

[Editor's Note: In this month's sales article, author Dave Kahle raises a topic of great interest both to sales managers and to salespeople looking to improve their results. He addresses a major influence that often restricts sales performance: a lack of established best practices. As in other areas of business, best practices in sales result in better outcomes. There's great value in establishing best practices among your sales team and applying associated metrics that motivate staff to faithfully follow these best practices through the selling process. Kahle poses the difficult question of whether those who resist using best practices are, in fact, avoiding accountability. This short article can be used as a starting point for exploring this important issue and its impact on your bottom line. These ideas can also be applied by individuals seeking to create a better personal sales model. JLM]

I Have My Own Style of Selling

by Dave Kahle

Occasionally, at a seminar or training program, I'll overhear one salesperson mention this to another -- "I have my own style of selling."

From my perspective, that idea is more detrimental to that salesperson's success than almost any other. Not only that, but that idea holds down entire sales forces, renders sales management impotent, and dissipates the sales team's potential. Of all the ideas that detract from sales performance, this is the most malignant.

Here's why. In the profession of sales, just like in every other profession, there is a set of best practices – specific things to do, behaviors and processes that are proven to produce results. (see my article, Best Practices for Salespeople for a more detailed explanation.)

"Planning for every sales call," for example, is a best practice. Those salespeople who adhere to that discipline achieve better results than those who don't. That's an easy example. The truth is, though, that there are literally dozens of best practices, impacting every aspect of the sales process. There are proven ways to identify your highest potential prospects, to approach a prospect, to uncover opportunities, to present your solutions, to acquire agreement, and to leverage that transaction into greater opportunities.

The world is full of sales trainers who make a living teaching some of these practices. And professional salespeople make it a quest to continually seek the best practices, and to inject them into their routines, turning them into habits.

Here's the problem. When a salesperson believes that he/she "has his own style of selling," they are negating the entire concept of best practices and discounting the past 70 years of development of the sales profession. It doesn't matter what anyone else says, it doesn't matter what practices the vast weight of professional judgment reinforces, it doesn't matter what behaviors research identifies as effective -- the only thing that matters is "my style."

How can anyone teach you anything as long as you have "your style?"

While I occasionally hear that in my seminars, I'm convinced that the salespeople who really believe it are the ones who don't show up at the seminars. Why bother? They have their own style.

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I suspect that, in many cases, there is something deeper going on. I suspect that those salespeople who maintain that they have their "own style" are really hiding a more profound situation. Maintaining that you have "your own style," is a way of avoiding scrutiny and sliding out from under accountability. How can anyone teach you anything? How can anyone coach you? How can anyone question anything that you do? That's the issue!

I believe that many salespeople who maintain they have their own style are really, at the heart, insecure about their performance. They may understand that they aren't really suited to selling, and they are insecure and uncomfortable with what they do. So, to avoid scrutiny, to escape being accountable for their actions, they hide under the cloud of "their own style."

"Their own style," is then, in many cases, the hiding place of the mediocre. Salespeople who announce it, sales managers who allow it, and sales executives who tolerate it are severely limiting the performance of their sales teams.

About the Author

Dave Kahle (www.davekahle.com/aboutdave.html) has trained tens of thousands of B2B salespeople and sales managers (www.davekahle.com/manageroverview.html) to be more effective in the 21st Century economy. He's authored seven books, and presented in 47 states and seven countries. Visit his website (www.davekahle.com) or sign up for his weekly newsletter (www.davekahle.com/maillinglist.html).

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