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Sales: Three strategies to improve sales performance in 2012

by

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Marshall Goldsmith's book, 'What Got You Here Won't Get You There' implies continual change is essential to grow your business and move forward. Yet, watching a Sunday afternoon of football leads one to think that growth and success is more about fundamentals and executing the basics well. Although the two perspectives sound mutually exclusive, implementing an R-R-R sales strategy will integrate strong fundamentals with personal change and development to get your sales from 'here to there!'

R-R-R is not an acronym for readin', ritin' and 'rithmetic. Instead, it means seeing the *right* people, seeing them with the *right* frequency or in the *right* numbers, and doing the *right* things while in front of them. A little more planning, qualifying and skill development can get you where you want to be. Let's consider one at a time.

- Finding and accessing the right people is a huge challenge. A common mistake is assuming that a contact or lead that uses your type of offering, or a decision maker from an industry you serve is automatically a prospect. Think of your market as the universe of people who use what you offer. Your prospects are those out of that total universe who are ready to buy now or in the near future. Finding the right people is a sorting process. The sorting filter is your set of qualifying questions. Just because someone was qualified in the past does not mean they are a prospect now. Personnel changes, promotions, layoffs, and market dynamics in many sectors necessitate that you continually qualify and validate that your target prospects are the right priorities. For example, a high volume realtor one or two years ago may not be a high volume realtor now.

- Seeing the right people with the right frequency and in the right numbers is vital in any sales cycle. The defense every seller uses at some point is, “I don’t have enough time.” The key to finding time to see enough prospects and follow up with them is daily planning. Otherwise the events that come in and out of your day will control your time. Start with a good contact manager program or daily planner, if you are not already using one, which will remind you about scheduled calls.

Equally important is using a planning calendar that covers at least one quarter. If your selling cycle is longer than three months use a six month or twelve month calendar. For those selling to a defined list of jobbers, dealers, resellers, or end users on a routine basis create a recurring itinerary. Add names weekly, monthly, or quarterly depending upon the frequency required to gain and maintain their business. Without a scheduled plan and priority call list, potential prospects and clients are more likely to be overlooked or missed, and you risk losing them to a more organized competitor. Social media is just another method to stay visible to those priority contacts.

The recipe for strong trusting relationships is a mix of character, competency, and vulnerability. Prospects and clients discern those components more quickly in face to face meetings over time. Remember technology is a tool, not a substitute for the value of meeting in person. One sales manager took away his team’s cell phones for two weeks so they could experience the success of working a plan uninterrupted. They had exceptional results during that exercise. Deal with the unexpected by scheduling extra or flexible time each day. .

- Being able to do the right things comes from experience, training and practice. Goldsmith is right; you must get better. You cannot script a complete call, and must be able to think on your feet. One truth you must accept in selling is that you will make mistakes and you will fail at times. Nothing works all the time. Doing the right things requires wisdom and you get wisdom by learning from previous mistakes and failures. Start by debriefing each call. Ask yourself, what went well, what could have gone better? Identify skills you need to sharpen and start an improvement plan. Everyone has at least one competitor who is working to get better. Neutralize them with your own personal skill development plan.

Be better by creating value for your prospects and clients each time you interact with them. Help them identify new problems, see problems they did not see, or provide new perspectives and solutions. When you say “I am just following up” it translates to “You are not all that important, and I am wasting time.” Build credibility and value and make the prospect feel important by referencing previous conversations, and offering new perspectives or information each time.

The formula is simple—See the *right* people, see them with the *right* frequency, and do the *right* things when interacting with them.