

During a negative economy, sales people fall victim to over-extended selling cycles, pricing pressures, and skeptical buyers with little to no time. These frustrating symptoms erode the sales professional's self-esteem and level of expectation for success whenever they engage with prospects and clients, thus impacting the final result of the engagement.

These symptoms cause a vicious cycle--the lower our expectation of success, the worse our results further diminishing expectation and future results. However, understand that these are mere symptoms . The cause of these symptoms is what must be dealt with in order to minimize the issues and obstacles sales professionals face in this type of economy.

Expedite the Sales Cycle

When assessing your position in the marketplace understand that your long selling cycle is rarely because your solution has suddenly become obsolete or otherwise unneeded. Even those in the luxury goods space have weathered numerous recessions. The people or companies you are dealing with are also suffering from the same symptoms you are, and the grip of uncertainty has left them mentally and financially unwilling to commit to change no matter how beneficial it may be.

The problem with many sales people is that they fail to adapt their selling techniques to accommodate for this stress within the buyer. They continue to lead with the same sales method that may have worked in the past but may now be alienating buyers. We emotionally perceive the prospect engagement from an I-Centric approach; it's an opportunity to get a meeting, an RFP, or a sale. As such we focus on the details of our solution that we see as important, and the reasons we think the prospect should buy from us. However, your prospect isn't going to invest in your solution simply because you think it's a good idea. The prospect needs to perceive the final outcome of your solution on an emotional level, something that's rarely achieved when you lead with what's important to you.

Don't try to influence potential buyers with who you are and what you do. When you rely solely on intellectually engaging your prospect you end up getting deferred or the prospect sends you on a wild goose chase to provide more information. Whereas if you focus your prospect on the gap of inefficiency they are currently experiencing and the associated negative impact you are engaging them emotionally. After all, your prospect is more apt to reject you, than a way to improve their current situation. They are not buying your solution; they are investing in an outcome that improves their efficiency, lowers their costs or otherwise benefits them!

For example, if a commercial printer cold called you telling you how many presses they had, how many happy clients they had and what beautiful work they did, you are simply tolerating a sales pitch; an engagement you want to end because you have other things to do. However, if that same printer called you and allowed you to uncover that creating your own promotional materials internally was costing you 10x and he could perform the same job for 7x without the aggravation you currently experience, how likely are you to reject the printer? How likely are you to defer making a decision that would be financially beneficial for you?

Reduce the Price Objection

Another critical aspect of a down economy is that buyers become very price sensitive. Sales people often foster this price-sensitivity by focusing on features and benefits instead of preemptively addressing the price objection that will inevitably arise. It's your job as a Sales Professional to help them to visualize the difference between your price and what they're paying by not implementing your solution

Your price is simply what they see on the contract or invoice. The big picture price has to do with back-end expenditures caused by:

- Poor pre-project assessment resulting in additional unforeseen expenses
- Poor quality, service or response time to problem resolution resulting in issues such as unnecessary downtime and opportunity cost
- Failure to identify peripheral issues that should have been handled up front.

After all, these are the issues that have a prospect dissatisfied to begin with. Not only are they bearing the up front cost, but they are also paying dearly for the back-end or big picture expense by maintaining the status quo or using a seemingly less expensive alternative!

Driving Behavior isn't the Solution

If you're a business owner or a sales manager and you're frustrated with anemic sales numbers from your team, understand the vicious cycle documented above and how it impacts a sales person's level of expectation for results. If you anticipate negative results from a particular activity how enthusiastic are you about engaging in that activity? Anemic sales results begin the downward spiral leading to sales plateaus, unhappy sales people making far less money than they deserve, and unnecessary turnover. Most Business Owners and Sales Managers respond to these symptoms by driving behavior in sales people—pushing them to do more to make up for current attrition. Unfortunately, this management method ends up acting as a catalyst. If the current behavior (business development activity and sales routine) of the overall team isn't producing the desired results, asking them to do more of what isn't working accelerates the downward spiral. The solution is to change their behavior opposed to driving it. If you want to change the results you need to change the approach, method and mind set adopted.

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