



20 Top Tips For Sales Professionals

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Let's talk about the negative stuff first. Here are the 10 main reasons why salespeople fail to achieve the success they deserve:

- They have unclear objectives
- They don't have a working sales plan
- They find it hard to prioritise activities
- Prospecting is not given a high enough priority
- They find it hard to deal with assertive buyers
- They don't structure their sales calls and find it hard to be in control
- They don't ask enough questions
- They fail to listen effectively
- They don't close because they worry about rejection
- They avoid negotiation wherever possible and side with the customer

Now the positive stuff:

Most salespeople are actually good at getting on with their customers. They have good social skills and are committed to their own success and that of their organisation.

They want to do well and give their customers great service.

They are nice people doing a difficult job.

Here are some ideas on how to improve sales performance:

1. Begin with a plan. The best salespeople have a personal sales plan that sets out their objectives and sales strategy. We have a template for producing a sales plan which can be used by everyone in sales.
2. Work on your image. Many salespeople don't invest in their appearance and image. How you look and behave is very important. Think about how you want to be seen by your customers. What would you want them to say about you? Appearance is one thing, another is behaviour.
3. Understand selling and buying behaviour. Traditional sales training has been very oriented towards sales techniques, which most people find irritating and non-productive. Most people don't like being sold to, but they like to buy things. We need to understand how our behaviour affects the outcome of a sales call. We also need to be able to sell to different types of buyer. For more information send me an e-mail and I will send you a free questionnaire and our free article on buyer behaviour
4. Work on your personal development. Learn about selling. Read books, attend courses, and look at the internet. The person responsible for your development is you. Don't wait to be given training and development opportunities; seek them out. This is the secret of 'lucky people'. The more I practice the luckier I get.

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5. Make prospecting your priority. Prospecting is the key activity for achieving sales targets. The problem is that when the pressure is on prospecting is the first thing that gets put off. Set aside a regular period of time for prospecting. Put together a plan. Have a mix of prospecting activities: Cold calling, direct mail, personal e-mailing, advertising, referrals, networking, and regular contact with existing customers, and joining business clubs. The key to prospecting is regular, planned activity.
6. Put yourself in the position of the client. If you were one of your customers would you agree to an appointment? Most people spend most of their time thinking about themselves. What's in it for me is the question they ask themselves. Sell the benefits of the appointment. It's no good offering to pop in and see someone because you are in their area. What can you offer that will make them better off as a result of meeting with you?
7. Deal with voicemail. Voicemail is a fact of life we have to deal with. Ring yourself up and leave a voicemail message as if it was being left with a potential customer. You may be horrified with the result. Try writing a voicemail script which contains benefits. Also, do some research on the company so your voicemail is personal and targeted to the individual. The reason I feel it will be useful for us to meet is Sell the benefit of the meeting, rather than the benefits of your product or service.
8. Plan your meetings every time. This means having clear objectives for each meeting. What is the best outcome? If we don't achieve this, what else can I aim for from the meeting? Prepare your list of questions. Anticipate objections. Have all your relevant literature to hand. Finally, think success. If we expect to succeed, or expect to fail, we generally get what we expected.
9. Set an agenda for the meeting. At some point during the meeting you need to confirm what the meeting is all about and your objectives. Ask the client: Is there anything specific they would like to achieve from the meeting? What are their objectives? Explain that you need to ask questions to see if your product or service could be relevant to them. Avoid presenting information too early.
10. Ask more questions. Asking questions is 3 times more persuasive than presenting information. Find out about their role, their organisation, the decision making process, problems, needs, finance, current suppliers and potential competition. Structured questioning works best. Avoid winging it!
11. Listen effectively. Salespeople are notoriously bad listeners. Practice your listening skills. We have some free information on listening with some listening skills exercises.
12. Identify buying criteria. When people make a buying decision there are usually 3 reasons for buying that are really important to them. Try these questions with potential clients. When you take on a new supplier what things are most important to you? What are you looking for from a new supplier? Ask the question several times until you have their full wish list.
13. Keep asking. The most common answer to the above is We are looking for a good service. What does this mean? Ask the question, Can you be more specific? Avoid the temptation to launch into a presentation of your service. Try to find out what they are really looking for. Have they had bad experiences with service in the past?

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14. Make each presentation unique. Every buyer has different reasons for buying. Our role is to find out then convince the buyer that our solution is best. 84% of buying decisions are based on emotion, rather than logic. Just before deciding to buy the buyer is thinking: Am I making a mistake? Phrases like: You don't have to worry. You can be confident. You can be reassured help to make our presentations more effective. For more information send me an e-mail and I will give you a call.

15. Present face to face. Many salespeople have an initial meeting then email, fax, or post a proposal. Presenting face to face is about 5 times more effective. Part of the close for the first meeting is agreement to set up a second meeting to present your proposal.

16. Don't close too early. Many salespeople either close too early, or not at all. Closing is not about sophisticated closing techniques. It is about confidence and timing. A simple direct question works best. Would you like to go ahead?

17. Listen to objections. If a customer raises an objection don't interrupt. Ask questions. Find out the problem. Is it a valid objection, or is the person trying to get rid of you. We all raise false objections at some point, usually because we are not convinced and the salesperson is trying to close too early.

18. Learn to say no. When a customer says you are too expensive, or makes a demand that is going to cost you money, avoid the temptation of agreeing too easily. They are negotiating with you and we need to find out if their request is valid and the consequences to our business. Sometimes we have to say no, but look for alternative solutions that are mutually acceptable.

19. Think like a business person. Before you agree to discount, or give a concession, ask the question: Would I do this if this was my business? Everything bears a cost. If we increase our costs, or reduce revenue our profits suffer. Remember the old saying: Profit is sanity, revenue vanity.

20. Learn to live with rejection. All salespeople face rejection on a regular basis. Get used to it, learn from it, but try not to let it get you down. Work hard, plan your activity and do your best.