



Help Sales Avoid Panic Driven Mistake.

by Shelley F. Hall

As published in Mass High Tech May 22, 2009

It's a tough selling environment today and in the face of real challenges too many sales people are making critical mistakes that cost them and your company money. As managers, we need to recognize that our sales teams face a choice every day: stay and "fight" through the tough times or take "flight" emotionally and/or physically. This challenge is especially true for high tech companies whose products often have high price tags or where a need must be *created* for new and innovative products/services. As managers, we need to watch for these panic driven mistakes and *act fast* to address the mistake and to support the sales person emotionally.

Mistake #1: "Nobody is buying"

If you haven't heard this, you're either very lucky or deaf. This kind of verbal negativity can be so debilitating that it causes sales people to shut down, to just go through the motions. In the face of reduced budgets they fail to demonstrate that your medical device or enterprise software will increase efficiencies or increase the number of medical tests performed each day. In other words, they forget to sell the ROI that can create a budget where none existed.

The Answer: Share every sales success story no matter how small. Invite a customer to a sales meeting to talk to the team about why they bought, what value the purchase brought to the company and how the company has benefited.

Mistake #2: Failing to qualify leads

Sales people fall into the trap of believing that any lead is a good lead. They are so desperate for a "live one" that they will waste time and energy following bad leads.

The Answer: Give your team the approval to *not* chase every lead. Instead of asking, "what are you going to do to sell this guy", ask the sales person what they've done to *qualify* the lead and *why* they believe it is a qualified lead..

Mistake #3: Shortening the discovery phase, moving too quickly to the product presentation

Panicked sales people will try to get to the product presentation quickly so they can ask for the close quickly. They miss the customer's real needs and they miss the cues that will tell them how to customize their pitch to a specific customer need.

The Answer: Stop conducting "what did you do this week" sales meetings and turn them into training opportunities. Remind them there's a sales *process* for a reason and ignoring or diminishing a step in the process will not close more business. Demonstrate that discovery itself is a process of "gaining agreement" and of leading a customer to acknowledge a problem for which you have the solution.



Mistake #4: Failing to adjust to the new reality, failing to change!

Repeating what you've always done before may not work now.

Certain aspects of selling never change. But how you do it does change and a recession should push us to examine every aspect of our sales process, our product and our marketing.

The Answer: How we present our product/service is definitely going to be different. Prospects are afraid and products or services should be presented in a way that alleviates or eliminates fear as much as possible. Change the context in which you present your product/service, use new descriptors and describe the benefits and results in terms that matter to the prospect, short term results may supersede long term results.

Mistake #5: Failing to respond appropriately to a slower customer decision making process

Decisions are taking longer. We need to adjust to that new reality and build strategies for it. Calling or emailing the prospect constantly will not force a faster decision.

The Answer: Accept that in a recession, your prospects are likely going to think and rethink every purchase. Be damn sure you can clearly and effectively state your value proposition in *specific* terms *relevant* to your buyer. Influence the buying criteria and the decision process. Stay in front of the prospect by adding value during the decision making process such as a free seminar, free trial or article of value to them.

Mistake #6: Failing to ask for help

In our culture asking for help can be viewed as a sign of weakness. But you can't help your team if they don't ask.

The Answer: Create a positive environment that encourages coaching and mentoring among peers. In private one-on-one meetings, ask sales people how you can help them. Avoid group discussions that require them to come "out of the closet" about their fears. .

In Conclusion

This list is by no means all the mistakes that can happen. It is management's responsibility to prevent these and other mistakes and to keep a watchful eye for signs that they may be occurring.