



Why Won't They Sell More?

By *Jeffrie Story*
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“I just don’t get it. We do everything under the sun to drive our ad reps, but nothing works. Why won’t they sell more?”

You may have heard this, or even said this! Driving new business is *the* key to success and more market share, but too many salespeople act as if prospecting is the path to catching Asian bird flu.

You, on the other hand, notice that what really seems contagious is Prospecting Avoidance Flu.

I hate to tell you this, friends, but there isn’t one simple answer to the dilemma. You already knew that, though. Watch this column each month, and we’ll explore what can cause it, and how you can improve it.

This month we’re digging into the first cause: lack of focus. Behavioral Sciences Research Press calls this Goal Diffusion. We scatter energy yet miss the big chunk of accomplishment. That stands for Less Prospecting. It feels as if a grouch holds the remote control to our brains and is flipping through the channels.

Oh my word, Goal Diffusion is a big issue for newspapers! It starts with basic industry characteristics: deadlines, a prolific number of products, operations and servicing issues. You could spend hours listing them, right? Add each individual’s own habits of distraction, and chaos reigns.

The first step for managers is this: Don’t feed the bear. Yes, you have multiple priorities you must pass on to reps, but show them how each one fits into major goals. Remind them of your major goals again and again.

When you have a new product or promotion to introduce, don’t give the impression that you’re shoving them out to peddle one more thing. Be sure they’re clear about the market fit for that product and how they can use it in consultative selling.

As managers, we think our message is obvious, but too often what reps *think* they hear is, “Go sell it! Here’s our new priority! But still do what we said yesterday!” or “Forget what we said yesterday!” Ongoing clarification of strategy and goals can reduce this industry-generated Goal Diffusion.

Helping reps become aware of their own scattered energy is the next step. They need to focus on one thing at a time and have their priorities *numbered* every day. You could even stop by occasionally and ask to see their numbered list — especially if Goal Diffusion is rampant. What would you find if you did that today?

Ongoing interruptions also contribute significantly to Goal Diffusion. Some are critical; some are controllable. What if you set up just an hour of uninterrupted time for everyone each day? Can't many interruptions be delayed for a single hour? If reps use that hour working through priorities — like calling prospects for appointments — they'll gain about three hours worth of time. I'm not exaggerating. Try it yourself!

Finally, do you ever organize task forces? Probably. Who are the people who volunteer? Yep, Goal Diffused people are the first to wave their hands. They're also the ones you *don't* want to select. Help focus them before they put more on their buffet plate of priorities.

Obviously, there are many strategies to conquer Goal Diffusion. The key is to recognize Goal Diffusion, act on it and take off the prospecting brake!

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