

Improving Sales by Working on the Right Things

A Day in the Life of an Expensive Sales Professional

Conway Management Company

People readily acknowledge that, like all work processes, the sales process is prone to inefficiencies and waste.

But most assume that the real waste has to do with poor selling skills or that it lies in poor time or territory management – they envision sales reps aimlessly lolling around airports or losing their way while trying to drive to new prospect or customer locations.

And while there is certainly some truth to those assumptions, the time lost due to airline schedule changes or taking wrong turns is only a tiny portion of the real waste associated with selling. In fact, some of the biggest causes of lost revenue are frequently unrecognized, and are accepted as costs of doing business.

Consider Chuck, for example, an office furniture sales representative who is one of the top revenue producers in his region. Chuck's managers and co-workers have always regarded him with respect. Over his fourteen-year career Chuck has developed a reputation for being an exceptional "closer" and he is considered an unofficial mentor by less experienced sales people within the sales organization.

In fact, when a corporate realignment brought about a shift in the company's reporting structure, Chuck was the first sales rep with whom the new regional manager wanted to travel.

On their first joint-appointment, Chuck and his new boss met with a senior buyer at a manufacturing firm. The buyer listened attentively as Chuck presented various catalogs and pricing programs, and he enthusiastically answered all of Chuck's many questions.

Sensing the buyer's interest, Chuck accelerated his presentation and smoothly moved into his summation.

"It seems that you are partial to the mahogany executive grouping," he said. "Would you like to place an order today?"

"You're right," the buyer said. "I do like the look of that particular line, and the dark coloring is consistent with our preferences. In fact, we've found that the darker shades hold up better in this environment. We've tested this theory in two of our six manager's offices."

He paused, and Chuck confidently picked up on the buyer's admission.

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“Well, I have an idea for you! Since you haven’t bought furniture from us in the past, I’d be willing to give you an extra 20% off of list price if you would agree to order those groupings today.”

Before long, Chuck and his regional manager left with an order for four executive office groupings in hand.

Their next appointment was with a more junior buyer at a large medical center. The regional manager noticed that Chuck was making a presentation similar to the one he’d given to the manufacturing buyer, but he was asking fewer questions. Regardless, it was clear that Chuck was making a good impression on the buyer, and the two seemed to genuinely like one another.

“I do have one spot in mind,” the buyer said slowly. “And I really like your mahogany executive line. Do you sell a lot of that brand?”

“Oh yes indeed,” Chuck said with enthusiasm. “In fact, the manufacturing firm we visited this morning ordered some of that very same furniture! They not only liked the look of the grouping, but have also found that our darker shade of mahogany holds up well in their office environment.”

The buyer nodded, and Chuck continued briskly.

“I’ll tell you what! I’d be willing to offer you the same quantity discount that we gave to that buyer – which means you’ll save an extra 20% – if you can place an order with us today.”

The buyer smiled, but said nothing.

Chuck was quiet as well. The waiting game had begun.

“You know, I’d like to take you up on that offer,” the buyer finally said. “But I just don’t feel 100% sure...”

“What is it that is making you less than comfortable?” Chuck asked.

“Here’s what I’d be willing to do,” the buyer said in response. “If you can extend your offer to provide that extra 20% discount for a few more days, I’ll give you a firm answer on Monday.”

Chuck paused just long enough, and then pulled out his order book.

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“Tell you what,” he said while nodding. “I’ll go ahead and do as you’ve asked, but I’d like to write-up the order now. Of course we’ll put Monday’s date on it, and if you have a problem between now and then I’ll tear it up. But let’s get the paper work done now, and save us all some time. How does that sound?”

Once again, Chuck and his new manager left with a signed order.

The following week, Chuck’s manager was happy to see the “post-dated” order come through, and decided to call the medical center buyer to express his thanks.

“It was fortunate that our sales representative Chuck was able to afford you the extra twenty percent discount,” he said to the buyer. “And as a result, we’re happy to welcome you as a new customer. I guess the timing and the pricing were right, and who knows, maybe we can do more business together!”

The buyer agreed, and said he too was looking forward to the possibility of doing more business with Chuck.

“Yes, it was a good idea on Chuck’s part to offer the lower price, but the real reason I asked for the extra few days had nothing to do with price. Our new Human Resource Manager was scheduled to visit on Monday, and I just wanted to make sure that she was comfortable with the mahogany rather than the lighter cherry shade...”

A similar follow-up call to the manufacturing plant revealed that that buyer was also ready to buy, and most likely would have done so with or without the extra twenty percent!

And the regional manager began to wonder about the frequency with which his sales staff was *unnecessarily* giving away twenty-percent of their margin!