

So You Want Some New Customers?

For many years, a lot of salespeople have been able to grow their business based on the growth of their customer base. Or to be more accurate, their territories have grown because their existing customers have ordered more. Many of you now face a problem with two sides—you need to grow sales and sales are not up—but down—in your existing customers. Further, your salespeople may not have the right skills in getting new customers.

The purpose of this little sermonette is to help you help them by understanding what the real question is...

Take a look at the following chart and fill it out for your entire organization—and then break it down into the goals for each sales territory. Once you've done that, you will know how much business you want from new customers—for both existing products/services and new products/services.

	Existing products/services	New products/services
Existing customers		
New customers		

This brings up one of the key sales questions. Assuming that you put a dollar amount in the bottom two boxes, you have passed along an expectation for your salespeople that they are supposed to get new customers. Be very careful how you task them to do this.

Let's take your average salesperson—we'll call him Willy. We've asked him to grow his territory by getting some new customers. Because you've read my stuff (and paid attention), you've done what you needed to do—that is, you've put the following in place:

Target Account List (You and Willy have agreed on the kinds of new customers you want and you've put together a list of potential accounts you want him to call on).

Customer Profile (You have created a list of key questions that you want Willy to ask of potential customers and you've asked Willy to make at least x survey calls per week).

Tracking Mechanism (You put together a spreadsheet that allows you to track progress and you are having regular review meetings with Willy to make sure that the right things are happening).

So, you've done all that—and Willy is at least trying to find the new customers. But maybe, he's not having a lot of success.

And here's why.

He starts out asking the wrong question. Listen to Willy the next time he makes a survey call and see if it doesn't sound something like this: "My name is Willy Sellit and I work for ABC Company. We sell widgets and I wanted to know who in your company uses/buys widgets. Can you give me that person's name?"

Sounds okay, right? Wrong.

The right question sounds like this: Who in your organization can make a decision on buying widgets from a different supplier than last time? And, what reasons might they consider important enough to make a change?

Notice the difference?

In the first example, Willy is likely to get a name or two but when you are not the current supplier, the odds are that the people you can easily identify are not the right people. They may nod and smile knowingly when you ask them if they are the decision-makers but often, they aren't. They do buy widgets but the only decision they can make is to buy them from whoever they bought them from last time—unless they either get someone else's approval (and there is a good reason to change).

The problem is that the first question is easy to ask and get an answer. The second set of questions is easy to ask but very difficult to get answers because the first people you talk to probably cannot (will not) answer them. This is the heart of the sales process however. You need to find out the answers to these two questions before you have any kind of realistic chance to succeed.

Think about how your organization buys things. When a new salesperson calls, there are a lot of built-in defenses. "We are happy with our current supplier." "You have to get on the approved vendor list." "You have to get your part on the drawing." "You have to be the cheapest."

While these may be true, they might also be blow-off answers to get your salesperson to go away. A lot of times, it's a pain for people to switch suppliers because of all the headaches they have to go through—and the approvals they have to get. So, unless you have the right person and a really good reason, your salesperson won't even be considered.

To get new customers, you have to do your job and then the salesperson has to do theirs. The two key points are:

Finding the people who have the authority to make a different buying decision

Finding a good reason that the customer should switch

If either of these conditions is not present, you're not likely to have much success getting the new customers that you need.

What you've just read can really take a lot of the 'kinks' out of becoming totally unstoppable in your new sales pursuits, if it's applied correctly.

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