



Treadmill
Syndrome
Working too hard but
not hard enough



By Jeffrie Story
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Have you ever peered out over your sales organization and noticed very busy people who weren't meeting goals, or moving in the direction you wanted, or making progress toward increasing sales?

I call this phenomenon Treadmill Syndrome. Running frantically, but getting nowhere except in the same two feet of space, with no reward. Working too hard but - based on results - not hard enough.

If we can identify when people are on it, we can lower Treadmill Time and increase results for the same amount of work. Maybe even less work. For you, that means fewer wasted resources and more rewards.

There are two types of what we'll call Treadmilling.

The first is doing inappropriate service work, or Service Treadmilling. It's about making knee-jerk decisions on how to handle service functions without exploring options.

Scenario: Phil, a current advertiser, calls and asks for pricing on a product. "Hey, Ed, would you fax me your prices on X product? We're doing some brainstorming over here and just wanted an estimate."

If Ed were a Service Treadmiller, he would jump off the phone and start pricing out X product. He might spend time figuring out several rates, listing bundled options and ways that X product could be discounted.

Then he would fax it to Phil (or drive it over to Phil!) and pat himself on the back for being so responsive. At the end of the day, Ed's manager might ask Ed if he had done his prospecting that day, and Ed would answer, "Are you kidding? I was tied up with servicing!"

In this example, what Ed called "servicing" may even have been a disguised sales opportunity. Ed didn't ask Phil any questions, so he couldn't offer a *real* recommendation. He may even have missed a bigger opportunity of participating in Phil's planning session. And he probably missed out on increasing market share.

Ed jumped on the Service Treadmill and just started running.

The second type is Sales Treadmilling, or selling in a way doesn't drive the sale – it merely keeps us in motion and dilutes the probability of those sales.

Here are three examples of Sales Treadmilling:

- Leaving an appointment without a next scheduled meeting. “I’ll call you after we get a spec ad developed.” (See April, 2006 column on Stalled Opportunities.)
- Sending out a proposal. No proposal should be “sent out” without going through it simultaneously with the prospect, even if it’s generated by your inside sales group. We’re throwing proposals into the air, hoping they’re understood, with no encouragement from the rep.
- Diligently dropping off business cards, or gathering business cards, then doing little, or nothing, with them. Some optimistically call this “prospecting,” and wonder why their return is so low.

The sad part of Treadmilling is that it’s a habitual behavior, done with high intentions and often with conscientious efforts. And usually those folks haven’t looked down to notice they’re running on a stationary treadmill.

I hope you’ll immediately recognize the answer to this dilemma: it’s in opening the eyes of your reps, and in teaching them how to handle these situations, and others like them.

With some observation and coaching on your part, you can quickly decrease your reps’ treadmill time. After all, no one wants to be stuck on a treadmill... especially one that carries them toward lost sales.

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