



Watering the Plants: Process Drives Results

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As seen in
MacDonald Advertising
Services
Inside Classified



What if we just didn't think about results? What if we could get reps to use enough of the right behaviors so that we'd know revenue would pour in profusely?

If I water my plants - my behavior - I can assume they'll grow - results.

Why can't we do something similar in sales? We could focus on behaviors and let results happen on their own!

It's an unrealistic idea, of course, but it brings up the issue of adding impetus to those behaviors we know will bring results. If managers focus on more of these critical behaviors, they can expect more beloved growth in revenue. Let's dig into the problem, then, and find a simple solution.

In my experience, newspaper sales managers and executives list three top problem behaviors that affect sales. They are:

1. Inadequate thorough needs analyses
2. Lack of formal written proposals, even if they're short
3. Inadequate prospecting

What are common solutions here? Begging, of course! This begging comes in many forms, such as compensation twists, contests, fanny-on-the-hot-burner meetings and tricky training. In addition to begging, we combine recognition with public humiliation. Yes, display those results on the wall! Surely it will drive some new behaviors!

While the above actions are helpful and necessary, they can't replace our ongoing work to change behaviors.

Let me tell you a secret about the first point. Consultative selling, or needs-based selling, was introduced about 30 years ago - replacing what I call manipulative selling - and I have never found a sales organization that doesn't admit its salespeople are mostly product-pushers.

Salespeople are still lacking in identifying needs from the prospect's point of view, which leads to weaker proposals. This issue, therefore, covers both points 1 and 2.

Similarly, we all know about the numbers game: Fill the sales funnel from the top, and money will eventually start falling out the bottom, showering us with abundance. Yet most sales organizations have no measure of contact initiation. They lament that their reps are not prospecting nearly enough.

What's the cause of these three issues? Are reps lazy? Are they defiant? No. Well, most aren't.

All three have the same root cause: Reps are afraid. They're afraid for two reasons. First, they think they don't know how to do what you're asking. Second, they haven't practiced enough. Now where's that simple solution? Sorry, but there isn't one.

However, the root cause gives us ideas for action, and they apply to all three points above. First, create three simple outlines reps can use. You'll have one for each of the three points. Usually these tools are non-existent, or they're too complicated.

Second, let reps know they don't have to be perfect, that selling is a process, not a performance.

Third, frequently ask reps to show you their needs-analysis notes, prospecting results and proposals. From these, you can estimate quality and quantity, and provide more guidance. Fourth, observe and coach as always.

These aren't state-of-the-art processes, but they're things you can do immediately to start driving better behaviors, and more of them.

The more we focus on the right behaviors with adequate quantity, the less we have to bite our fingernails waiting for final sales results.

We'll know we've been watering those revenue plants!

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