

Sales and Service Excellence

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SALES/RESULTS

Sales Killers

They ruin your results.



by Lenann McGookey Gardner

IGO FROM COMPANY TO COMPANY, diagnosing sales and marketing problems and recommending ways to improve this critical business function. I'm often astounded at the weaknesses I see—the overlooked opportunities, the money left on the table. As an executive coach, I work with business leaders, helping them to discover other courses of action—change they implement *because they thought of it*.

This “discovery process” is part of the path to committing to change. I'll be willing to bet that this article contains a few things that you need to discover!

Ten sales killers can keep you and your organization from meeting sales and growth goals. Do you see yourself in any of these scenarios? If so, what are you going to do about it?

1. Not enough time spent on selling. For all the lip service paid to selling, it's amazing how little time gets spent face-to-face (F2F) or phone-to-phone (P2P) with prospects. Yet we know that this simple statistic—time spent in conversation with those who can authorize money to be spent with your company—correlates directly with

closed business! We see no similar correlation for email-to-email (E2E), and yet many salespeople spend much time emailing prospects with few results. If F2F and P2P time are so important, shouldn't this selling time be the bulk of your working hours? I'm astounded at the number of salespeople who spend less than 5 percent of their working hours F2F and P2P (5 percent of a



40-hour week is just 2 hours a week of uninterrupted sales time).

2. Outdated selling skills. Why are so many people conducting sales conversations the same old way? Selling skills are fluid—they need to change to reflect the times. If your sales results disappoint you, start learning what's actually working in sales now—the ele-

ments of a state-of-the-art approach to selling. For example, many sellers could benefit from adopting The 90-10-90 Rule: when you are talking with a prospect, the prospect should be speaking 90 percent of the time. Of the leftover 10 percent you, the seller, are speaking, you should spend 90 percent asking questions. Most sellers are still talking far too much! (The *exception* to The 90-10-90 Rule is that you can talk as much as you need to if you are answering your prospect's questions. But if he's not asking, you should not be *talking*, you should be *inquiring*.)

3. Lack of quality salespeople. Do you know the qualities of successful salespeople in today's economy, and do you interview specifically to hire people with those qualities? Or are you interviewing to find a clone of yourself? The interviewing skills that identify quality sales reps are different from those that identify other types of talent; be sure that those doing the interviewing know the best questions to ask. Begin the interview by telling candidates that this is an informal interview and that you're going to ask a few questions. Never explain what you're looking for before you ask these questions. Have candidates describe themselves before you give them an idea of

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what you consider to be the ideal qualities for the job. Consider a question like, "If I were to talk to your previous manager and ask what your strong points are, what would he or she tell me?" Asking "If I were to talk to your previous manager and ask what your weak points are, what would he or she tell me?" may be even more powerful!

4. Poor sales management. Many "super-salesmen" call themselves Sales Managers and just step in to close business rather than build up the members of their sales team. The role of Sales Managers is to recruit and develop people, and to do what it takes to free salespeople up for selling—not to do all the selling themselves and try to be the hero. If you are the Sales Manager, understand your role; take a class, or at least read a book about it!

5. Lack of a message. In this noisy world, you need to sit with your company's leadership team and ask them to write down *The Main Message We Want Our Prospects to Believe About Us*. Look at the answers. I'll bet you have many that are different. Why does this matter? Because if you try to say everything, you'll end up saying nothing. Positioning is the process of determining the most powerful, provocative, short messages you can hope to implant in your prospects' minds, and then delivering them, and delivering them, and delivering them. A Positioning Statement should contain four to six ideas—and those few messages are the core of what goes on your website, in your collateral materials, and in your sales conversations when you're with a prospect who refuses to talk about herself and instead demands, "Why should I be interested in your company?"

6. No prospect list. A Prospect List is a list of people—not organizations—with whom you would like to be doing business. I'm astounded at the number of salespeople who don't have a prospect list! If you're a sales manager, help your salespeople to develop a Prospect List! Start with your current customers and ask, "In these client companies, are there other people who could benefit from our products and services?" Or, are there similar companies you should approach? Target a new market segment or two. If your skills or products might benefit other industries than those you currently serve, reach out to them and, using your Positioning Statement to create interest, get some conversations going!

7. Little or no networking. If your prospects are local, are you getting out to public events where you might meet them? The most powerful impression you can make on a person is made in person—not



on the phone or with a mailing. Face-to-face meetings on neutral ground at networking events can often lead naturally to face-to-face meetings in prospects' offices—and these meetings lead to sales. Assemble a *10 Most Wanted List*—a list of 10 people you'd really like to know. Write those names down, read the list regularly, and the odds of meeting those people increases. With the list in the back of your mind, you'll find that you meet someone who knows someone, and you'll remember to ask for an introduction!

8. Poor follow-up. One key to building trust is to follow-up systematically and methodically on every opportunity you identify. Most salespeople have good intentions to follow up, but their follow-up is usually terrible! Be sure that you *schedule* your follow-up activity with

prospects, and then keep those appointments! Get some *urgency* behind this! If you say you'll get someone more information, e-mail it today. When you meet someone new, always be back in touch within four business days—and touch base with them again within 30 days. Thus, they hear from you three times in the month in which they meet you—and that's enough follow-up for you to be on their "radar screen" when they have a need for what you offer.

9. Weak closing skills. The worst thing isn't a prospect who tells you *no*—it's a prospect who tells you *maybe*, and starts you on weeks or months of ultimately unproductive follow-up effort. Most companies are drowning in "maybes". Learn to close—to move selling conversations to decisions sooner rather than later—and you'll return to reality. Get rid of the doubt in the pit of your stomach that's telling you that many of the "maybes" really are "nos". They are.

10. Overwhelm. Everybody seems overwhelmed these days. They're tired, a little depressed, busy, dying for the weekend—anything but motivated, enthusiastic people. If you're a leader, your job is to create such a motivated and focused team. Sometimes the lethargy can be traced to one or two people poisoning the atmosphere, but whoever is responsible has to shape up, or be moved out. I wouldn't allow it (and I wonder why so many leaders do).

In what areas do you have the biggest problems? Where will you take action? My role as a sales consultant is to help you to make happen the things you haven't been able to make happen on your own—perhaps due to overwhelm! SSE

Lenann McGookey Gardner is a past #1 sales rep at Xerox, speaker, sales coach and author of Got Sales?, nominated for best sales book of the year. Visit www.YouCanSell.com.

ACTION: Counter these 10 sales killers.

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Leadership Excellence
1806 N. 1120 W.
Provo, UT 84604
1-877-250-1983
1-801-375-4060

Sales & Service Excellence:

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