

THE FIVE FACTORS OF TOP SALESPEOPLE AND THE TOP FOUR SALES MISTAKES

BY JOHN ASHER



The Number-One Skill a Salesperson Needs

Consider these two statistics about business-to-business sales:

- Four percent of the sales people in the U.S. sell 94 percent of the goods and services, according to two meta studies - one by Harvard University and one from the Gallup Organization.
- Eighty percent of business-to-business (B2B) transactions are the result of relationships/consulting type sales, where the buyer has to like, trust, and get along with the seller, according to current surveys done by "Selling Power" and "Sales and Marketing Management" magazines. *(Twenty percent are commodity sales where price is the driving factor. Today, in some industries, nearly all sales are commodity-based.)*

The statistics tell the story: **Selling yourself is the most important sale in 80 percent of the B2B sales.**

The most important skill of a salesperson? Listening.

It seems contradictory. How can you sell yourself if you're listening?

It's simple. Ask questions. Listen to the answers. Respond with comments that show you listened, and ask more questions. In the end, suggest your solutions.

"When a sales person starts out with a presentation, most of us feel like we're being sold to. Most of the country's top salespeople recognize the negative psychology of that," says Asher.

Instead of polishing up the perfect presentation, top sales people will ask about the prospect's issues, problems, pain and requirements. After they've unearthed all that, they offer a solution. "Now the psychology is switched around. Once a relationship is established, they act more like a trusted, helping advisor than an 'it's-all-about-me' sales person."

Profile of a Top Salesperson

If you were to create a profile of a top sales person - that four percent of the sales population that accounts for 94 percent of the sales - you would see five factors converging.

"It's what I refer to as 'the perfect storm for sales,'" says Asher.

The factors are:

1. **They are "knowledge giants."** They know what they're talking about. They have a perfect understanding of their product or service. They understand their competition and the competitive landscape. They come across to prospects as 'go to' people because they really know what they're talking about, and they can help prospects solve real business problems."
2. **They have an aptitude for sales. It's in the DNA.** "All of us have a natural aptitude for some jobs and won't do well in others. In Jim Collins' book, "Good to Great," one of his bottom lines is to get the right people in the right seat on the bus, in jobs where they have natural talent or aptitude," says Asher.

3. **They have *The Top-Ten Skills of the Super Salespeople*, which are generally unknown to the average sales person.** “Some of these skills are counterintuitive. They do not come naturally so they must be learned,” Asher explains. For instance, someone with a “driver” personality like Asher’s is not a natural-born listener - yet listening is the number one skill. So it must be learned.

Another skill is patience coupled with perseverance. “Most sales people give a lot of prospects a few contacts. Top salespeople pick a few top prospects and give them a lot of contacts. When you get a new B2B prospect, you have to give them on average 12 touches before they will buy,” he says.

In Asher’s sales training experience, when you give a person with a natural talent for sales the top 10 skills of the super salespeople, you will usually see an explosive growth in sales by that salesperson.

4. **They are motivated.** Asher says motivation involves the following considerations:
 - ***Is the person self-motivated?*** If they test high for sales aptitude, they are usually naturally self-motivated. If they do not test high for sales aptitude, they need to be motivated by sales managers.
 - ***What type of sales person are they?*** The two basic types are “hunters” and “farmers,” and if they are mismatched to the job, their motivation will suffer. A hunter likes the thrill of the hunt, the challenge, and will be most motivated by acquiring new accounts. A farmer likes to have many accounts that he or she can nurture for up-selling and cross-selling opportunities. If you have a hunter in a hunter job, he or she will be motivated. Put a hunter in a farmer job and motivation declines.
 - ***Where is the sales person in his or her life?*** Are they single and trying to build wealth, thinking about money all the time? Or, are they middle-aged, having made a substantial nest egg, and don’t need so much money? Motivation will be affected accordingly.
5. **They are supported by a process.** “Most top-performing companies have ‘best practice’ branding, marketing, sales and customer service processes to support the sales people,” says Asher. “You won’t see a great sales person working in a company with unsatisfactory processes.”

“So the profile of top sales people is that they’re knowledge giants who help customers solve real business problems, they have a natural talent for outside sales, and they have the top 10 skills and use them. They’re self-motivated and they’re at that point in their lives where they’re charged up to make more sales. And they’re working in companies where they are supported by best practice processes for branding, marketing, sales and customer service. When all five of those are clicking along, you have a top sales person,” Asher says.

Sales Mistakes Companies Make

What’s not clicking in some companies that are sales-challenged?

Asher draws on his experience consulting with 400+ companies, and he identifies these issues:

1. **Promoting the best salesperson in the company to the position of sales manager.** “Now we’ve shot ourselves in both feet,” says Asher. “We’ve lost our best salesperson and gained a lousy sales manager, because the aptitude for the manager’s job is not the same as the aptitude for an outside ‘hunter’ salesperson. It is a rare person who has the aptitude for both jobs.”

2. **Confusing the roles of branding, marketing, sales and customer service.** “It’s actually a fairly simple distinction,” Asher explains. The objectives in each process are:

- Branding: *Raising market awareness*
- Marketing: *Obtaining qualified leads.*
- Sales: *Making 12 contacts with a qualified lead to close the sale.*
- Customer Service/Account Management: *Once you’ve got the customer, delight them and grow the account by upselling, cross-selling and obtaining referrals.*

“The mistake many companies make is that they have hunter sales people do marketing, sales and account management, when the company should take care of marketing and customer service and let the hunter sales people sell.”

3. **Failing to have a repeatable process for sales.** “I have 399 out of 400 CEOs telling me this: ‘I want a repeatable process for my sales people, so that as they go through contacts one through 12, the outcome is more predictable,’” says Asher.

The “right” overall sales process will vary a bit for each company, but the basic sales processes need to be developed and put in place by top management (CEOs and sales managers). Most top companies have a “sales manual” that includes prospecting, qualification, pursuit and closing processes.

4. **Misunderstanding the CEO’s role in locating top salespeople.** “Almost all CEOs want top salespeople, but they don’t take it as their personal job to find them. It should be one of the CEO’s top jobs in life to find top sales people,” he says.

HOW?

- Identify them. They’re usually within your industry, working for a competitor or vendor/supplier.
- **Build relationships with them.** Personally stay in touch. Don’t delegate that task.
- Position yourself as the “go to” employer of choice. When they are in a chaotic situation, they will think of you first.