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## **Sales Success Secrets for 2009**

By Dennis Sommer, Founder & CEO, Executive Business Advisers

*The jury is still out about our current economy. Some say we will be experiencing a mild recession and others say we are on the brink of a depression. It doesn't matter where you fall in the debate, one thing is certain, business growth is not as easy as it once was. If you have been reading the news headlines, many sales executives are focused on cutting costs and laying off employees. This does help short-term profitability, however these actions are precisely the wrong strategy to take if you want to grow your company in a bad economy. Sales executives who want to increase sales, profit margins and drive new business growth in 2009 should consider the following top 5 sales growth success secrets.*

Have you ever wondered how some companies achieve dramatic sales growth during a bad economy when everyone else in the same industry report sales declines of 25 to 50%? As a management consultant and business growth specialist I have witnessed and analyzed this phenomenon over that past two decades. What I have found is, companies that can grow sales during both good and bad economies have unique sales characteristics that work in any business climate. Are you going to settle with a sales decline in 2009 or are you ready to make a few minor changes that can dramatically improve your sales growth?

After spending over 20 years working with top sales organizations and performing years of research for my book "Adviser Secrets – How To Become a Top Performer," I was able to uncover the recipe for success of top sales organizations during both good and bad economies. Quite simply, they don't follow a popular sales process you would find in a book or seminar. They don't focus on developing additional features for their products and services. They follow a simple framework that is based on helping customers become successful while communicating effectively.

I call this simple framework 'The Adviser Success Model,' which helps catapult sales organizations to the top of their industry. The Adviser Success Model contains four steps: Prepare, Understand, Deliver and Nurture. The focus of each step is directly linked to the customer and the value you deliver. The amazing thing about this framework is it works across all professions and industries.

Before we review the Adviser Success Model, let's take a look at how top sales organizations develop communication skills that help them effectively communicate the value they deliver to a customer.

### **Top 5 Customer Communication Skills**

Undeniably, one of the most important skills of a top sales organization is effective communication skills. For this reason, customer communication is one of the first elements we discuss in the Adviser Success Model. So, why do most sales training programs and books either ignore or graze over this topic? Many believe that technical and process knowledge is more important to their business. Others see communication skills as something you can easily learn on the job. When talking with top sales organizations, you will find the opposite is true. After sales planning, customer communication is the skill set that allows them to maximize sales revenue, customer satisfaction and customer retention.

Let's review the top five customer communication skills.

- **Questioning**  
To solve a difficult challenge you must ask the right questions. Asking simple yes/no questions is not sufficient. First, you need to understand the questions that you must avoid. Next you need to learn how to ask powerful smart questions for gathering key information. The type of questions you ask, how you ask them and when you ask them will dramatically change how your customer perceives you. Smart questions lead to smart answers, which in return leads you to providing the best solution for your customer.
- **Listening**  
To truly understand, you can't just listen to what people are saying. You must effectively listen. Most sales professionals effectively listen only 25% of the time. Unfortunately, effective listening is a very difficult skill to master. Top sales organizations spend a good portion of their time mastering the 11 techniques of an effective listener. By talking less and listening effectively, top sales organizations can solve problems quicker, promote new business discussion, open up the customer's mind to new ideas and earn the customer's lifelong trust.
- **Speaking**  
The key to speaking is quality, not quantity. Most sales professionals talk too much. Remember, sometimes less is more. Top sales organizations have learned that speaking less is more productive when you master the speaking skills for different situations. They learn how to eliminate objections and resistance before they happen. When involved in public speaking it is important for you to overcome the fear of speaking in front of groups no matter how large or small. It is also important to become a master meeting planner and facilitator. Top sales organizations learn the unique skills needed when talking with different customers, gatekeepers and assistants.
- **Written Word**  
In today's world of email, texting and IM'ing we have forgotten the fine art of great business communication. Top sales organizations focus on quality written communication. They use the most effective words and stories based on the customer's profile and personality. They write memos and business documents that make an impact and persuade their customers. Top sales organizations also find tremendous benefit in the lost art of keeping a business journal and sending out handwritten thank you notes.
- **Promotion**  
Finally, when you tie together questioning, listening, speaking and the written word you have all the skills to promote your organization to the top of your industry. Top sales organizations learn how to tie these skills together into a self-promotion tool package that attract customers quickly and earn them top dollar for the products and services they provide.

Now that we have covered how top sales organizations develop effective communication skills, let's take a look at the four steps in the Adviser Success Model.

#### **4 Steps – Adviser Success Model**

##### **1. Prepare**

The first step involves preparation. In order to achieve success as a top sales organization, you must do your homework before meeting the prospective customer. You must learn how business and strategic planning will help you focus on the right solutions and target the right customers. Part of the preparation process is to master business communication skills. Articulating clearly to the customer is a sign of true professionalism and will reassure the potential customer that you mean serious business. Taking time to acquire an in-depth understanding of the customer's business and industry and finally, understanding your unique value position compared to everyone else in your industry will solidly prepare you to achieve success.

## 2. Understand

The second step focuses on completely understanding the customer's needs and expectations before you discuss products and solutions. Learn how to introduce your unique value position to gain the attention of your target customer. Uncover all customer survival challenges and priorities by digging deep into current trouble areas and visualizing the perfect solution. Determine what success barriers you may encounter. Understand what criteria you must meet for a solution to be successful. Last, you decide if it is in everybody's best interest for you to walk away from the opportunity.

## 3. Deliver

The third step contains the necessary elements for delivering an ultimate solution exceeding customer expectations. Your solution must be focused on delivering customer value, which increases revenue or reduces costs. Performance metrics must be measurable and available for visibility in a scorecard. When delivering your solution recommendations, your message needs to be inspiring and persuasive. At this point, a 'go' decision to move forward should be nearly automatic.

## 4. Nurture

The fourth step focuses on gaining the customer's trust and becoming their lifelong adviser. You will earn trust by over delivering on results. You will strengthen your customer relationship by treating customers as a business partner. A customer account strategy will become your strategic planning tool that both you and your customer will use as a living success roadmap. And finally, once you deliver a solution, you will monitor the solution value metrics and you will take appropriate action if needed.

If you follow these proven communication and sales framework techniques, you will find yourself exceeding sales expectations in 2009.

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