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# Utilize time, organize day to be most productive

Denver Business Journal - by [Garry Duncan](#)

In selling, time is money -- and usually is in short supply.

You can control the time trap by working smarter. Slowing down to speed up can be sage advice. So begin by keeping a log for a couple days of everything you do and the duration of each major activity.

Estimate each activity's potential value in helping you meet your sales goal. For example, prospecting may have a 50 percent impact, follow-up calls 25 percent and routine administrative activity none. The idea is to identify and separate the most productive activities from those that are just support.

This exercise can be an eye-opener.

After your analysis, make productive activities a priority during normal business hours. These activities include prospecting, sales, follow-up calls and tasks that involve other people.

Reserve your paperwork, routine administrative work and as much proposal writing as possible for before or after prime contact hours. You'll be amazed at how much more quickly you'll accomplish these tasks without interruptions.

Allow time each day for emergencies and unexpected events, but put calls into voice mail and avoid e-mail when focused on priority activities.

Airlines follow flight plans for efficiency. Take a few minutes to create your own flight plan for each day and week. If you lack a clear plan for each day, it's easy for others to entice you into helping them reach their goals.

How many times have you heard, "Jolene, can you help me with this?" or something similar? Having your own daily plan makes it easier to say, "I can't do that right now," or to ask, "Can I do that tomorrow?"

Other time-saving steps include getting organized, qualifying your customers, mastering account management, delegating and being clear on the customer's view of good service.

- Getting organized involves having an excellent filing system and keeping good notes on your accounts. Clear the clutter from your mind and desk. Take out what you need when you need it and

place it in clearly designated work areas. A "must do today," "tomorrow" and "this week" offers organization. Label and file any other material.

- Seasoned sellers are careful to prioritize their time investment with well-qualified buyers. They don't mistake interest and courtesy as qualifiers. For most situations, there are three qualifiers: evidence of need, knowledge of the decision-making process and budget.

Prioritize your sales funnel and efforts into three categories -- "A" prospects are qualified on all three points, "B" prospects are qualified on two and "C" prospects on one. Then devote your time where it's going to reap the greatest rewards.

- Become a master account and relationship manager.

When a customer makes a request, don't assume they want or need it handled immediately. Urgency is usually communicated, but be sure to ask. A simple, "Is Thursday OK?" or "How soon will you need this?" allows you to stick to your plan and still meet the customer's need.

Avoid the mistake of investing more and more time with only one contact in an organization. If that person leaves, you're at risk.

Reduce time-consuming crisis management and increase your sales leverage by having more than one relationship within the organization. Obtain a formal or informal organization chart and expand your sphere of influence.

And don't forget to make every interaction with your customer count by gaining additional information, updating your records, cross-selling or getting referrals.

- Delegate and strengthen relationships in your own organization.

Get your team involved in the sales process. Take support people out to meet key customers, and coach your customers on how to resolve issues when you're not available.

It just makes sense, and your customers will value not only you but also your organization when they see competent co-workers backing you up. Make a point of delegating non-essential work that eats into your time to others who can perform it more efficiently and better in the long run.

- Be sure to ask each customer how they perceive good service. Often, it may not be what we think it is.

Some may prefer e-mail, while others prefer frequent personal contact. Instead of the ineffective question "How is everything?" or "Are there any problems?" ask, "What would cause us to lose your business?"

It's more thought-provoking, generating more useful information. Increase efficiency by looking for and dealing with problems early.

Manage interruptions, requests and your accounts -- or they will manage you.

*Garry Duncan is principal of Denver-based Leadership Connections, a sales training company. Reach him at 303-462-1277 or [garry@leadershipconnections.com](mailto:garry@leadershipconnections.com).*

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