

How Quality of Sales Prep Directly Impacts Your Sales Results

By John W David

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Quality Preparation Equals Quality Sales.

In a normal high quality sales event, including prep, travel, the actual interview, and post-call activities, forty-five percent of your total time will be spent in Preparation.

The closer you are to that forty-five percent, the more targeted your effort, the more confident your approach, the higher your close conversions on new business, the firmer your negotiations, the better your pricing, and the higher your customer-base retention rate for existing accounts.

Furthermore, in the longer term, the quality of preparation is the mark of successful sales professionals. And, that makes you a demand commodity.

As we meet in these little sessions, you can get a sense how each of these major and minor articles are coming together for you, building into what is unquestionably one of the major components of any sales event.

That's how you have to look at a sales call, as an event. All sales events are different. Your sales call is an event within an on-growing process of events.

What separates the great sales people from good ones is their Attitudes towards Quality of the Selling Process. Unquestionably, reps can make a good living by winging it.

Imagine how much better they would do, how much better a lifestyle for themselves and their families they could achieve with just a bit more focused, professional approach to the selling process.

There is a truism that goes: How you prepare is how you practice. How you practice is how you play. It's true. So, the lead in to the meat of this article is how well you prepare... is how well you will play.

This is a big session. So, let's begin.

* Clear Your Mind. Clear your workspace. Then, after a few minutes, begin to focus on your next 'one' sales event.

I know you've made a lot of sales calls in your career. And, you're probably doing quite well.

However, much of what you are looking for is often nothing more than just that bit of coaching that restores your edge.

That edge is just a dozen little disciplines that we all short-cut occasionally.

We all get bogged down in the good or bad things that happen each and every day both in our personal and professional lives.

It's these little things that will have impact on your sales performances... and outcomes.

* Begin with a simple question: Will this call that you're planning to make lead to a sale and positive things for your territory, your company, and your income?

If you believe so, begin preparing.

* Gather Information.

Because you must have your customer re-sell herself on some major aspect of what they have bought from you and are currently using, gathering as much information as you can to support this inviolate objective of each and every sales call is crucial to using this interview opportunity properly.

Remember that re-selling on each and every sales call is a way of locking out your competition and growing the value of the account. We've talked about this in depth before. It's very important.

Even if this contact is completely new to you, they may not be new to someone else in your organization. Questions produce the darndest results.

Delivery drivers, mobile technicians or installers, marketing support, customer service, credit management, order desk... anybody who may have or may have had contact with this prospect / client since your last call here.

You should use the information gleaned from any of these points of communication only in that you know this information exists.

This demonstrates that you are interested in and aware of everything that goes on in your territory and that your support people and you work as a unit on behalf of your customers. This is important. And, hopefully you do.

What you don't want to do with this information, beyond the need to re-sell an existing account or support your involvement in a prospective situation, is to allow any of this extraneous information to dominate or even hijack your agenda that you and your prospect / customer set for this interview.

If this happens, not only will it destroy your call; it could even destroy everything positive you have reached to this point.

In any event, any time you get off track, you jeopardize this call and damage the value of your part of the selling / buying process. That's one of the reasons for always using a sales call sheet and your respect for time-lines.

One more thing. In using your material, don't go hunting for the information in your paperwork in front of your customer. It's important only that they know that you know what, whom, how, and when. By making it a big issue that is not part of the interview, you will open the 'why'. You really don't want to go there.

Okay. So, gather your information for every available source. Filter it for quick, positive impact at an

appropriate moment in the on-growing process.

* From what you know, can you determine, define, and measure a viable Result and apply a Time-line to it?

Now, I know that that's a tough question to answer for a new contact. However, there is an answer. There's always an answer. The only real difficulty is that you have to find it.

If you're running a business, is it not more cost / profit effective to have fewer people making better quality sales from a more targeted visitor list?

So, as to whether or not this proposed sales call will make a sale, it's up to you to determine the ultimate value of that effort such that you can proceed as a professional business person responsible for the profitability of your actions.

* Know your account and territory stats. While that's a given, knowing your stats will help you determine the relative value or potential value of this selling event.

Know, too, your sales conversion ratios for this account in particular, for your sales territory in general, and the current directional flow of those ratios. This is very important.

This is a measure of not only your revenue and income, it is also a measure of your career and how it is going now and over time.

Prepping to your stats and the directional flow of your results is just a great opportunity to regenerate your appreciation of this part of the professional selling process.

Each and every sales call can be a barometer. You want to use each and every sales call as a growth opportunity remembering, as we've discussed earlier, that each and every sales call does produce a Result whether you have made the sale or not. You want to be on the positive side of that result.

If the barometer is headed slightly downward, you can catch it and redress it in your prep work. If you haven't done it in a while and you discover that your numbers need help, refer to my article on curing the common slump.

* Establish Value / Establish the most appropriate time-slot for the call.

Ideally, you make this determination prior to calling for your appointment. It's obviously easier for a repeat call. In prospecting, do your best.

However, be sure to keep your prospecting calls in their best appropriate time slots allocated to that purpose.

With everything we have discussed so far in this article, you can get a better sense of how it all comes together to this point when you have only so many hours in a day and in a week or month.

How well you're converting your opportunities and how well you convert your time slots reflect in the directional flow of your revenue, your income, and the relative profitability of both.

Professional Sales and the Professional Selling Process is all about you being the best of the best.

Your Time and Effort are Money.

The objective for you is to convert that Money as much as you can into the investment category instead of the cost side of the equation.

Therefore, with all the knowledge you have available to you, determine what the real return in definable, measurable results within some determinable not-too-distant future this account will bring to you and your territory.

Break it down to value-of-call and value-per-hour. Then, fit it into the appropriate time slot where it's value belongs amongst all your clients and prospects call values scheduled for that week.

You want to focus as much as possible high value calls to high value time slots. Doing this often enough will see an increase in your sales revenue and income.

* Begin from "New".

Whether preparing for a totally new sales contact interview or for a call where the process is already in motion, always begin with a new sales call sheet.

This will also help you re-center your thoughts onto this new event and assist you in establishing your major and minor objectives for this new sales opportunity.

This new sales call is a new sales event. Even if it's your twenty-ninth sales call, is still a new sales event.

Everything about your previous sales calls is now just part of the situational and competitive information on your call sheets from which nothing can be assumed. Change is a constant.

Finally, a new sales call sheet is part of your sales material which should look fresh, crisp, clean, and ready in support of your non-verbal communication package in which you demonstrate your feelings about the value of the call... especially as perceived by the person in front of you.

* On Your Call Sheet. Transfer all the situational stuff.

On the sales call, itself, you will spend just a very few moments confirming that nothing has changed so as to catch anything that has.

In a totally new call, you need to confirm the accuracy of your research into the account. You want to keep up to stay ahead. But don't get sidetracked or bogged down here. As a general rule, this up-date should be quarterly.

On new calls, most of the situational stuff is readily available to you during your Qualifying effort. If you waste your time at this point of the sales call, you'll lose the respect of your prospect.

You have approximately twenty quality minutes to work with.

Maximize, maximize, and maximize each one of those minutes. That's why you prepare the interview and how to use a proper pace of time to maximize impact and opportunity.

* Why are you making this call?

Here is where you start to prep your minor and major objectives on your call sheet. We went into this in greater detail earlier. It's too big an article to re-do here.

* What was offered to secure the interview? Stay within that offering. That's what they are expecting.

If you asked to meet them to provide an introductory overview, you have to stay within those terms. There is nothing that upsets people more and why they don't like meeting sales people than an informational session that turns rapidly into buy me, buy me, and buy me.

That raises an important point. Because you have to prep your calls, and the better the quality of the prep, the better the quality of the interview, the better the quality of the results.

Therefore, when you give your reasons for making the call, make sure that they are consistent with your major and minor objectives for making high quality sales calls.

* Did they answer your appointment fax or email? Did they make any request of what else they would like to discuss in their reply?

Now, it's very rare that they ever reply. However, by having sent them the confirmation, you have both confirmed the agenda and have created a minor, but important market separation.

Both are important and should be done after securing each and every sales appointment.

One of my approaches in confirming the appointment would be to close out under my signature with a P/S:

"Bill, if you can think of anything that should be on the agenda that would bring greater value to our time together, please just drop me a note.

Again, Thank You."

* What do you know about their processes and their customers' needs?

That should not be too difficult to find out. And, it lends exceptional credibility to your effort if they see that you have even any of it right.

So, write down what you know. Offer it up as what you have found. They will be happy to fill in the blanks.

Remember: approach it from making it a compliment.

You always have to remember and understand the Power of Knowledge. Being totally right is great. But, being wrong is also right. It allows for dialogue.

More importantly it allows for dialogue that comes from Respect for a Professional and a Professional Effort on their behalf. Been there many, many times.

Continuing with your sales call sheet.

* What do they like about what they have in place now? This is easier in a repeat call situation. In either case, it is a higher form of situational knowledge that during your sales call will be included in your Summary Presentation.

Remember: If they are using your product, get them to re-sell themselves on it in their own words out of their own mouths. However, keep it short and to your time-line.

* What do they not like about what they have in place? Again, this is easier in a repeat call situation.

However, as much as possible try to glean as much information as possible to this very, very important question.

After a while, you will find that as you get really good at it, the impact nature of this section can be

broadened to be deeper and wider and produce awesome Summary Presentations that just scream CLOSE!

We'll get into that at another time. It's a lot of fun. I'll try to do it for you next time.

* Be Organized.

Highly creative people are generally not very well organized people. That isn't necessarily a problem.

However, being highly organized and disciplined to the structure of that organization is a hallmark of highly successful sales people. That is why I suggest that you use a sales call sheet to help you with that structure.

Even if you are highly organized, it is still better to use a sales call sheet for the reasons I've shared with you earlier.

Organize Your materials, your order forms, your brochures and other hand-outs.

They should be instantly ready and in not too great a supply. And, get rid of any paperwork that is tattered or dog-eared.

Your customer sees your sense of organization as a benefit to him/her in dealing with your company through you. Remember that they know your company essentially through you. Sensing a disorganized company is not a positive signal.

Further, being highly organized cuts down mental wandering by both parties and moves the call from introduction to conversion more quickly and efficiently. That's the object.

* Prepare and Test Your Demonstration Equipment or Your use of new support materials. Oy!

To this very day, I will never forget my very first call for a company after my training / indoctrination period. That was a long time ago.

But, being a perfectionist about my pre-call check lists the ONE short cut I made that morning cost me dearly. Fortunately, I was able, over time, to recoup. But, I'll never forget it.

In your practice / rehearsal phase of your preparation, test your demonstrating equipment and know all your materials literally from memory. Keep brand spanking new (but, test it, too!) back-up versions of your demos immediately handy.

* Practice. Be strong. Practice being strong. Effectively you are Rehearsing as would an actor before a major on-stage production. Because... it is.

Based on everything above, craft a one minute, benefits-loaded Introduction Presentation that basically acts as both a grabber to get their attention focusing quickly on who you are and how this sales interview is going to improve their lives.

Your company may have a canned version including your Five Best Value Benefits. If not, it's time to make one.

Also, you want to get into the intro as soon after the handshake as possible so as not to get bogged down by a lot of nowhere chatter.

Caution: I have seen too many sales reps move from their Intro Presentation right into a

Features-driven "ready, fire, aim" babble that will almost always lead to: "Well, that sounds interesting. You've given me some valuable food for thought." In short, the rep has blown the call.

(Another solid reason for practice, rehearsal, and the use of a sales call sheet).

By all means, create a sense of rapport. However, as I've discussed earlier, your chatter can be about a question or a compliment or, better, a complimentary question that closely aligns to your business reasons for being there.

Try: "In doing my home work, I am really amazed at how well you folks are doing. How did you do it?"

This allows your customer to lock in early and quickly and to talk about their favorite topic... themselves while it allows you to fill in some of the blanks on your call sheet.

Also, when your client is talking, they are more energized and will volunteer a lot more than they otherwise would.

If this call is on an existing account, it is here that you want to use your investigative results to get them to speak highly about what they have bought from you. And how much they just love how it has saved them time, effort, and money. Or made their lives safer, more secure, more enjoyable, and more comfortable... you get the idea.

Always get existing customers to re-sell themselves on you and your products or services.

Keep in mind, you have access to about twenty minutes of your customer's attention span. Where you want to spend most of your time is in building your Summary Presentation about new business through the questioning part of your call sheet.

In your practice time, build your close-conversions into your Summary Presentation. With practice and proper preparation, it's easier and flows smoothly. Then you don't have to rely on playing mind-games.

Now, part of how you practice and rehearse this aspect of the selling / buying process is how you view your role in it. So...

* As the sales person, you are the decision-maker. If you can't decide that they need, want, or desire your product or service, how can you expect them to? That's why you rehearse.

As I discussed earlier in Conduct Sales Meetings that Inspire Results, a major benefit of a properly conducted sales meeting is this very consideration of why you have one.

A properly conducted sales meeting provides a forum of like minded professionals to test, practice, and rehearse their skills amongst people whose contribution pro and con can greatly assist each other to maintain a winning edge.

* A very important last step in Practice / Rehearsal:

Clean and, if necessary, polish your brief case. Press your clothes. Clean your car.

Organize your presentation materials for immediate, easy access. It's got to look and feel to your customer that you've done this successfully many, many times before.

This is especially true of your order forms and purchase agreements.

Finally, I hope you understand more why a full forty-five percent of the total time allotment for a single selling event cycle for a professional sales person is spent preparing their game plan.

A football team wins or loses based upon the quality of their game plan sometimes to the slimmest of opportunities.

Lawyers and their clients may go as much as 80% of the entire litigation process before a case goes to court... all in determining the relative strength of their game plan.

* Get a great night's sleep knowing you have done everything you can possibly think of to maximize your conversion opportunities in the next selling event.

I hope this memo helped you. Until next time, Ciao.

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