

# YOU CAN ALWAYS SELL MORE ...

## ***“You Can Always Sell More...By Spending More Time Riding With Your Sales Reps”*** by Jim Pancero

How strong are the selling skills of your team? How consistent and effective are they in front of a prospect or customer? And when was the last time you checked them out to see if they could actually improve any of their skills and effectiveness?

### **The Problem In Believing That “Experienced = Trained”**

Do you believe that “experienced = trained?” The vast majority of sales managers actually believe that statement or they at least manage their sales team as if they believed in it’s accuracy.

How do you train a newly hired sales rep? Most managers only train a newly hired sales rep on the technical product knowledge skills required in the job. They’ll also do extensive training on how to process and enter all of the administrative aspects of the job.

When I ask sales managers “but what about actually training a newly hired sales professional on the “best practices” of selling?” Most answer with “well, since we only hire experienced sales reps we really don’t see the need to teach them how to sell. We assumed their experience in sales should have already provided them with those required skills.”

And that’s alright with most sales reps anyway. The majority of experienced sales reps also tend to believe “experience = trained.”

Whenever I get a chance to talk with an experienced sales pro I like to ask them a series of questions to better understand their experience level and to learn how strong and consistent their selling skills and structures really are. One of the first questions I’ll ask someone is “So how much sales training have you had in the last twelve months?”

How would you answer that question? The vast majority of otherwise experienced sales professionals when asked, don’t define their recent sales training efforts because for most they haven’t experienced any recent training. What they do answer back is “Well I’ve been selling for 15 years!” “Experienced = trained!”

### **Most Experienced Reps Are Like A Car Going Down The Expressway**

Most experienced sales reps are like a car going down the expressway. Their success is measured both on how fast they’re going and how far they can get. Now most of the experienced sales reps I meet are doing a good job, they’re going 80 miles per hour down the expressway and have been covering a lot of ground. They’re successful!

But the majority also tend to be inefficient and even ineffective in a number of specific selling skills. Even though they’re driving down the expressway going 80 miles per hour, they’re still in second gear and only utilizing 4 of the eight cylinders in their engine. Imagine how much faster and further they could go if they were using all of their resources and skills!

## **Where Are The Selling Skill Gaps Within Your Team?**

Where are the selling skill gaps within your team? What personal selling skills or processes have they stopped using or were never taught?

You can't learn this type of insight into the skills and selling gaps within your team unless you actually ride along and observe them selling. How often do you ride with your salespeople?

I observe three problems or challenges currently being faced by the majority of sales managers. The first problem is they tend to be very overworked compared to the rest of the sales team. In most companies the sales manager is the one who's putting in the most hours and is under the most day-to-day stress. Is any of this accurately describing you and your job?

The second problem is that most sales managers tend to focus all of their attention on where things are today. What can they be doing today to close business or improve their market position?

This today focus becomes a challenge when it overwhelms the thinking and planning of a sales manager. Even when they do ride with a salesperson for the day making calls most managers still only see their time investment with this rep as a way to close business, help move an account forward or network with one of their people.

And the third problem is this problem we mentioned earlier of "experience equaling trained." Because most sales managers assume they already have experienced sales pros working for them they don't even see the need to observe, and coach their senior sales reps, even though most definitely need help and with the proper coaching could get even better than they are today.

## **What To Look For When Riding With An Experienced Sales Rep**

A listing of the major skills I believe are critical to success in selling can be found by taking your own free online evaluation of your selling skills at [www.GreatSalesSkills.com](http://www.GreatSalesSkills.com). By completing a twenty question online evaluation of your selling skills you'll receive a five to seven page report based on your specific answers. There's also a more extensive report that includes 30 pages of ideas and suggestions that's also available for a charge. You might also want to complete the twenty question online evaluation of your sales leadership skills, also available at [www.GreatSalesSkills.com](http://www.GreatSalesSkills.com)!

If you haven't done this already, the easiest way to get started evaluating and coaching your sales team is start carving out some time in your schedule to allow you to ride with your reps. If you're new to coaching one of the best places to start is to watch and evaluate the foundation or operational skills of your people.

Operational selling skills include the basics or fundamentals of selling. Your ability to ask questions, to use the steps of a sales call, to understand the personality flexibility skills and to be able to manage and run a territory are all Operational skills.

## **Three Of The Most Common Fundamental Skill Gaps Within Otherwise Experienced Sales Reps**

Three of the most common Operational or fundamental skill gaps I observe in otherwise experienced and successful salespeople all focus on their bias of only tending to talk about themselves.

I recently rode with an experienced sales rep named Chuck calling on the fleet manager of a local distribution company. The goal of the sales call was to present the final leasing proposal for several trucks and to walk the customer through the presentation of why their company could do the best job for that manager and his company.

The first part of Chuck's presentation proposal was basically made up of about 20 pages of PowerPoint like full page slides talking about why his leasing company was the best choice for that distributor. During this 45 minute call this otherwise experienced rep made all three of these fundamental skill errors with his fleet manager buyer.

The first problem was Chuck did all the talking. Now he really knew his product and the benefits of leasing over purchase. But throughout his presentation as he covered feature after feature pointing out all the benefits to the customer, Chuck just kept talking never giving his customer a chance to confirm or comment on anything he was saying!

At one point his customer even responded to a benefit of his leasing program by saying "Now that would be a significant improvement over what we're doing now!" But instead of drilling deeper to better understand why his customer was so excited, Chuck just kept going by turning the page and continuing his presentation.

During his 45 minute sales call Chuck did over 90% of the talking! That meant his customer only talked for about 5 minutes of the entire sales call! And Chuck was trying to get his customer to buy and to sign the lease! What percent of the time did you talk during your last sales call or customer presentation?

Next time you ride with one of your salespeople listen to see what percent of the call the buyer, the one with the money by the way, actually gets to talk during your call. Most salespeople I have ridden with spend 80 to 90% of their sales calls talking.

Chuck's second fundamental skill gap was in addition to doing all the talking...he also didn't ask enough questions. How many questions do you ask during a sales call?

There're several goals of asking questions during a sales call. The most obvious are to learn and to qualify a prospect. But there are two additional goals of questioning that are equally important. The first is to use your questions to pull your customer into your presentation so they feel a part of what you're trying to create. The more involved a customer is the more likely they'll also be positively involved and connected to what you're proposing. The more questions you ask...the more your customer will feel a part of what you're discussing.

And the second additional goal of asking questions is to learn which of the points you covered were of most importance to your client. Because Chuck asked so few questions he really didn't know what to highlight from his presentation as he started to ask for the order. Asking questions during a presentation or sales calls allows you to make adjustments to what you're saying based on the comments and feedback you're getting from your buyer. Because Chuck asked so few questions he was really clueless to the customer's interests and motivation, even as he was asking him to buy.

I believe this problem is caused by the strong experience levels in sales reps. A strong experience base also means you're more aware of the common problems faced by all of our customers. As we were driving back to the office Chuck and I discussed the call. I asked Chuck why he asked so few questions and he responded that he had gotten his questions answered weeks ago during his initial sales calls so he didn't need to ask anything else while he presented his proposal.

But because Chuck asked so few questions, he didn't get much of a connection with his buyer and he never knew the most important "hot buttons" or areas that'll most motivate that fleet manager to want to buy.

And Chuck's third fundamental skill gap was in addition to doing all the talking and not asking enough questions most of what he did say was all about him and his company. How balanced is your communications with a customer? What percent of your comments focus on how great your company is compared to talking about how great your customer's experience with your company will be?

It's what my Dad taught me growing up, he always identified that you don't go into the hardware store to buy a drill, you go in for the opportunity to make holes! But the majority of sales reps, like Chuck, spend all their call talking about how great their company and products are. Is your team selling drills, or the opportunity for your customers to make holes?

There's a simple test called the "X's & O's" test that you can do to discover the balance or bias of any communications.

Take any letter, proposal, presentation or brochure and mark it up. Put an "X" through every time your document says your name, your company name or uses the words "us," "we," and "our." Then circle each time you use the customer's name, their company name, or say "you" or "your." Now all you have to do is count up all your marked "X's" and "O's" to see the bias of your communications. How customer focused is your letter? I got to look through Chuck's proposal on the drive to his customer and his proposal was about 95% "X's" only talking about himself. He went into great detail in his proposal telling how great his company, products and service would be for his customer, but he never took it to the next level by describing how positive his customer's experiences would be if they did business with Chuck and his company.

When you present do you make statements like "This has been rated as one of the most reliable products in the market"...a very "X" focused statement? Or do you make it much more persuasive and customer focused by saying "Because this has been rated as one of the most reliable products in the market you'll see less down time and a much higher reliability in your usage."

The job of a sales manager is one of the most stressful and pressured positions within a company. But it's also one of the most powerful positions within an organization because of the profound impact you can have as a coach improving the selling skills, tactical structures and strategic philosophies of all members of your sales team.

But to improve their selling skills requires you to actively coach each member of your team...no matter what their experience or success level. So how much time can you carve out of your otherwise over-full schedule so you can work with your team?

We know you and your team are good....now the question is...are you good enough...and involved enough to coach and lead your people as they improve the consistency and effectiveness of their day to day selling skills?

To your continued success,

Jim