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Proven Ways to Lose Your Next Sale (and how to avoid it)

By
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Behind their assertions of self-confidence and annoying arrogance is an undeniable fact: It takes guts to get the endless unknowns and oddities of customers. But that's what salespeople do.

At the end of the day, it isn't how many calls you make, appointments you go on, or proposals you prepare. It's how much revenue you chalk-up. Some sales are better than others, but every sale counts. After losing a sale, how many times have you said, "I can't believe it. I was sure I had that one."

No one sets out to lose a sale. But it happens. That's why recognizing the danger signals can help avoid unnecessary losses. Here they are:

Deciding who will buy and who won't. No matter what they may say, no one dislikes disappointment more than salespeople. So, they come up with the clever little trick to avoid it by claiming they can tell if a customer is going to buy or not. Having been through it so many times, they have a sense of what's going to happen.

This thought process helps avoid the downer of disappointment. You knew the outcome, so just pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and move on. It also erases the need to analyze what you could have done differently to get the sale.

Assuming the sale is a sure thing. Because selling is a tough game, salespeople are prone to believe that having "the right attitude" they can influence the outcome of a sale. If they think the sale will go their way, it will.

Unfortunately, this approach keeps the focus on the salesperson and takes it away from the customer. To try to do both at the same time doesn't work, as Stanford University has shown with multi-tasking research. In fact, they found that the human brain is built to do one thing at a time.

This suggests that salespeople are at a disadvantage if they try to keep the focus on both themselves and the customer at the same time. It's counterproductive if they try,

and it may send a signal to the prospect that the salesperson “isn’t all there,” which is exactly the case.

Playing the “friend game.” The salesperson’s mission is to present a compelling case for winning the order, not to make a friend or to feign friendship just to get the sale. Customers can see through such thinly veiled tricks. They’ve seen it and they don’t like being used.

More than anything, the goal is to be viewed as competent. Impress the customer by being laser focused on the customer so that you thoroughly understand the business and the issues and can differentiate yourself from the competition.

If a friendship should occur, it will be after you get the account, not because of it.

Quitting too soon. For serious salespeople, the “Urgent” sign is lit up all the time. Get in, get the order, and get out. And it’s understandable and even commendable because that’s what gets the job done. But not always.

There are times when you can be too sure of yourself and overly confident. After giving it your best effort, you decide the prospect can’t make a decision or isn’t serious. Then, three months later you find out that the person bought from a competitor.

Some prospects put salespeople to the test, checking them out to see if they want the business.

Failing to ask discovery questions. Some salespeople can’t wait to get to the good stuff—their sales pitch. They’ve been through the drill so many times they find it distracting and a waste of time getting bogged down in asking a lot of discovery questions. That may be OK for new salespeople, but not necessary for anyone with their experience.

Not so, by any measure. The purpose of discovery questions is not just to qualify prospects, but to engage them so they are talking about what’s really important to them—their business. There are many possibilities, but here are four examples;

- Why did you agree to meet with me?
- What sets you apart from your competitors?
- Are there changes going on that affect your business?
- What problem are you trying to solve?

All of which is to get the right person (the customer) talking and the right person (the salesperson) listening, instead of the other way around. If you’re listening, you’re learning. When you do that well, you will know what to do to make winning presentation.

Dispensing solutions. When customers have a problem, they are primed to look for quick, easy, low-cost solutions. You might call them “low-hanging fruit” or, more appropriately, “easy prey.” They’re in hot water and they want to get out. This is why salespeople armed with appetizing and tasty solutions get their attention.

Unfortunately, instant-fix solutions are like pills we pop to take away the pain. Customers want to believe they work, but, as we so quickly discover, they only disguise it and it doesn’t take long before it’s back. Yet, this is the sales tactic far too many salespeople utilize throughout their careers and why they have so few repeat customers and referrals.

If there’s a single objective in sales, it’s to empower customers to make decisions that are in their best interest, decisions that result in satisfaction.

Giving customers what they say they want. “What’s wrong with that? That’s why we’re in business, isn’t it,” you say. In the Age of the Smartphone, there is no need for salespeople who are merely “transactors,” who literally give customers what they ask for, and whose function is to scan barcodes and say “thank you.” Robots can perform that function 24-hours a day more efficiently and at lower cost.

The Smartphone Age brings the essential role of the salesperson into sharp focus and, surprisingly, it’s not new—it’s the same as ever. Believe it or not, the picture hasn’t changed over time. The sales task is that of the specialist, the one who serves as an authentic resource customers can trust.

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