

Secrets of Top Sellers

Revealed

A hard look at the hard sell

Selling is tough—there's no doubt about it. Customers demand more at the same time their loyalty is plummeting. Cut-throat competitors seem willing to give things away just to get the business. Even setting up meetings with new prospects can be a major ordeal. Busy decision-makers don't want to waste their time with product-pushing peddlers.

There are many reasons why you can't sell today; I've heard them all. Yet some sellers are having their best year ever. They're not smarter and their products and services aren't superior. They simply look at things from a different perspective.

Here are some ways to be like the "best of the best."

Be Personally Accountable

Successful salespeople refuse to blame the economy, competitors, marketing, pricing or even customers for poor sales. These are merely obstacles that must be overcome. They accept personal responsibility for both their fails and sales, and believe they can impact their future results—a simple concept with far-reaching benefits.

When faced with difficult situations, average sellers bemoan their miserable fate and instead blame others. They expect management to fix the problem, they question their marketing department's actions, they want lowered sales quotas due to an unsteady economy, they want to be offered "good" training and they wonder when customers will stop being so demanding.



Have you made similar comments during a dip in your sales revenues? If so, this type of attitude only ends up deflecting the blame on others. If they do something different, then you can be successful. This, in turn, puts you into victim mode—you're stuck in a lousy situation over which you have no control.

Top sellers, on the other hand, take a different approach. For example, they will ask questions, including:

- What new skills do I need to learn to be more successful?
- What can I do to help marketing realize I need different tools to sell more?

• How can I use my customers' demands to solidify our relationship?

Despite financial roadblocks, they come up with ways to tout the long-term values of their products to customers and they use their clients' demands to solidify their relationships.

This type of self-examination stimulates thinking. You'll be amazed at how many new ideas happen through this approach. Once your brain kicks into gear, connections can be made with other strategies previously used to overcome similar problems.

Say: "I Will," not: "I'll Try"

This may sound too easy, but sometimes simple is key. In these turbulent times, your past efforts may not work as well. Acknowledge this and make an "I will" commitment to change. Losing weight is a great example. Shedding a few or many pounds often requires abandoning your comfort zone (e.g., counting calories and fat and exercising on a regular basis). If you're like most people, you lost some weight initially but eventually returned to your old ways and your larger clothing size.

The same thing happens in selling. Many sales professionals know new ways of selling are needed. They try new strategies or tactics they've heard worked for others. But on the first attempt, they're often miserably uncomfortable and feel like a novice again. When immediate results aren't forthcoming, they quickly revert to their comfort zone convinced the new techniques don't work—at least for their customers.

Top salespeople resign themselves to figuring out a way to succeed in today's crazy market. When they try new behaviors, they feel the same discomfort but accept it as a natural consequence of learning. They practice until they've mastered the new skill. If the desired results still don't come, these top sellers continue searching for knowledge and skills that lead them to success.

Take Action

Last, but not least, top sellers don't just come up with a bunch of ideas; they act on them. If they feel their selling skills need to be enhanced, they sign up for workshops. And if their company won't cover the expense, they start their own tabs. If customers don't value their products, they try different approaches until they find one that works. If a customer's service problems affect future sales, they do what it takes to resolve them. If better sales tools are needed, they work with marketing to develop them.

If top sellers are stymied by a sales situation, they get help from a variety of resources. They brainstorm with colleagues. They seek their boss' advice. They call internal or external consultants who might have valuable insights. They enlist corporate leaders to make high-level sales calls. They explore new ways of working with business partners.

Sure, everything isn't always rosy for top sellers. They occasionally like to blow off steam, too. But, they don't wallow in self-pity. Quickly after they complain, they begin to look at themselves and how they can take action to make things better. Meanwhile, their less successful counterparts are still on the phone playing the "Ain't it Awful?" game.

To get started on this process, analyze a sale you've recently lost. Ask yourself what could have been done differently to increase the likelihood of success? Dissect your sale in detail to identify where mistakes may have been made, steps omitted, the process rushed or important information overlooked. This doesn't have to be done alone. Your colleagues can provide valuable insight based on their unique perspective.

Write down all your thoughts, ideas or suggestions on paper. Then analyze the list, separating symptoms from root causes. Try to determine where changes in tactics or strategies could have impacted sales success.

Finally, commit to growing from this valuable learning experience and take action. Perhaps you need to strengthen your presentation skills—get a book, watch a peer or role-play with your manager. Perhaps a better grasp of a customer need is required—write down questions to ask for tomorrow's sales call. Call on higher-level decision makers—do it now on an in-process sale.

No one can make you do things differently; the decision to change is yours alone. However, to be a top seller, you must commit to personal accountability for your success and act on it. There aren't any shortcuts or quick fixes. It's a life-long process of growth and development. But if you make this commitment, you will be a top seller—maybe not overnight, but over time. Results are guaranteed.

BY JILL KONRATH

*Jill Konrath, author of *Selling to Big Companies*, is a recognized sales strategist in the highly competitive business-to-business market. A popular speaker at sales meetings, she helps her clients crack into corporate accounts, speed up their sales cycle and generate demand for their offering. Konrath publishes an industry-leading online newsletter and blog. To subscribe—and get a free Sales Call Planning Guide (\$19.95 value)—visit www.sellingtobigcompanies.com. For information on sales training, call (651) 429-1922.*