and committed to memory so that you know it verbatim and can respond immediately in a real-life sales situation.

Mistake #5: No goals, no plan, and no clue how much activity has been done, or needs to be done, in order to be successful

Whenever I begin working with someone one of the first questions I ask them is, “How many calls did you make last week on brand-new prospects?” As with the objection above, I am usually met with “Ahhhh.” Usually followed by a guess, like, “Um, I think about 4.” “You *think* four? Is that number too big to count?” The truth is: they didn’t keep track and it wasn’t four. It may have been two, or even zero. In order to be successful, you have to have annual, monthly, and weekly goals, along with knowing the daily activity necessary to make those goals a reality. Then you have to make the calls.

Mistake #6: Giving up too soon

81% of sales are made after the four contact. Roughly 20% of salespeople make it past the fourth contact. Enough said.

Mistake #7: Not doing the work necessary

99% of the time a salesperson fails it’s due to a lack of activity. Not making enough calls, to talk to enough people, in order to make enough sales. The other 1% of the time, the salesperson got hit by a bus. Since activity is the primary reason for success or failure, I could have led off with it, but it’s so obvious you probably would have stopped reading.

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