



Special Report

Essential Selling Skills

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Everyone is in sales. What does this mean? In order for an organization to meet continued success, sales must occur and occur continuously. Generally, a company's sales professionals are responsible for sales campaigns, customer purchases, and for keeping the revenue flowing into company coffers. This is a tall order, one that is most effectively fulfilled with the help of a supporting sales culture.

A sales culture is one in which everyone in the organization understands the sales workflow, sales objectives and goals, what prompts a potential customer to buy, and how he can contribute to the close of that sale. Everything that each organizational member does is done with an understanding of how that work touches the customer. The line of sight is always present and hopefully impacts each person's individual work so that it is done in the context of the customer's needs. A sales culture is customer-centric. Everyone, including the sales professionals, works with the customer in mind. This mindset becomes the pattern and fabric of the organization. It is how things get done. Everything that everyone does touches the customer, hopefully in a positive way. A sales culture ensures that this is the case.

With the creation of this sales culture, the job of sales is not left to the sales professionals alone. Your sales professionals are supported and enabled by others in the organization. Further, it is the sales professionals who have the responsibility of creating the sales culture environment for others in the organization. Since the sales professional is the official company representative to the customer and also part of the organization, it is most logical for the sales professional to use his essential sales skills to lead the development of a sales culture for everyone else in the organization. He is in a position to communicate to the customer and from the customer when people need better understanding of customer needs. He also has a well developed set of skills to help him in this endeavor.

In today's complex times, the sales professional cannot meet all customer needs for information, customization, or general support. The sales culture engages and empowers all organizational members to contribute their expertise to the sales campaign.

Therefore, it makes sense to explore these all-important essential sales skills. This paper is focused on identifying and discussing in detail the essential sales skills in four different areas: personal, relational, professional business, and return on investment. Sales professionals must master an

essential set of sales skills in order to build lasting relationships with customers and to close sales. They also use these skills to build the sales culture that is so critical to today's complex and turbulent environment.

Essential Selling Skills Development

Developing essential sales skills is a joint responsibility. It rests with the sales leaders and with the sales professionals.

It is essential that the sales leaders in an organization make sure that all sales professionals have solid development plans and opportunities for maximizing their ability to lead effective sales campaigns.

Sales leaders must coach, evaluate, and mentor sales professionals to enable them to develop and use these essential skills. When sales professionals are competent with these skills, they can then use them to lead effective sales campaigns within the sales culture that they are charged to create.

Sales leaders must understand this responsibility and ensure that sales professionals are prepared to be accountable for reaching sales objectives and goals, as well as to build a sales culture that will prepare organizational members to contribute to necessary sales campaign initiatives as is relevant to each of their areas of expertise.

When sales professionals are prepared as such, they can prepare others in the organization to perform accordingly. They will model these behaviors to create the necessary sales culture environment. This ultimately provides a customer-centric focus, clarity on connections to the customer, and bottom-line results being targeted. It shows organizational members what they must do to contribute their expertise to the sales campaign and for what result.

This approach essentially empowers everyone in the organization to impact a customer and a sale. Support for the sales professionals is critical in today's complexity. Everyone is in sales and so everyone must be prepared accordingly.

Essential Selling Skills

Essential sales skills progress from an individual focus to a more general and external focus, and finally to a strategic focus. They are skills that engage, empower, and enable organizations to communicate common direction, objectives, and goals, collaborate on work towards those goals, and build innovation and sustainability into the daily routine.

What separates the successful salesperson from the other members of the sales community? Ask a dozen salespeople and you'll most likely get back two dozen different responses. Is it the ability to create great leads that makes you successful, or is it a winning personality? If you're looking at things like charm or the size of client lists, you're barking up the wrong tree. Look at the basics – the simple stuff that sales professionals overlook from time to time. Things like the ability to listen carefully, respond correctly, and approach clients not as a sale but as people you want to know and help solve problems. These are the things to focus on in order to bring more value and visibility to your career. While they are common sense, these methods are often the first ones we forget to use.

These skills are those of highly successful salespeople, who repeatedly create their own success, have tangible and visible traits that fall into the main categories: personal, relational, professional business, and return on investment.

A brief description of these skills follows:

- Personal skills ensure that the sales professional is assured and competent in his own skills and self-awareness.
- Relational skills ensure that personal skills can be used in collaborative scenarios to build trusting and positive relationships with others, customers as well as fellow employees.
- Professional business skills encompass all elements of business planning, objective setting, goal definition, metric, and measurement of achievements toward goals.
- Return on investment skills combine the use of all other skills to enable sales professionals to maximize sales culture environments and activities for new value creation. This would include innovation, new

product and service development, and sustainment of long term customer relationships.

When sales professionals can competently use all of these skills, they build trusting and business-focused relationships with customers. They can then use these same skills to help their colleagues develop and contribute to the sales culture environment. This environment empowers everyone in the organization. How could all of those heads not be better than the limited group of sales professionals?

The result of building competency in these essential skills is that everyone in the organization understands the customers, all work is customer-centric, and the enterprise is healthy and sustained as long as it is being supported by all of its members. When each customer and sale is supported by a team of experts working together towards the commonly understood goal, how could satisfaction not prevail?

Personal Selling Skills

Personal skills define who we are as individuals. These qualities are prerequisites to the other skills, as they allow sales people to progress to develop the relational skills that are the most critical to developing a sales culture and affecting successful sales campaigns.

Innate desire to sell



To be a great sales professional, you must want to sell. The best salespeople love to sell and it is evident to everyone around them, especially their customers. On the other hand, there are sales people who sell because it serves a purpose or they are in some sort of career transition. People know when you don't love what you do, and they'll be less likely to buy from you. Do you love to sell?



Passion

You have to be passionate about your work and the product that you sell. You must feel very strongly about it in order to be successful. You can have the innate desire to sell, but not the passion. Passion is genuine enthusiasm that drives the desire to sell. Passion is palpable, and it can be seen and felt by colleagues, customers, and prospects. Lack of passion looks like a lack of interest in earning business. Many sales close because customers are caught

up and energized in the salesperson's passion.

Energy



When sales are lagging or customer lists aren't producing, do you have enough energy to continue? While it is not definitive that a high energy level will guarantee sales success, we do know that low energy will not lead to success. High energy means that you bring the right energy and intensity to work with you and try to instill it in those around you. Energy is part of how you are wired, and success for the sales professional demands it.

Self-motivation



Great sales people are self-motivated and close business. They make things happen, proactively handling obstacles, while they keep pressing forward toward the goal. There is no other way to be successful. You must also know what actually motivates you. There may not be one right answer, but knowing what drives you is important to create success. If you know why you are in sales, you become energetic and passionate, and you begin to display other characteristics of a good salesperson. When passionate about yourself, you extend that passion to your work. This is reflected in the value that you convey to your customers.

Integrity



The best sales professionals are honest. They are punctual, dependable, reliable, respectful, and caring. It is never a good idea to tamper with your credibility. It is important to always make sure that you do what you say, say what you do, and be completely honest with your customers. You get one chance to build credibility towards sales success. Always be ready to acknowledge mistakes and apologize without blaming others.

Relational Selling Skills

Relational skills define how we handle ourselves as individuals and form relationships with others. These qualities are necessary to understand customers and their needs, as well as those of organizational members as they provide support to sales campaigns as a part of a sales culture.

Humility



Humility is at the heart of lasting sales success. Genuine humility is not faked or insincere. It is a strength of character that creates success. People would rather buy from a person who is modest and real, as opposed to one who is arrogant and overconfident.

Ego Control



Be careful not to be too impressed with your own success. It takes a lot of hard work, time, skills, and a little bit of luck to be a great salesperson. Keep these factors in mind when presenting yourself. Customers sense your concept of yourself. An oversized ego will alienate you from your customer and your co-workers, making it very hard to create a collaborative work environment.

Confidence



Great sales people create success when they are comfortable with their skills and knowledge, while simultaneously understanding their limitations and leveraging their strengths. Confident sales professionals possess a natural comfort in dealing with customers and an ability to converse and interact with ease. Customers like to work with confident and capable sales professionals and will place a higher level of trust in them. Being comfortable with yourself, your company, the products, and knowing how to handle rejection creates success and boosts your confidence level.

Relationship- building



Customers buy from sales people who they trust. This trust happens as sales people invest time in building a relationship. Closing on a complex sale is due to a relationship of trust and it leads to other sales, as well. Selling is frequently less about products and solutions and more about the relationships and trust that have been established. You must create success through solid relationships and trust. These elements become your support system for tomorrow's sales.

Collaborative

Building great relationships allows you leverage to collaborate and network with your internal team in order to close business. As sales campaigns, opportunities, and products/services become more complex, you must be able to collaborate effectively (often virtually) with



internal and external customers. Collaboration brings leverage to your resources to get a deal closed. It helps you build an effective and motivated virtual team that collectively works together to create success. Influencing people in your organization so that they are willing to support you whenever you need their expertise, even though they are not part of the sales organization, is critical to your success. Using technology to facilitate these relationships and collaborative work is a must in the 21st century. Inclusive, effective networking along with collaborative, open communication will serve you well.

Listening



Customers want to be heard. They do not want to hear the sales person talk more than they do. Customers and prospects have challenges, problems, issues, and pain points that need to be solved and the only way they will be solved is when sales people listen intently, correctly, and with integrity. Let your customers finish their statements for best understanding of their challenges and problems. Keep alert to their needs and don't presume to know how you can solve their challenges with your knowledge, products, and/or services until they have had a full opportunity to describe them. Slow down, take a breath, and listen to the whole scenario. Let them guide you to creating success.

Patience



Patience is essential to let deals develop, mature, and close. Rushing a deal to closure can mean sacrificing business and long-term relationships. Every sales campaign's buying cycle and customer are different. This requires the sales person to be patient, to understand, and to adapt to those specific needs. Great sales campaigns take time. Your customer will not be rushed.

Personal Responsibility

Personal responsibility is the aggregate of all of the above skills. Only you are responsible for your own success. Your image, power, and energy are evident every day. Your treatment of customers is critical to these perceptions and controls your sales karma. Whatever happens is within the sales professionals' domain of



control. If an event occurs that is obviously beyond your domain, such as a bankruptcy or company change, consider the options, and perhaps move on to create success someplace else. You are the creator of your own success.

Professional Selling Skills

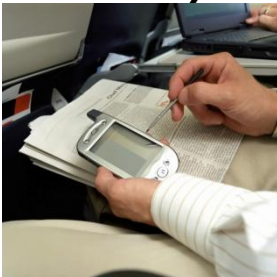
Professional business skills encompass all elements of business planning, objective setting, goal definition, metric, and measurement of achievements towards goals. They take you from building relationships to building relationships for a purpose. You use professional sales skills to help others contribute effectively to business goals and results.

Business Acumen



A great sales person needs to be able to put a business hat on, look at a customer or sales situation, and assess the actual business opportunity. It is important to look at the sales opportunity as a business decision for both the buyer and the seller, in addition to seeing a deal with a commission. An objective view allows you to accurately assess how and when to proceed with a sales campaign. Emotional sales people lose their business “eye” and do not assess situations from all angles. How healthy is your potential customer’s company? Can you create a profitable deal? Will the deal continue to be a good one beyond today’s closure, for both your company and your customer’s company? Listen to your business sense.

Build Your Business Plan and Define Required Activity



Practice your business acumen by developing a business plan. The business plan is one that perceives your sales territory as your own business. It is essential to have a focused and definitive plan to deliver on your business goals. This includes an understanding of the activities that are required to become successful and how to build a robust pipeline. How many calls, proposals, and demos are needed? What developmental activities do you have to perform in order to manage your sales campaign and to open up new accounts? Focus on the metrics, become

metric-driven, and create your own success. A successful plan has activities ongoing. It has goals which you must keep in mind during follow up activities. Organize your efforts to build a scalable and final business plan that says exactly how you will create success.

Competitiveness



Being competitive presumes a degree of awareness of the world around you. Knowing how and why your products and services differ from other providers is key to being able to articulate the unique value of your own.

A good sales professional needs to be able to speak to the customer with this knowledge and understanding. This means knowing what will serve your customer and what the alternatives to your offerings might be. Competitive sales professionals are expert in why and how their products and services are the best choice for the customer. This involves significant homework on your industry, other providers and their offerings, as well as the specific needs, both visible and underlying, of your customer.

Ask for the Order



You have done the work, you've brought the customer to the point where a buying decision can be made, but you haven't closed the deal. Review your approach and progress so far. Have you asked for the order? Have you assessed your customer's needs, knowledge of your products and/or services, and interest level to the point that you and the customer are ready to close the deal? Sometimes asking for the order can happen early in the sales campaign, other times it will take longer to get to this point. If your customer knows your products, and expresses interest, what stops you from asking for the order? Do not delay asking due to fear of a refusal. That refusal may lead you to a better understanding of what your potential customer's unmet need might be. It is often an invitation to seek more information for better understanding. What is motivating your customer to back away from a

commitment? Can you address those needs? Asking for the order can reveal hidden objections and undiscovered challenges. It is a natural part of the sales conversation.

Return on Investment with Essential, Exceptional Selling Skills

Return on investment skills combine the use of all other skills to enable sales professionals to maximize sales culture environments and activities for new value creation. This would include innovation, new product and service development, and sustainment of long term customer relationships. These relationships allow you to partner with your customer, maximizing the value that your customers can acquire from you and the subsequent value you can gain from them.

Intelligence



Sales people are intelligent. They possess people and street smarts. They understand the components of a sales cycle and have the ability to read all the signs during a sales campaign, as well as understand the competition, the industry, and the economy. Intelligence is a vital combination of common sense with a healthy quantity of knowledge that leads to make solid business decisions.

See the Big Picture



Today's sales are exciting, for sure, but are you seeing the opportunities that are six months, a year, or two years down the road? Your customers are not one-time opportunities. Use your business maturity to gauge long-term impact and to view your customers as accounts with future potential. Every customer has a chance to be that star customer who will continue to engage you for products and solutions. Be sure to look beyond the deal at hand. Customers are multiple opportunities and the building blocks of the long-term sales strategy.

Become a Thought Leader

Be sure to know what is going on in your industry and larger environment. Become the "go-to" person for knowledge and information. Sales professionals



are people who acquire a reputation for being a thought leader. You should be able to talk intelligently with customers about the products and/or services that your company provides, what is going on in the industry, and be able to give a worthwhile opinion. You must sell with a perspective of your industry. Be able to talk intelligently about where your customer's industry is going, about internet developments and chances that are likely to occur. Thought leaders create value in their relationships and long-term success with their knowledge of the industry and its environmental nuances.

***Desire to Educate
Your Customers***



You are in a position to educate your customer and prospects about your products, concepts, services, and the markets around them. You must create a compelling story and compelling reason for them to buy. Not every prospect or customer necessarily understands what you do, so educating with patience, courtesy, and respect creates success. Speaking to your customers and prospects at their level of understanding is a powerful step to building strong and solid relationships.

***Commitment to
Career Learning***



You have never learned it all! Always be open, willing, and able to learn new things, develop new skills, and volunteer to teach peers by sharing your experiences. Customers, as well as other sources, have much to offer by continuing your career learning. It is most important for sales professionals to continue their education, perhaps even more important than in other fields that also require continuing education. It is a 360 degree process; you learn and you give back. Share with peers what you have learned and be open to what you find new and interesting. This commitment of a sales professional also lends strength to the industry as well, since learning is key to continued development and growth for individuals but also for their organizations and areas of expertise. Expert sales

professionals are key to that growth.

Create Your Own Success

It should now be apparent to sales leaders and sales professionals that you must create your own success. The simple check list of essential skills, when mastered, will yield exceptional results. The skill areas build on each other and are incremental in their value to creating a successful sales professional. When sales leaders understand this concept, they can make it their business to ensure that there is a systematic process in place for sales professionals to embrace and master these skills. They will be sure to meet expected results of closing more business.

Perhaps you possess other traits that have helped you in your sales career. If so, use them. Nevertheless, recognize the importance of the most basic set of traits presented in this paper. It all really comes down to respect for yourself and for your customers, and in the time-honored systematic process of selling.

Respect Yourself

You are the essence of your sales success. Respecting the time you spend in developing your skills, your business plan, and sales success is critical to feeling good about yourself and your efforts. You work very hard to understand your customers and their needs in order to ultimately close sales. Give yourself credit and leverage all of your energies to propel you and your sales successes further.

Respect Your Customers

Your customers are your greatest source of success, as they can build a vast continuum of sales and career experiences for you. They can help you understand their needs, which is fundamental to innovation within your company. Lifelong relationships of trust can contribute exponentially to your company's sustainability. When your customers are your partners, you have a significant competitive advantage. You have the assurance that they will continue to be customers and help you sustain your business - this is in your best interest and in theirs simultaneously.

Respect the Selling Process

The process of selling is not new. It is a system into which you should invest time in order to learn and master it. It is incremental and systematic in its path to value. If enabled and followed expertly, you will not fail as a

sales professional. Distinct steps and milestone performance markers make it a sure formula for success. It is the ability to use the process of selling effectively that determines your own success. When you understand and use the process effectively, you cannot help but make your own success.

In Conclusion

Everyone is in sales. Helping all members of your organization understand your sales campaigns and use essential selling skills will propel your organization to the highest of performance levels. You are the guiding force that engages, empowers, and enables all of the organization stakeholders to contribute effectively to your sales campaigns.

Recognize your need for skills and those of your supporting team members, fulfill those needs, and enjoy sales success. Everyone needs essential, exceptional selling skills to execute individual roles. You, as a sales professional, have a responsibility to share your wealth of essential, exceptional selling skills.

Good selling!

About Todd Cohen



Todd Cohen works with sales leaders who want to create a sales culture so that more sales happen. Since 1984, Todd has coached and led sales teams to deliver more than \$500 million in revenue for leading companies including Xerox, Gartner Group, Pensare, Thomson-Reuters, and LexisNexis.

Todd, who has developed a natural presence in the field of building sales culture, inspires, advises, and builds high-performance sales teams that produce outstanding results. He provides strategic oversight for teams and serves as executive sales coach and advisor to clients ranging from small, rapidly growing start-ups to well-established, large corporations.

Todd is a passionate networker and connector of sales professionals, entrepreneurs, and executives in transition. He is a professional member of the National Speakers Association, and a board member of the NSA Philadelphia chapter, and he serves as chair of the Sales and Marketing group of the Greater Philadelphia Senior Executives Group. Todd, an occasional contributor to the Philadelphia Business Journal, is the founder of The Innovators Club, a networking organization dedicated to advancing technology and entrepreneurship. He is co-founder of LinkedIn Live Philly, a networking group for members of LinkedIn to advance their professional networking skills, and also helps professionals in career transition. Todd has been active in the American Cancer Society as well as several other charitable organizations. Todd holds a Bachelors Degree in Business Administration from Temple University. He is a frequent speaker at sales conferences and national association meetings and hosts his own radio show "Let's Talk Sales Culture." His book on sales culture "Never Sell Alone" was released in 2010.