



TEACHING CONSEQUENCES TO YOUR PROSPECTS

An innovative, highly effective selling strategy

A superb selling secret for the new millennium

Buyers today are better at buying than sellers are at selling

Like a miserable plague, the educated, experienced buyer continues to confront and confound us all. What happened? How did buyers get better and how should we adjust to this epidemic of enlightenment that takes money out of our pockets? That adjustment is contained in the unique strategy Teaching Consequences to Your Prospects. But first, let's define the need for a new approach by defining three ways that those buyers are kicking our sales tails.

1. *Buyers know all of our closes.* Sales training evolved from techniques that were developed in the 70s and 80s. Many potential customers have experienced the use of our closing techniques for decades. We learned to work buyers with the alternate choice, reduce to the ridiculous, the Ben Franklin and many more closes. My favorite old close was one I experienced recently after test-driving a new car. While I was being worked by the auto rep, he warned me that the car color and model I'd driven was so popular that if I did not put a deposit down today, it would be gone tomorrow. I said, "Hey! That's the impending event close. If I don't buy from you now, circumstances will change and I won't be able to buy from you. That's a very manipulative thing to say now, isn't it?" At that point he asked what I did for a living and accurately guessed that I wasn't going to buy a car from him today. Since buyers have experienced these sales ploys for over 20 years, is it any surprise that they know them and might even be irritated by their use in conversation? Once a buyer identifies our tactic, it becomes a trick. And nobody wants to be tricked. Another reason many buyers know our closes is that they might have been a salesperson in a previous existence.
2. *Buyers gather information before they talk to us.* My whacked-out World Wide Web theory is this – the Internet is merely an outgrowth of Consumer Reports Magazine. Think about it. Pre-buying prospects go online to look at alternative choices, gather users' opinions (good and bad) and compare pricing. The popularity of Consumer Reports Magazine was rooted in the fact that it educated and prepared buyers. The web and our need to send literature first (before qualifying, see point #3 below) are educating and preparing our buyers. If you're not sure whether this is really true, think about how many times this past month you bounced around the web or phoned

for literature before you went forward with a decision, large or small. I recently spoke to a national exporting association and noticed a man who lingered until all the attendees had left the room. He introduced himself as a buyer and said he regularly attended meetings like this to find out what to expect from salespeople down the road. He also pointed out that many industries call on prospects who are truly professional buyers. The title on their business cards reads “Buyer.” It is all they do, all day long. And their companies are paying great loads of money to train them how to beat up salespeople and get the best prices. Who’s training them and giving away all of our secrets? It made me think of the convicts who get out of prison and help police and consumers to fight crime by giving away their criminal insiders’ strategies. We now need to be prepared to deal with buyers who are armed and dangerous.

3. *Tragically, buyers have been trained by our bad selling practices.* We’ve done things like push them to hurry up and buy. They respond by pushing us away and stalling. We whip out our laundry list of benefits, then employ something like the Ben Franklin close (a list of reasons to buy vs. reasons not to buy), but we don’t discover what motivates them to buy. They receive this message that we don’t care or understand them and they mentally mark us off their list of solutions. Another poor practice occurs when we dump loads of information on people without or before qualifying them. I remember working for an executive search firm in the ‘80s where, as a rookie, I mailed out almost \$1000 a month in classy, expensive literature to everyone who said something like “sounds interesting, mail me your information.” Is every “interested” prospect a potential buyer? Of course not. If I were still that naïve, I certainly would not be involved in the world of sales education today. Here’s the problem with our bad selling practices – we’ve set a weak standard for the selling environment and created a monster. And we need to keep feeding him because he really feeds our family!

The truth is that buyer simply needs to meet you to decide if you’re the safest bet for his company and the safest bet for his career. And this selling strategy focuses on that premise.

Teaching Consequences to Your Prospects

Here’s a revelation for you: You already know all about consequences, you just need to figure out how and when to apply it to your sales arsenal.

Remember when you were a little guy or girl and adults had to teach you things like don’t touch a hot stove, and look both ways before crossing the street? The adults would conclude their warning with a consequence: “you’ll burn your hand” or, “you’ll get hit by a car.” This was meant to etch into your brain the seriousness of your mistake. This is the number-one rule in raising children - teach them that an outcome or aftereffect occurs as a result of their actions. These repercussions can be good or bad, but let's focus on the bad fallout of their actions. If you touch the hot stove, you burn your hand. Let's move forward a few years. If you steal a banana, later steal a book, then later steal a Buick, you’ll awaken one morning surrounded by steel bars and a new set of friends.

Consequences reveal that the initial problem, snatching that banana, is not the real problem. The real problem is the many repercussions of that little banana grab, the eventual conclusion is a life behind bars. While that example seems dramatic, you do want to use similar language that nurtures your buyer while warning them of danger. You're going to play the adult to your child/prospect. You can learn to engage in discussions that will prevent your prospects from burning their butts on the job or getting run over by the competition.

In our sales lives, we want to talk about how the repercussions of not buying from us could damage the prospect's business in some way. Consequences might include a slow-down in sales, diminished production, angry shareholders, serious damage to the future of the business, etc. Your job is to point the prospect to the real aftermath of his or her unsolved trouble.

Let's look at a quick example of a traditional sales call and one that uses the consequence strategy.

Traditional

As a recruiter, it was my job to pitch outstanding candidates to employers looking for salespeople. I attacked the marketplace like hundreds of other recruiters in Chicago. Our collective phone calls, thousands of them each week, all sounded like this:

Dan: Hello (decision-maker), I understand that you're looking for a salesperson, and I would like to share a great one with you. She has hit 150 percent of her quota the past three years, is trained by Xerox, which you know is outstanding, and she has made President's Club—that's top 10 percent—for her firm the past two years. What an excellent addition she'd make to your team. (I was about to get hit with any of a dozen objections.)

Decision-maker: We don't pay fees to headhunters, we require a college degree, she'd need ten years in selling, she hasn't sold in our industry, I already have plenty of candidates from my ad in the paper, it's late in the interviewing process. And if she's doing so well, why is she looking? And so on.

It was the beginning of a verbal arm-wrestling match. Except it didn't matter if my larynx was stronger; the prospect could always just hang up the phone. Selling by pitching this way was exhausting, discouraging, and demeaning. There had to be a better way for my energy and my ego.

Consequences

I'll never forget the first time I used consequences (in fact, when I speak on this experience I get goose bumps recalling it). I created a list of questions that pointed to the impact of the missing sales rep problem. Here's how the conversation with that first sales manager evolved:

Dan: Hi, John, I heard you had an open territory, how's it going?

John: Well, I'm very busy interviewing people now. (Notice he's setting me up to get off the phone with the "very busy" comment.)

Dan: Good, hope you find someone. So who's covering that open territory?

John: I am.

Dan: In addition to managing your other people and all your other work?

John: Yes.

Dan: Oh, no, that's probably not taking too much extra time from your day?

John: No, it's not really affecting my days, I just work into the evening. (He laughed, he's forming rapport with me.)

Dan: Since you've been doing the work of this missing person, is your family okay with the extra hours you're putting in?

(After a long pause)

John: You know what, I haven't been home for dinner in two weeks. And my wife is a great cook! (He said those exact words.)

I continued, asking other consequence questions, like "Do your competitors know that these accounts aren't being visited?" "Is the missing person costing the company much money?" "Is this costing *you* money?" The situation was being framed by the trauma caused by the missing sales rep.

Five minutes into the phone call, he asked me if I had anyone for him to see. Imagine that! I hadn't presented a product or service to him. I hadn't presented any benefits I could offer. There wasn't even a hint that I had a solution for his problem. But he knew one thing about me that was true: I knew his situation, his personal experience, almost as intimately as he did. So who was better qualified to help him—me, or the other pushy parrots calling to "present" candidates for the job?

I later had a unique experience when that potential client (who became a buyer and a friend) told me what happened after we had that discussion on the consequences of his decision making. He said our conversation was so unusual that he told his wife about it at home that evening (after eating leftovers). He told her that while the choices between my service and a competitor's were fairly even, I had a *much* better understanding of the *complete reality, the scope*, of the decision. And that's why he chose to do business with me.

Two great things about this strategy? First, every conversation is customized based on the prospect's perception of outcome (with a little help from you). No more boring pitches

that lead to burnout, especially among phone salespeople. Next, the nature of consequences is that it prevents stalling – the number one problem with which sales reps struggle. Strategize with your sales and marketing teams about the consequences of your prospects' trouble. Build this new language into your presentation and literature. You'll begin to gather rich information that will help you gather more riches for you and your family.

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