

Sales and Marketing

The complex-sales method may not be best option

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Almost everyone acknowledges that regardless of the industry involved, revenue generation has become more challenging over the years.

Today a number of selling and business development tools are available to independent agents that make it is easy to lose sight of the big picture—a personal connection. Unless you sell insurance in a transactional way to people you've never met, you have to remember that this is a "people business" regardless of the products or services you offer. However, there is somewhat of a compelling argument that says even in a highly transactional business model, you better be mindful of connecting with people the way they want to deal with you.

With that in mind, let's take a look at diverse areas that when taken together can lead to greater or lesser levels of sales success. As you read, I suggest you resist saying to yourself: "I know that already." Instead ask yourself: "Am I actually putting this into practice each day?"

1.) Consistency in getting your people in front of their best clients and building business through referrals.

I know this is common sense, but, getting in front of the right people is more urgent than ever before. The first question to ask is, "Who are my best or ideal prospects?" Remember that our objective is to get in front of our best *prospects*, not just any *suspect*.

Wouldn't it make sense to devise a marketing and selling strategy that focuses on reaching people in these specific market segments consistently instead of reaching out to everyone who may or may not be looking to change their insurance agent or carrier in the next year?

As an insurance agent, you should ask yourself: "Who is most likely to buy our products and services in the next two years?"

Here are several strategies that could be considered going forward regardless of which insurance you specialize:

- Review your prior sales records and activity logs.
- Compile a list of why your customers/clients

have purchased from you in the past and confirm what prompted them to take action with you.

- Will these reasons still be valid for others as you go forward?

I ask this because some products or services go through a life cycle with wild swings in demand. For example, I suspect that selling "pet rocks" would be a tough business today, but you could have made a small fortune when they were in fashion. Are you looking forward enough with your products and markets?

Consider the following agenda for your call or visit. During each interaction you should confirm with your clients:

- What was the major benefit you received by working with our agency?
- Why did you decide to work with us as opposed to our competition?
- What advice do you have for us as an agency?
- What should we be doing more of?
- What should we be doing less of?
- What should we be doing differently?

Let's review these questions briefly. The first two questions remind both you and your clients about your strengths and capabilities and reaffirm all the things you do well. It's much easier to reach your best prospects when you are clear about what distinguishes you from your competition. The third question is designed to keep you close to your customer. Not only will you uncover future needs, but this presents an opportunity to become or remain a trusted adviser. More often than not, this is whom the best prospects in your market will buy from.

Are your employees squeamish about asking for referrals? Has anyone taken them under their wing to teach them how to be successful in this regard?

2.) Maintaining focused activity.

To determine if you maintain an adequate focus on your activities, ask yourself:

- Do I have a clear picture of how my product or service could benefit my future clients?
- Do I have goals in place to round each of my customers appropriately?
- Do I have a follow-up system in place to make sure actions happen?

If you are in sales or manage a sales function,

consider answering the following additional questions:

- Do I have an appropriately long list of decision-makers I can contact each day?
 - What would be the value of having a prepared list of calls to make each day?
- High levels of activity are great, but focused activity is best. The importance of adding SMARTY goals to the sales process is unquestionable. In any sales role—either staff or management, there is a need for daily, weekly, monthly and long-term goals. SMARTY stands for: **S**pecific, not vague; **M**easurable, defined; **A**ttainable, not too far out of reach; **R**ealistically high, not too easily reached but requiring stretch; **T**arget date, specific time frame; and **Y**ours, important to you, not just to others.

Agents often say they'll do better or they set expectations so high that they set themselves up to fail. Well-thought-out game plans, with target dates, help focus your activities on a daily and weekly basis to keep you on track. You cannot know where you are when you don't

have enough prospects or if you haven't predetermined and tracked your activity.

3.) Approaching the next sales-related conversation differently.

Even when you get in front of great prospects, you have to manage every phase of the relationship building and selling process carefully.

Here are some questions to consider as you prepare for your next conversation with your clients whether live, or on the phone.

- What verbal and nonverbal signals are you paying attention to or watching for as things progress?
- How carefully are you phrasing your questions so that the possibility of confusion is minimized?
- How often, and how well, do you assess the insured's or prospect's subject matter knowledge before launching into an explanation for them? Going into too much or too little explanation can really break rapport.
- Have you worked out in advance how you will explain difficult or uncommonly understood concepts as

simply as possible, without talking down to someone or glossing over important information?

- Do you avoid the use of "cutesy" or sarcastic phrases or comments that could be misconstrued or misinterpreted?
- Have you figured out how to explain your value proposition using word choices and language that makes sense to the person you are talking to?

It really comes down to this.

How often and how well can you put yourselves in a place to maximize the opportunities that surround you and then fully capitalize on those opportunities? Success usually leaves cues and clues. Make sure you are tuned in to those guideposts. ■

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