

TOP 10 Rules of Running Great Sales Appointments

In terms of sheer difficulty and stress, sales ranks very near, if not at, the top of the list. Beside the always intense competitive environment sales professionals must negotiate, most consumers despise or fear them for all kinds of real and imagined reasons. With the now unlimited amounts of information available to everyone at the touch of a screen, many have even delighted at the possibility of the extinction of the sales professional.

Of course, that is not about to happen, but what has happened is that end-users have become smarter and more demanding. As account managers and executives running sales appointments we must realign with fundamentals while aggressively learning, adopting, and redefining the popular new approaches.

Here is the Top Ten List of running great appointments in today's information-soaked environment.

1. *Run the appointment!*

This one seems like a no-brainer, but too many salespeople consider it smart "lead management" to not run appointments that don't check out 100% in advance. There is the much-touted "costs vs. benefits" excuse that says that driving out to a "no show" appointment wastes time and energy. Some go as far as refusing to call a teleconference appointment that did not get "verified" in advance. Unless you're a master mind reader, you can never really know for sure what's going on in a prospect's head until you're face-to-face with them or speaking with them directly in a teleconference situation. The risk of missing a legitimate opportunity is too great to try to avoid a little inconvenience.

2. *Be well prepared*

Most amateurs wouldn't be caught at a sales meeting without their business card, some marketing material, and clear-cut proposal to the prospective client. Professionals take it up several notches by knowing everything there is to know about the prospect's business and even the point-of-contact. Utilize well all preexisting internal data, and web and social media tools, including chatting with industry experts you may know, before heading out to the meeting. Most importantly, you should be able to repeat hanging upside down at 3:00 am what makes you different from your competitors.

3. *Show enthusiasm*

Even veteran sales professionals sometimes slack off on this point, and they know better. No one likes buying from a dull, boring, or, worst of all, arrogant person. Neither do you need to do Jim Carrey impersonations to impress. Proper sales enthusiasm stems from regarding the prospect positively no matter the situation and convincing them that you are excited by the possibility of signing them up as a client.

4. *Dress for the occasion*

Business dress codes have gone through dramatic redefinitions lately, with preferences leaning in the casual direction as the Silicon Valley ethos permeates the corporate world. Judge your prospect's office environment carefully and dress accordingly. A lot depends on what sorts of products/services both you and the prospect sell. Wearing a golf shirt and casual pants to a meeting with a law firm's partners considering signing a 3-year document management SLA is a risky move. On the other hand, deciding against a double breasted pantsuit to present a POS solution to a restaurant manager is a good call.

5. *Avoid prejudging the prospect*

Prejudice is something we cringe from and disown, particularly in social settings. It is no less important to avoid prejudging business prospects that, after all, could be paying for your salary, office rent, or even 401k. The smart sales professional has the mentality of a hunter whose success is based much more on achieved rather than perceived goals. Yes, we'd all love to have prospects that deliver us sales in round conformity with our objectives. The reality on the ground, though, is never 100% in conformity with what

we want. Prejudging prospects is a cardinal error that has ended many promising sales careers prematurely.

6. *Think of service before thinking of the sale*

How many sales professionals seem to have little calculators ticking in their heads as they walk into a sales meeting? You can almost hear their heads going “tap, tap plus...tap, tap, multiplied by...” and so forth. Aside from being unprofessional and rude, this is also not a sales habit that will deliver much success. Convince the prospect that solving their problem or ushering them into a much-better-than-current scenario is what is preoccupying your mind, and they will very likely trust your expert opinion, at which point the sale is yours as a natural consequence.

7. *Know your audience*

No one would try selling a server rack to a corner boutique, nor stress the logistics component of an ERP solution to an employment agency. Time is precious short on sales calls and wasting time highlighting products/services the prospect is unlikely to buy surely lowers closing ratios. There is also the matter of over- or undervaluing the decision-making power of a given point-of-contact. Spend too little time with a powerful GM and the sale escapes you; spend too much time with a controller whose CFO boss entirely excludes them from the decision-making cycle and there was not even a chance to close. To borrow from point 5 above, it is also critically important to make the prospect feel comfortable with you, no matter their personal background. This will become a major challenge if you don't make a point to understand the prospect well.

8. *Clarity, clarity, clarity*

From the moment you walk into the prospect's office and greet the receptionist, to the final handshake and departure away from their office, there should be zero doubt as to your objective as a salesperson. Talking at length about qualities and features of your product/service is alright as long as it contributes toward solving a problem the prospect is facing, whether or not that problem is explicitly defined. If after the meeting either party is unsure about what happened or what to do next then clarity was not achieved, which, needless to say, will not lead to the sale being achieved either.

9. *Professionalism must be your identity*

Show signs of bad language, high temper, late arrival, unkempt appearance, disorganized material or thoughts, or lack of commitment to your own company's advertised values and you've dug a hole for yourself even before getting to the meat of the matter. The greatest product/service in the world cannot be sold by an unprofessional rep, or even if the sale occurs don't count on it delivering much profit or being a repeat sale.

10. *Close the deal*

All roads, of course, lead to this one. To continually achieve sales success in today's challenging economy, there must be a mastery of many skills, the good sense of what pitch to use in employing those skills, *and* a great amount of energy in the execution of it all. The objective in sales is to sell, obviously enough, but if the close is done without tact and grace sales can become remarkably elusive. Again, today there is no shortage of information, so it's not “the right information” but “the right interaction” that will make the ultimate impact in those special closing moments.

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