

Myths and Truths about the Sales Process

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After years of focusing exclusively on the bottom line, companies are now focusing on their top line. Executives have discovered the advantages of a superior sales force providing steady long-term sales growth. Without sales growth, companies become stagnant, inflexible, crisis-oriented and ultimately – unprofitable.

Yet, after all this interest in the bottom line and sales growth...why are sales not increasing? Or worse, why are sales increasing and profits going down? To understand this, we must examine certain myths about sales and the corresponding truths.

The first **Myth** is that selling is simple and easy. Someone decided that anyone can sell...just get in front of the decision maker and show features and benefits and then close the sale. Interestingly, this method did work until the late 80's, when customers began to reject this process. Sales has become increasingly complex.

The **Truth** is that selling has become a very complex process, requiring a high level of sophistication to coordinate all the strategies for sales success. Sales people are dealing with longer sales cycles, multiple decision makers, fierce and increased competition and more knowledgeable and demanding customers. Successful salespeople demonstrate higher levels of skills in dealing with their customer in this environment.

The second **Myth** is that we can't always find the right people for the sales organization on the first try. This belief ignores both the direct costs of bringing the wrong person "up to speed" and then replacing them, as well as the indirect costs of lost business and dissatisfied customers.

The **Truth** is that the proper effort used on the front end will have the right people doing the right things. Successful sales people can be found using effective selection processes. Organizations using proper hiring methods get better results by increasing sales, improving profitability and reducing turnover.

Another **Myth** concerns the role of enthusiasm in successful selling. In the old school, sales people were taught to be enthusiastic and customers would buy. Today, research has shown that a high percentage of buyers are mistrustful of enthusiastic salespeople. They label them as shallow and self-serving!

Today's **Truth** shows a sales person's self confidence has a more positive impact on both the salesperson and customer. Why? Self confidence is derived from a combination of self-mastery, knowledge, experience and trust in one's own ability. Research shows that buyers have more trust in people who exhibit high levels of self-confidence (not ego!).

The fourth sales process **Myth** is that tricks, methods and techniques should be used to overcome the customer's objections. This will allegedly "close" the order. However, today's customers do not want to be sold anything. They recognize and resent manipulation. They plan to buy value to satisfy their wants and needs. They seek truth rather than clever selling tricks, methods and techniques.

The **Truth** is sales people must understand both the selling process and the buying process to be able to win the trust, confidence and business of their customers. Successful sales people seek to understand the customer's buying process and then align their selling process accordingly.

The next **Myth** is that sales people must be "showing and telling" customers about their product or service. Canned scripted presentations abound. This activity usually leads to a price driven buying decision! Some consider presentation ability to be the key sales success factor. They think that sales people should present their product whenever customer shows even a glimmer of interest.

Today's **Truth** is that sales people must focus first and foremost on the customer. They have to master questioning and listening skills to be successful. Customers demand that you totally understand their unique situation. Customers want salespeople to know the customer's industry and the company's specific issues. This requires sales people to utilize value added selling of customer specific solutions. At the same time this yields the benefit of higher profitability than can be achieved with bidding on a generic open bid package.

The sixth **Myth** is that successful sales people focus upon the product or service being offered! This idea has been amplified by operations oriented management and product managers who are in love with "their baby". We have never seen a product or service sell itself....someone had to differentiate their product or service from the competition's....or demonstrate the superiority of their product or service over the many options open to the customer.

The sixth **Truth** is that to be successful (growing and profitable), the sales process must be focused upon the customer. For customers to buy, they must feel that you are offering the best value, not the best prices....that you understand their issues (not learning at their expense)...and you will be involved for the long-term, not here today and gone tomorrow. Most importantly, they

trust you, they feel that you have their best interest at heart and that you will do what you say you will do!

The final **Myth** is sales people don't need any new training or development. Some believe that experienced sales people already know all about selling. The only thing required is more product knowledge! Why do these organizations find sales results less than expected? Because sales people are focused upon products and not the customer.

The final **Truth** is that sales people need continuous development. The risk of poor selling strategies is a permanent loss of a customer. The excellent salesperson must have skills and knowledge in products, communication, industry norms, and the ability to manage many different customer's personalities.

The understanding of these myths and truths have assisted our customers to successfully increase their bottom lines. The key is learning. A commitment must be made to improve the quality of the sales team. We find that successful companies invest 5-15% of annual payroll in development practices. Join the winners today!

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