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The Secret Strategy for Meaningful Sales Meetings

by Dave Kahle

Oops! Got a sales meeting coming up in two weeks, better get ready for it. Let's see, what should we do? I'll go over last month's numbers, that'll take a half hour. Then…I know! The credit manager has been complaining about the state of receivables lately. I'll have him come in and complain directly to the sales guys. That'll take about an hour. Now what….

Does that scenario sound familiar? All too often that's how we plan our sales meetings. The focus is on how to fill the time, what information we want to transmit, and who we want to present it. When the focus is on the agenda, it's easy to wander off, to fill the time with needless details, and to end up with a boring and non-productive meeting. With a meeting like that, it's no wonder that most salespeople would rather be in the field, doing their jobs, than killing time at a sales meeting. Here is a powerful strategy guaranteed to make sales meetings more meaningful for your salespeople, and more valuable for you.

Let's say you have a range of new prices on some of your current products. You are planning to spend an hour presenting them and answering questions. That sounds good. Who could object to that? So, your sales meeting agenda looks like this:

Present new prices.
Let's dig through it to come up with the end. Why are you presenting the new prices? You might say, "So the salespeople will know them and understand why we are changing prices."

"OK, why do you want that?"

"So they will be able to convey them to the customers."

"Why do you want to do that?"

"So the customer will accept the new prices without too much objection."

"What you really want, then, is the customer to accept the new prices without raising too much of ruckus about them?"

"Yes."

"And you want salespeople to convey the prices in a way that accomplishes that?"

"Yes."

OK, so let's start there. In order to get what you want, the salespeople will need to make some commitments with deadlines as to when they will present the new prices, and then they'll need to be trained in the best way to present them.

The question now becomes: What can you do in the sales meeting that will ensure that your salespeople will convey the new prices to their customers in a way that will be acceptable to the customer?

At this point, if it were me, I'd start at the end – having the salespeople make specific commitments to deliver the prices to the appropriate customers. That's the behavior you want. But, you'll also need to

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equip them to do that – that's the training piece. So, It's about ending up with the salespeople filling out a document as to when they'll convey those prices to the impacted customers.

In order to ensure that they knew how to do that well, I'd think about doing some role-plays so the salespeople could practice conveying the prices. The role-plays would also allow them to identify some common objections, and practice responding to them.

Before I could do the role-plays, I'd have to demonstrate to them some of the best practices for communicating the price increases. And before that, I'd have to describe the price increases, the rationale, and the best way to communicate them.

Now, I have my agenda:

1. Describe the rationale for the price increases.
2. Describe the best way of communicating them.
3. Demonstrate the best way to communicate them.
4. Organize a role-play so everyone can practice.
5. Discuss what they learned in the role-play.
6. Repeat the role-play.
7. Have each salesperson create a list of which customers need to have the new prices.
8. Have each salesperson identify a date by which he/she will have communicated the new prices.
9. Ask each to report, by a certain date, on how well it went.

Look at the difference in the two agendas. The first is unfocused, and emphasizes the time and general subject matter. The second is precisely focused on an end result, incorporates interactive exercises, and is very practical.

The difference was where you started. Start at the end.

One important observation: if you are disciplined about this, you'll soon discover that the end of every sales meeting is almost always expressed in some behavior that you want from the customer, and therefore some behavior that you want from the sales force. In other words, you want the salespeople to stop doing something, to start doing something (like in the example), or to do something better.

Every sales meeting, and every item on every sales meeting agenda, ought to be designed to bring about some specific change in the salesperson's behavior.

Let's test this with some common sales meeting agenda items. Let's say you are going to present a new product.

"Why?"

"So the salespeople will sell it."

The change is behavior in the salespeople selling something they have never sold before. Start there and work backwards. Or, you are going to have the president (VP, CFO, etc.) come in and present the new strategic plan for the company.

"Why?"

"So the salespeople will know what our plans are."

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"Why?"

"So they will feel good about where the company is going."

"Why is that important?"

"So, they will be more committed to the company."

"What will they do differently if they are more committed?"

"I suppose they will be less likely to leave for another job."

"So, what you really want is for the salespeople to not look for another job while they are working for you."

"I guess."

OK, start there and work backward. You can still have the president talk, but now he has a focus for his presentation, will be much less likely to digress, and will speak to the practical needs of the sales force.

Here, then, is the secret for making every sales meeting practical, meaningful and worthwhile: Start at the end, with a description of the change in behavior that you want in the sales force, and work backwards from there.

It will make all the difference.

About the Author

Dave Kahle is a consultant and sales training expert who helps his clients increase their sales and improve their sales productivity. He speaks from real world experience, having been the number one salesperson in the country for two companies in two distinct industries. Dave has trained thousands of salespeople to be more successful in the Information Age economy. He's the author of over 1,000 articles, a monthly ezine, and six books including: 10 Secrets of Time Management for Salespeople and Transforming Your Sales Force for the 21st Century. He has a gift for creating powerful training events that get audiences thinking differently about sales.

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