



THE 6 MISTAKES MADE BY COMPLACENT SALESPEOPLE

by Leigh Wallinger

Most sales people are prone to become complacent. It's to do with the nature of the job – it is very hard work, it is stressful, it requires lots of patience and tenacity. There are also no short cuts to success.

Sales and Business Development, especially in the IT space, is not an easy option. However, there are numerous issues that even experienced salespeople can encounter which makes their lives more difficult than it needs to be. One of the most common issues is complacency within the sales team.

Complacency creeps into the lives of successful sales people when they become over-confident in their abilities. This leads to them taking a number of short-cuts in how they do their jobs. The most likely short-cut is in trying to maintain their sales success and cut their working hours. Complacency is often a by-product of success.

Successful sales people appear to start looking for short-cuts; to start thinking that some of the tasks they used to undertake routinely, are now optional. They are not and this is a key sign that complacency is setting in.

Below are the 6 biggest mistakes that complacent sales people make – be sure you are not making them.

Mistake 1: Lack of basic research

In the current business climate, the prospects in your marketplace are bombarded with marketing messages from everywhere. It is important that your approach to each prospect hits a point of pain that your prospect is encountering. Successful salespeople will spend time before approaching a new prospect to carefully research the target organisation. This can largely be undertaken using the Internet. Complacent sales people tend to ignore the research activities. They reckon that because of their extensive experience, they don't need to invest in pre-call research.

For each target organisation, especially if you are looking at the Corporates, you are advised to have an account opening strategy (or a prospect penetration strategy). This is an important step in ensuring that you are approaching each prospect in the most efficient way, using a multitude of different methods. You will need a strategy to approach your prospect some 7 – 10 times over a period of a few months.

Mistake 2: Lack of preparation and personalised communications

In some way, this critical mistake made by complacent sales people is the most common. You turn up for a meeting with a prospect and you have done no preparation. You plan to "wing it", hoping that your experience will help you carry the day. When you are unprepared, you will have a tendency to ask your prospect to "tell me something about your own business" – with disastrous results.

Successful sales people will always turn up for meetings with a series of pre-planned questions, open-ended questions that will draw the prospect into a conversation about their situation and help you confirm the pain-points against which to focus your attention. Complacent sales people will turn up and talk about anything when they arrive. They think of their next question as the prospect is answering the previous one, so miss some vital clues that would enable them to make additional sales.



Complacent sales people will make great use of standard emails, letters and proposals - thinking these demonstrate how efficient they are being with their time. In reality, a prospect or a customer receiving a standard communication like this instantly feels devalued and not important. In practise, you really want each prospect to think they are very important to you and each customer to think they are your most important customer. Successful sales people do this by sending highly personalised messages that address the specific pain-points of their customers and prospects.

Mistake 3: Not listening very well (or at all)

Experienced sales people may fall into the trap of thinking they have heard it all before from prospects and customers. Complacent sales people only half-listen to what is being said and, instead, focus on what they will say next – due to their lack of preparation. The emphasis is often about what the sales person wants, not what the other person wants.

Associated with not listening is little or no eye contact between the sales person and the prospect / customer. Again, it is a small signal that you are not really interested in what the prospect has to say.

Prospects respond to this sales style by not buying. Customers feel they are no longer important to you, levels of customer satisfaction drop and the number of customer defections increases.

Mistake 4: Talking too much

Complacent sales people tend to talk too much. They end up giving a sales pitch, full of generic benefits irrespective of whether or not they are relevant. The reasons for this are given in Mistakes 1 and 2. They have failed to do any preparation and tend to talk about their own company and its product and services because they can't think of any good questions during the meeting.

A good rule of thumb is to get the other person to talk for 60% of the time. In this way, you will learn all about the issues and problems and pain points that exist which are causing your prospect to meet with you. It is your job as a sales person to uncover these issues and try to solve them. So, in a 1 hour meeting, your prospect needs to be talking for about 40 minutes. You can only achieve this if you ask some great questions – questions which won't spring to mind in the middle of a meeting.

Mistake 5: No follow through

Surprising as it may seem, not all sales people do what they say they will do for their customers and prospects. If you agree to send through some information within a period of time, make sure you do so. It will make your customer or prospect feel good and reflect well on you and your organisation. Complacent sales people make commitments without much thought as to whether or not they can deliver. It is the small things that matter when it comes to winning sales and keeping customers. Doing what you said you would do, when you said you would do it is a habit you should develop.

Mistake 6: Showing a general lack of courtesy

Lack of courtesy by complacent sales people is displayed in lots of small ways. Being offhand with receptionist and secretarial staff always backfires, be polite and professional in your dealings with everyone in your prospect's organisation.

Other examples which damage your standing in the eyes of your prospect are: being late for appointments, not confirming meetings beforehand, not keeping to agreed meeting durations, giving standard answers to questions, not answering questions and being unprepared.



Another habit that many sales people seem to have adopted is to leave mobile phones switched on during meetings. The real irritant for prospects is when the phone rings and the sales person answers it. The subconscious message being given to your prospect if you do this is "you're not as important as the person who is calling and I don't mind wasting your time while I answer their call". Is it any wonder these sales people don't win the business?

Bonus thoughts

Successful salespeople work hard to put their prospects and customers at ease. They act as consultants offering solutions to some of the problems their prospects are facing. The complacent sales person, the one who decides to "wing it", doesn't have this mindset. They tend to act like and sound like a sales person.

This has two psychological effects on your prospect. Firstly, they are immediately on their guard – becoming much more defensive and cautious about what they say to you. Secondly, they feel superior to you. Instead of having a peer-to-peer conversation with your prospect, in their mind you are just another salesman looking for a quick order. In short, you are no different to all the other complacent sales people this prospect sees.

The complacent sales person won't have prepared properly for the discussion. They will not ask enough questions to fully uncover and understand their prospect's pain points. As a result, they will not know which benefits of their product / service will be relevant – so just end up talking about every possible benefit hoping one of them will generate a reaction from the prospect. They will try to impress the prospect by relaying facts and figures about their own Company, its history, its strategy, its plans and its range of products / services.

At the end of the meeting, the prospect will probably be polite enough to say something like "I'll think about all you have said before making any decisions"

The prospect leaves the meeting grateful to have escaped without buying anything. The sales person reports back to their Manager details of another successful meeting. Unfortunately, the sales person will now spend many frustrating weeks trying to get a follow up meeting with a prospect who doesn't want to be sold to.

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