

AHERN ADVISORY

How to Become an Effective Sales Person

Over the last several years I have written numerous articles on:

- How to increase sales in the trucking industry.
- How to set specific goals and objectives for sales people to achieve.
- I've provided the characteristics of what makes a good sales person, and;
- I've stated that successful sales people are people that are:
 1. Focused.
 2. Constantly energized.
 3. Organized, and;
 4. Always prepared.

A good sales person doesn't fall in a singular selling pattern. Last year I wrote a 9- part series on how to develop a successful sales program, and I indicated that in order for sales people to be successful;

- They need to be prepared.
- Focused.
- Consistent.
- Persistent, and;
- They can't find excuses and blame somebody else for their lack of achievement.

In order to be successful a sales person needs to be;

1. Enthusiastic.
2. They need to create excitement;
3. They need to understand that people buy only when they can't fill their own needs with their resources at hand, and;
4. A sales person must be an effective listener.

When a sales person approaches a prospect with a potential "fix to a problem" there is no appreciation for what a prospect must deal with in order to change how he/she is currently handling their problem.

In other words, the first thing a sales person needs to do is focus on the "buying" process. When I am modifying behavioral patterns of sales people, I have noted that the reason many are not successful is because;

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- They try to tell prospects what they should do, and;
- They don't recognize that when you try to tell a prospect what they should do there's a very good chance that they are not going to do it.

When you threaten a prospect with dire consequences, they normally fail to act, and they often "dig in their heels". The secret to a successful sales person is, the prospect, believes it's their decision.

Recognize that, before a prospect will consider buying he/she must first;

1. Recognize there is something missing.
2. They must verbalize it, visualize it or in some other way understand the steps needed to get to a solution.
3. They need to explore all possible ways to solve their problem, and;
4. They need to understand there is going to be a certain amount of disruption in the process.

It's important for sales people to understand that people don't like change. When a sales person assumes that people will buy, because he/she creates or finds a need and presents a case for the service, that is the beginning to the end; because for all practical purpose that sales person is not addressing the real issue. Finding the need and solving the problem of whatever the Buyer is looking for.

A successful sales person needs to create a "wish" list.

- A sales person needs to probe.
- They need to uncover the undiscovered problems, which are accidents waiting to happen.

Rarely is a prospect totally happy in their present situation and not willing to look at improving it in some way, but yet we never ask the magic question. "Are there any conditions under which you would consider supplementing your current service with an additional resource?"

I deal with this in my practice every day. For example; recently I received a telephone call from a freight broker.

- The freight broker indicated their revenues were between \$20MM-\$50MM.
- They indicated that they had received several offers, over the last year, through a business broker, but they turned all of them down; I asked; why?

The Seller thought for a minute and said, "It didn't reach my expectations", and I asked "what are your expectations?" and the comment was "I don't know".

How can you expect to sell a business if;

1. A seller is not properly prepared? And/or;
2. The Seller is not sure of what they want to accomplish;

When I did some additional probing, the individual indicated that;

- I am now "ready to let go", but;
 - I don't know what the pricing perimeters should be for a company my size.
1. I provided the prospect with several alternatives.
 2. I provided Ahern's cost to provide such analysis, and;
 3. I provided the benefits for utilizing Ahern's services.

I then indicated that;

- “It’s your business.”
- “You have to do what you feel comfortable with”, and;
- Once I forward an email, it is up to you to make a decision, whether you want to utilize our services or not.

In other words, you want to get the prospect to think. You want to get the prospect to consider whether they are ready to let go or not, and you want the prospect to feel comfortable with you. At the same time, you have to be very careful, in the sales process, that you don’t let someone take advantage of you, and it happens in every business, in every company, including mine.

Recently, Ahern /Benesch held their annual transportation conference;

- The attendance was outstanding,
- We received a lot of positive response, and afterwards;
- I received a telephone call from a potential Seller indicating, I would like Ahern to provide me with a “free” analysis of the potential selling price of my company, and;
- At the same time the Seller indicated, they were thinking of utilizing a business broker to market their business.

I explained to them that, whoever they feel comfortable with, that’s who they should chose, but then the business broker should provide the analysis. Their comment was;

- “You’ve sold more businesses in the trucking industry”.
- You have a good reputation in the industry, and;
- Therefore, we want you to do it, but we don’t want to pay you! “We want it for free”.

That is not a valid prospect. When that happens you need to politely explain that you are a business just like every other business and move on to the next prospect.

My point; you need to be able to;

1. “Listen” to the objectives of a potential client, and;
2. Respond to their objectives.

Threatening them or providing a “dooms day outlook” doesn’t get them, or you, where you want to go. On the other hand, if you in fact know that they have some challenges, then it’s up to you to show them how to solve their challenges, and let them know what it’s going to do for them, not you.

A successful sales person is an individual that has will, dedication, persistence, honesty, ethics, is positive, enthusiastic, fun, healthy, an effective listener, and an individual that likes to learn new things and someone that can provide encouragement to others.

In this economy, your selling process should have changed dramatically from the way in which you used to approach prospects previously.

- We are in a social dilemma.
- The enthusiasm level of our country is at an all-time low.
- Many people are feeling sorry for themselves, and;
- You have to constantly remind people that if they are still in business today, they are a success not a failure.

Granted, they may be suffering cash flow problems. Grant it the bank may be tightening their spending habits, and shippers may be making lives difficult; but at the end of the day they have survived, and that in itself is a testament to their ability.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK: **“Good judgment comes from experience. Experience comes from bad judgment”** (Jim Horning)