

Evaluating your sales process

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Our sales process needs beefing up. We are talking to lots of people, but not getting far enough in the conversation in many cases. We're not closing enough, and we're wasting time, energy and money. When I ask my people what happened with prospects that fell away, they can't answer my question with anything definite. Any suggestions?

Selling is a process. The more you can lay out, test, and implement a process that works, the more confidence you and your staff will have. Using a set of questions that you all agree to ask will help clarify where sales people are having problems. Using standard data to regularly discuss prospects will improve your ability to analyze and improve results.

Start by laying out the process you and your staff go through to get a client. List each stage, and the steps you need to go through in each stage. Start with approach, then initial contact, followed by nurturing the relationship and qualifying needs. End with closing and implementing.

Take a look at each stage in more detail. Define the typical amount of time it takes to go through each step. Look at the questions that typically get asked in each stage. Define what prospects say at each stage that qualify and dis-qualify them as good prospects.

Sound mechanical? To some extent, it is. Keep in mind that the more you can lay out a process that works, the more confidence you and your staff will have when you're out selling. And the clearer you will be about the value of what lies in your sales forecast. The art comes in being able to dance with the process once you and your staff understand what it is.

Here are a set of questions that you and your staff might want to work with. Ultimately, you all want to agree to ask every prospect the same questions in every situation, keeping notes on how they respond.

- Where are you now (with respect to the product or service I sell)?
- What kinds of problems are you having?
- What makes this a good time to explore a solution?
- What is it you'd like to see happen as a result of exploring this?
- What concerns you do you have about seeking a solution?
- What do the issues we discussed cost the company short and long term?
- Where is this on the priority list? What causes it to move up or down?
- How long do you give yourself to fix this problem?
- What happens if you don't fix it?
- What kind of budget do you have to fix this?
- Who is in charge of following through on implementation? Approving funds? Who makes the final decision? Who will use the solutions we devise? May I meet with them to discuss their views?

Agree to a process - a series of questions and steps everyone follows through on. Take notes on each conversation. Track results on which prospects close and which don't, which prospects turn into great clients. This analysis puts you in a better position to define what makes a good prospect for your business. You'll also be able to identify answers and patterns of responses that turn into prospects that don't close, or that turn into duds as clients. The trick is to more quickly recognize prospects that aren't going anywhere, and stop focusing on them. Focus instead on prospects with higher than average likelihood of becoming great clients.

As you begin to dance with your company's script of questions, ask yourself:

- Who closes more than average? Who closes less?
- What are those high- and low-close individuals doing with the script, that's different from the norm?

At this stage, it's attention to details that will lead to results.

Your high close individuals are probably following their instincts. Translating those instincts into process will help you improve the sales results of the rest of your team. The low-close individuals are probably skipping critical steps. Helping

them to learn to follow the process will improve their results. Conversely, finding out if the low close individuals can't follow the process will save you time, money and effort as you cut your losses.

Hold regular meetings to discuss results. Put the process down on paper, create a check sheet that each person uses on every sales call. It will take practice to get everyone in the habit of using the sheets. If you get pushback, explain that you're all in this together, working to improve results so you can all put bread on the table and keep the company moving forward.

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