

Tough times? 4 really practical things you can do this week to get your sales moving

Unless you're resting in some unusually cosy comfort zone, you probably need to get sales moving. And the chances are, you're about to make these classic mistakes: do more "marketing"; send out "an email"; do some training; make more calls. They won't work, or at least not on their own. If it were that simple, the email it took four people and two weeks to organise and that produced at best, two complaints, would have done it for you at this stage. No. Getting sales moving requires a plan that's a bit more ambitious and process-driven.

1. Start with the truth

Most sales operations – and managers – are looking at the wrong "sales" data. They are looking at the *end* result instead of the numbers – and ratios – that get you there. **The first thing you need to do is to change the way people report their progress.** Get them to show – very clearly – what they have *going on* at these critical stages ON THE WAY to making the sales.

Stage 1 Opportunities	Stage 2 In Discussion	Stage 3 About to Close	Stage 4 Closes
Opportunity 1 Opportunity 2 Opportunity 3 Opportunity 4 Opportunity 5 Opportunity 6 Opportunity 7 Opportunity 8 Opportunity 9	Prospect 10 Prospect 11 Prospect 12 Prospect 13 Prospect 14 Prospect 15 Prospect 16	Prospect 17 Prospect 18 Prospect 19 Prospect 20	Customer 21 Everyone measures this stage. Tracking the other 3 stages is what gives you some control over outcomes and forecasts.

All over the world, we find that effective salespeople – who can guarantee target – have an "inventory" of between 15 and 20 active prospects in stages 1 to 3. There *are* numbers! If your salespeople can start using this view of what they have going on, they will start to self-check and self-manage.

2. Apply this one, tough, unforgiving rule

The above process will not work unless you apply this rule: you can include only those prospects that have given you a date and time to meet (or talk) again. **No date. No prospect.** And no amount of explanation, bluffing, rambling or pronouncing will make up for not having a prospect who has agreed a date with you. Ask your salespeople this: "*In how many diaries does your name appear this morning?*" If it's not between 15 and 20, the chances are the targets will not be met and those "forecasts" will remain just guesses, with odds of about one in a million!

By the way, step 1 won't work, if you don't – rigorously – apply step 2. You may well have a pipeline system that is not unlike the above, but it's more than likely full of date-less – and therefore useless and dead – prospects.

3. Get "Monday Morning" right

"Monday Morning" sales meetings are usually torture – and pointless. They run on vague conversation, vague answers and avoidance behaviour. "*It was an OK week*". "*You can feel the recession biting. Things are tight*". All English for "*don't expect much from me. See how tough it is*". You have to draw a line here.

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Start asking hard questions. Start looking for date – driven prospects. Ask about numbers. Ask about timelines. Ask these questions:

- How many appointments did you set last week? Why that number? Will it be enough?
- When are you going back to see that prospect? Is the time and date set?
- Leaving aside the fact they're "interested", who's likely to say "no" to this deal?
- When you call that prospect right after this meeting, what will be your opening sentence?
- If that deal doesn't come in, what have you to replace it?
- How much of your diary is already booked up for the next 2 weeks?

The Monday Morning meeting should last all of 30-40 minutes. Look at the pipelines. Ask the questions. Get immediate action. Incite your salespeople a little. Push their "hot" prospects back to "zero". Watch for the reactions. When they (re)act positively, it's called "selling".

4. Get People to Plan their Sales Meetings (just before they meet the prospect)

A lot of salespeople wing their sales meetings. They jump out of the car, head straight into a meeting, ask a few questions, suggest a "solution" and wait for "yes". Unless you have proof they planned the meeting – in writing – they probably haven't. So, get them a planning booklet and get them to **write down 4-6 opening questions for each and every meeting**. It will transform their own performance with the result that prospects will start to open up and trust them. This is so simple to do, it should be done tomorrow.

Ask your salespeople this: *In how many calendars does your name appear this morning?* If it's not between 15 and 20, the chances are that the target will not be met and those "forecasts" are just guesses, with odds of about one in a million!

Is this all a bit "big brother"?

It's called a sales process. Process and selling have never made good bedfellows, because it's not in our emotional interest to be too visible or even truthful. But, as the manager or owner, your job is to manage sales performance and that requires rules, numbers and processes. It's your duty to protect income and therefore you must be able to see **how people are planning to hit their target**. Don't apologise for your own job description, which is what happens to a lot of talented and over-worked sales managers. If some people on your team prefer their personal "style" over visibility, you'll have to call it.

What about personality, style, trust, talent, experience?

That's what most sales operations run on now. That way the manager is kept in the dark and so are the salespeople. Get a process in place. Teach people to work from the end figure back. Get them to see what they need to do to hit a target, not who they need to be. They are who they are. You can't change them. But, you can get them to spend their time better and improve their approach. You'll end up with a far more engaged team, where there is company-wide respect for sales and selling and where the best salespeople make a point of upholding the standards of reporting, planning and activity.

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