

Simple Inside Sales Skills

The best sales teams are most often led by someone who is more like a sales coach than a sales manager. The dedication to developing inside sales skills ultimately creates a sales team that not only hits its short-term goals but instills a culture of learning and self-improvement in order to achieve its long-term goals as well.

But it's not always so easy. Superb inside sales skills don't always come naturally to young reps, and sales leaders often feel like they don't have the time or mastery to adequately coach. I know how important the process is and have concentrated it to this list every salesperson should master.

Product/Service Knowledge

A salesperson who doesn't perfectly understand the product or service they're selling is completely ineffective. Training should be one of the very first things you teach – they should be able to explain in detail how each product/service works, what business value it offers, and the reasons it appeals to your company's ideal customers. This will help craft the sales pitch effectively and ensure the strongest features are highlighted. Deep product knowledge is honestly one of the few things that separate the top 1 percent from the rest.

Strategic Prospecting Skills

While many sales leaders have their reps do early cold-calling, I actually never suggest cold calling. From an economics perspective, it is obviously considerably more cost-effective to do sophisticated prospecting or "strategic prospecting." This means searching for referrals through existing connections that fit the target buyer or ideal customer profile. It also means thinking about new and original marketing ideas that are proven to work in your industry. It's also important to go back to closed and lost opportunities with whom you've already had previous conversations and try to revive them.

Building Rapport on the Call

Some people already have a natural ability to create instant rapport and only have to finesse it. Others can learn to research prospects in advance and find common ground to empathize with the person on the other end of the line. Whether you're chatting about sports, attending the same college, or just the weather, rapport should not be underestimated.

Buyer-Seller Agreement

In order to set mutual expectations and to make your prospects more comfortable, you should learn how to create an agreement that sets the tone for all calls or sales meetings. These are verbal agreements at the beginning of the sales process that outline expectations for both sides. For example, “Let me ask a few questions about your business and then I will be able to show you exactly how we can help you to ensure this is the best fit for all of us.” It allows the prospect to feel comfortable and understand what is coming next, so no one feels ambushed by the next step. It also allows a two-way street in the selling process so that both parties get to a win-win conclusion.

Active Listening

Most people feel comfortable talking to prospects, but listening is another story. You should become proficient in active listening or listening with a strict focus and asking intelligent follow-up questions. People can usually tell if you’re really listening to them, rather than just thinking about what you’ll say next – and most people appreciate a good listener.

Communication

On the phone, the tone of voice, volume and pace of speech are surprisingly important sales skills. In sales, how you say things to a prospect matters more than what you say. As you may have heard before, it’s not what you say but how you say it. Try to subtly mirror a prospect’s tone of voice and style of talking – if a prospect is more formal and polite, then speak similarly; if they’re more informal and joke around, do the same. This helps prospects feel familiar with you and relate to you more easily to create rapport. You also need to speak clearly, not too quietly, and not in a monotone. You need to let your emotion and personality shine through so that the person on the phone knows you’re a human and is interested in talking to you.

Qualification Questioning

You should start every sales conversation by asking questions to analyze a prospect’s business needs. It’s important to not just throw random features and benefits at the prospect hoping something will stick. In fact, stop sharing all your capabilities all at once. This is a bad tactic. Instead, you need to delve deep to discover your prospect’s business pain and how your product can help them solve it by asking qualifying questions. These questions help you determine what you should share about the benefits and value based on what is going to be most important for them. Every prospect is looking for a solution to some problem; you just need to find that problem then be their solution.

Time Management

The most effective salespeople are able to make the most of their time. The key to being highly productive is using good time management skills. You need to sort through leads to find the most promising ones, and not waste too much time on a deal that isn't going anywhere. You can use analytics to identify the industry, business size, and other characteristics of ideal leads, and share the information with your team. It's vital to make the most of the hours in the day to bring in more deals. It is also important to remember the time when on a call or in a sales meeting. Most people are thinking of how much they can fit into a day and having a call or meeting drag on too long is just going to irritate the prospect.

Objection Prevention

Practice the art of proactive "Objection Prevention" and not merely "Objection Handling" and you can reduce some of the most basic objections by way of how they approach a sale. Be strategic and think ahead by studying what typical objections come up in most cases. For example, there is no reason to get to a point when a prospect can say, "I don't have a need for this" or "Call me again in a few months."

Objection Handling

Even the best salespeople can't prevent every objection, so it's important to help prepare for objection handling. Be ready for any objection so that the sales process doesn't end abruptly and you lose the opportunity. I like to coach salespeople to empathize, soften and ask good questions to understand what is genuinely at the core of a prospect's concern. You need to learn to sincerely understand the prospect's problem, ask for more information, and offer clarity to help the prospect overcome their objections. No matter your opinion of their objections, they are not looking for an argument but always a solution.

Gaining Commitment

Great salespeople can get a prospect to commit fairly quickly. The key is making sure the right people with the right approval power are brought in to the process as the sale progresses. Meaning the salesperson needs to know with whom they are speaking because if they hear all positives and then finally the prospect says "But I cannot make the final decision," you may have wasted the opportunity to close the sale right then and there. However, if the prospect has the authority to either "sign on the dotted line" or at least be able to have most of the influence in the final decision, then the sale can close rather quickly. It is important to continually ask questions, assess the prospect's needs and reinforce what the prospect is interested in buying. You should ask "Is this helpful? Is this how you envision it?" and more. By forcing the prospect with buying power to acknowledge again and again that you're offering them real value, it helps push them to commit to a deal.

Closing Techniques

Now that you've convinced the prospect that their company needs the product/service, it's time to close. Salespeople need to know that it is ok to push prospects, ask for the order and get it signed fast. You can do this without being too pushy. A lot of prospects will try to push the closing date back a few weeks or a few months, and honestly, you may be tempted to set a goal with them for the future, but your own goal should be to close that sale NOW. In the case of postponing, you have to establish a timeline, and push the prospect to sign using a compelling event. This shows how the prospect is missing out on revenue by not having the product/service in place now. With the right combination of pressure and value offered, you can learn to close deals sooner.

Post-Sale Relationship Management

Many of us forget to thank customers and to continue building and maintaining the relationship after the sale. Firstly, it's important to be appreciative for the business regardless of whether the customer will buy from you again. This is just common sense and common courtesy. And those who are genuinely appreciative are the ones who typically grow professionally and become masters of their craft. Furthermore, you don't want your customers churning later and going to a competitor. Additionally, your customers can and will refer you to other customers. Even ten years later, you can still go back to the individual to whom you sold and, who knows, they may still become a customer even if they are in a new and different company. Relationships really matter; it's that simple. This is a key area at which I encourage all to become really disciplined. It could mean even more growth as well as loyalty.