

Why Sales Fail

Four problems and a bundle of solutions. By Simon Young.



Salespeople may be born or made, but one thing's for sure – they all need training. Some of New Zealand's top sales trainers share tips about the problems salespeople face and how to overcome them.

1 Yeah, Yeah, I Know By far the most common problem we heard from trainers is a failure to ask enough questions. Big marks off if this is your weakness. "Salespeople need to understand the customer's business more than ever before," says author, trainer and speaker Richard Gee.

According to fellow sales guru Eugene Moreau salespeople are just great at getting in there and telling prospects how good they and their products are.

When it comes to the listening and empathy stuff they're not so hot. Moreau sometimes reads 13 pages of a proposal until he finds the bit about the customer's needs. By then it's too late.

"It's a cliché, but people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

Smart salespeople focus on uncovering a problem. "If I can understand what your problem is and its depth and impact I can provide you with a solution," reasons Moreau.

And watch out for the busyness trap. "Salespeople knocking on doors every day can get caught up in the rhythm of movement," says Moreau. "Then they

don't really achieve a lot of momentum because they don't tap into the problem their customer is facing.

"Every customer has a different problem; no two problems are the same because they have different impacts."

Fiona Daysh, area manager Wellington for Dale Carnegie, sees sales reps presenting their product far too soon in a process. "Relate it to when you go to the doctor. He/she has to ask you questions to find out what's wrong with you.

"People should know more about their clients possibly than they know about their product. That will give them the real edge."

Rogen md Rosemary Hume reckons salespeople are sometimes simply asking the wrong questions. "For example, probing on a rational reason when the real reason is emotional, political or cultural."

Hume also stresses the importance of understanding all the different levels of decision-making involved, particularly in b2b sales.

2 The Personality Clash Sometimes sales meetings don't work because the seller and buyer have different personality types. And although it sounds like a trivial reason for a sale to fail, it turns out we make a lot of decisions based on how we feel about something.

"People buy on emotion and justify on

logic," says Moreau. "If they can't connect with you it's unlikely they'll go in your direction."

Is this an insurmountable problem? It all depends on your attitude. If salespeople can learn to be flexible and

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creative and adapt to individuals, they should be fine, says Hume.

"Don't see sales as a step-by-step process," she recommends. "You need to be flexible and creative. It's about gaining rapport with all decision-makers, and 'presentation' can take place at any time during the discussion – or not at all."

3 The On-The-Fly Trap Gee sees many sales reps stuff up because they don't plan every aspect of the sales process.

It needs to be deliberate, and self-management is the key, according to David Forman trainer Roger McGill.

"The self-management process means being really clear in your own mind about what your objectives are, and be-

ing clear that you're fulfilling a professional role."

4 I'm So Shy What's one of the most common phrases uttered in client training? Sadly, it's "What if they say no?"

"In New Zealand nobody likes to be hassled," says Gee. "If you try to pressure someone, of course they're not going to buy – it's not the New Zealand way – they need to trust you."

Auckland regional manager of Champagne Consultants, Ann Mowbray, says salespeople are often reluctant to self-promote, partly because of Kiwi bashfulness, and partly because for some "there's still the old stereotype of what salespeople are".

Too right, says Rosemary Hume. "Many people have a block. In the past they might have been on the receiving end of someone trying to sell to them and they've been pressured to buy. They bring in these past experiences about what selling is, which is therefore a block for them when they have to sell."

The resultant call reluctance often comes back to a simple fear of rejection. The proof's evident at training sessions.

McGill acknowledges that learning how to deal with objections comes only with time. "It's important for salespeople to be able to classify objections and know whether the words being used are actually what the resistance is about," he says.

"Having learned that, they have to be able to deal with resistance which is being raised falsely."

Mostly, then it's a case of helping a buyer want to do something about the need that they are aware of. The short answer to this particular conundrum: learn how to create want.

All Is Not Lost Daysh compares selling to being in a sports team: "If they don't have a crowd behind them, they don't have the support. Having to be your own cheerleader and support team can be quite lonely. The fear factor and confidence issue makes it so difficult."

Or check out Champagne Consultants'

yardstick formula: performance = (knowledge + skills) x attitude x direction x opportunity.

Training imparts the knowledge and skills and influences attitudes, says Mowbray. But direction and opportunity come back to management structure and support.

Richard Gee says marketers should spend time with their sales reps. "Go out

“ The short answer to this particular conundrum: learn how to create want. ”

with them, visit customers, sit back and listen and see how your wonderful sales promotional material is being used. Hear what customers are actually saying."

Eugene Moreau says strategic marketing means identifying a problem in the market and then telling everyone that

Really Useful Stuff

Trainers' Websites

David Forman www.davidforman.co.nz

Detailed course information, including suggested paths for different positions.

Dale Carnegie www.dalecarnegie.com

Information on training, and helpful interactive forums on sales, customer service, teams, presentation and leadership challenges.

Rogen www.rogenint.com

Training information, case studies, even speeches and critiques.

Champagne Consultants www.ccltraining.co.nz

Information on training courses, and the Business Game.

Richard P Gee Consultants www.geewiz.co.nz

Information on Richard Gee's books, training and seminars plus free articles.

Moreau Group www.moreau.co.nz

Information on the Moreau Group's services, plus a free e-book on public speaking.

Sales Coaching.net www.salescoaching.net

Sales coaching by email. You have to email to find out more.

NZIM www.nzim.net.nz

Courses on strategic prospecting, consultative selling and selling through service.

Auckland University Short Courses www.shortcourses.ac.nz

One- and two-day courses.

E-Newsletters/Resource Websites

Sales Tips for Selling Success: Ron S LaVine www.intellworks.com

SalesDog.com www.salesdog.com

Zig Ziglar Newsletter newsletter.zigziglar.com

Let's Get Real Newsletter <http://www.franklincovey.com/letsgetreal/>

JustSell.com www.justsell.com

Psychotactics.com www.psychotactics.com

JustSales.com www.justsales.com

MarketingProfs.com www.marketingprofs.com

Executive Speaker <http://www.executive-speaker.com/>

Direct Your Mind www.directyourmind.com

Leadership Journal www.leadershipjournal.net

Books

"The Pitch Doctor" – Neil Flett

"Psychology of Sales Call Reluctance" – George W Dudley & Shannon L Goodson

"The One Minute Sales Person" – Spencer Johnson, MD, & Larry Wilson

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you've just solved this problem. "Give customers a reason to want to meet with your people."

Gee also says marketers can strive to coordinate marketing and promotional efforts with sales call cycles. "For exam-

**“Motivation is like
a shower; if you
don't have it, people
complain.”**

ple, you have a new product to release. If you examine the call cycles of the sales team you'd find that in the week you're launching a new product to your 'A' list customers, they're going to be calling on their secondary customers." The two departments need to work in sync.

Hume says it's important to summarise and conclude your message when presenting marketing goals or new product information. Don't just dump information. Salespeople are trained to be people of action, so it's pointless to give them information without an action point.

Meanwhile, bear in mind that most sales training is about relationship skills rather than sales tactics.

Over the past 10 years Stephan


Goodburn, OneSource national sales manager for the Cogent division, has seen an increasing shift towards salespeople taking a long-term approach towards their careers.

And because we're always learning, training needs to be an ongoing process. Hume says a behaviour must be repeated 27 times to become a habit – good or bad.

While there are many generic courses available for initial sales training, every-one we spoke with recommended tailor-made courses (inhouse or one-on-one) or mentors and coaches (who prepare and attend a pitch with your salesperson) as sales careers develop.

Moreau adds that training needs to go past mere sales tactics. "Train your people to understand what's going on in the marketplace, why people are buying and why they're not."

Above all, help your salespeople to see themselves as professionals.

Salespeople who are involved and appreciated will be motivated to do well. As Fiona Daysh puts it, "Motivation is like a shower; if you don't have it, people complain." 

Simon Young is the man behind Simon Young Writers and voices a few opinions of his own on sales and other matters in his regular missive Communicate! www.simonyoung.co.nz/newsletter.shtml

Then It Turned To Custard

"I accompanied a sales rep on a sales call. The client told the rep clearly what they wanted but the rep didn't write it down. When we came out of the meeting I asked, 'What happened? What did they ask for?' and the rep couldn't answer me."

Author, speaker and trainer Richard Gee

"Many years ago I was working on a very large deal with a six-month sales cycle and I did not qualify who I was talking to. I got this person to a decision and he said, 'that's great. The next stage is to go and talk to my boss'."

Stephan Goodburn, national sales manager – Cogent division, OneSource

"I met a real estate agent and in 10 minutes I knew how successful he'd been, how many homes he'd sold... I even knew how much money he earned. In 40 minutes he hadn't asked one question about me. He made huge assumptions. I use him a lot to relate the danger of not connecting with your customer. He was full of himself."

Fiona Daysh, area manager Wellington, Dale Carnegie

"The thing I find horrible is salespeople who aren't given development opportunities. They don't know what they're doing and why they're doing it, even though many of them have sincere intentions and good products."

Roger McGill, trainer, David Forman