

Manage your Customers

One of the most frustrating things about sales is the situation where we are working with a customer and just not getting anywhere. We think we have a qualified customer; we think we are dealing with the decision-maker(s); we think we have a real opportunity and they appear to like our product / service but nothing is happening.

After a while, we begin to wonder...are they going to buy or are they just stringing me along? (Kind of like the high school prom where the girl says yes to some dopey guy—me, as I recall—while still holding out for an offer from the captain of the football team. If that offer comes, you're history, right?)

Some percentage of the time, you are being strung (along or up) depending on the circumstance. Part of the time, however, the issue is one of truly understanding the customer and their DMP (or Decision-Making Process, for long).

All organizations have certain patterns of decision-making. Sometimes, the size of the organization has an impact (neither GM nor the government appear to make rapid decisions). To be fair, some professional practices (attorneys, physicians and accounting firms) seem to have the same problem, regardless of size. Other organizations seem to make decisions more quickly.

Sometimes, the organizations appear to move quickly but some people in the organization move slowly. Sometimes this is by design where a decisive CEO will place a deliberate buffer in the organization to slow down decisions (in an attempt to avoid bad ones). And sometimes, you just face a slow person who may (or may not) survive in an organization that likes to do things quickly.

The problem is that most people in sales are “immediate gratification” kind of people. We are in a job like no other in that we can often get a monthly check dependent on our results. Who else lives like that?

This often puts us in conflict with the rest of the world that appears to be in no hurry.

Our challenge looks like this—first we have to recognize that not everyone has the same speed. Then we have to be facilitating agents to help organizations to make progress on important tasks.

To do this, we need to be clear on the following:

- Our goals
- The goals of their organization
- The goals of the individuals involved

- The timelines they have agreed upon
- Their critical path

Then, we have to do everything in our power to make our goals mesh with the rest of the issues listed above. By doing this, we can often not only increase our chances of success but move the customer at a slightly faster pace than they would normally tend to work.

Many people work with salespeople because by working with them, they look better.

Take a real inventory of the value you add to your customers. If they were to list the salespeople that add the most value, how many of them would name you? What can you do to increase this perception?

Begin by being clear (and asking the right questions) to get answers to the five questions presented earlier in this article. Are you clear? Are they? What can you do to help them get clear?

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