



# ***Selling in a Tough Economy***

**Articles and excerpts from training sessions conducted  
by Mark Hunter with additional commentary from his  
*Sales Motivation Blog* and *Sales Hunting Tip* emails**

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2



## MAXIMIZING YOUR PRICE IN A SOFT ECONOMY

Establishing maximum value for your price is never easy. In today's volatile economy, it's even more of a challenge. For most companies, costs are increasing, yet the ability to pass them along to the customer is fraught with numerous roadblocks. The customer's response to a price increase is rarely positive, with the usual line of objections that go along with it. In addition, there are the concerns that a competitor's price may undercut yours or that the customer may choose to go down a different path instead of buying from you at all. As big as these issues are, they pale in comparison to the number one roadblock to maximizing your price point: the confidence of the salesperson.

The main reason why companies do not capitalize on their potential revenue is because their salespeople do not have the confidence to ask for and receive the highest price point. If a salesperson is secure in what they are selling and in knowing how the customer will benefit from their products/services, then they will be confident in asking for and getting the desired price point. The problem is that many times the salesperson lacks confidence in at least one of these areas, resulting in their inability to make their sales quota.

To rectify this problem, it's important to examine how the salesperson first developed a lack of confidence in their ability to maximize their price points. Generally, it stems from a sale they perceived to be lost because their price had been too high. On the surface, their assumption probably appeared to be correct. However, in reality, it just seemed that way because the right price-value relationship had not been established. If the salesperson had executed a proper sales strategy that allowed both himself and the customer to see the product's/service's true value, this could have been avoided. It needs to be communicated that in a B to B environment, the benefits are to both the buyer and the business they're buying it for. In a B to C environment, the benefits are to both the buyer and to the person(s) who will actually use the product or service. When the salesperson and the customer understand this, it can help erase the uncertainty that the price may pose.

Let me give you two quick examples. If a person works for a mega-global company and is buying widgets, he'd have no problem spending a little on them if he knew he was buying them from a reputable company that has experience selling to other mega-global companies. In essence, the customer is looking for confidence and is willing to pay for it. In a B to C situation, because the customer doesn't want to look like a fool for their purchase, they want the salesperson to provide them with enough emotional benefit to allow them to convey to others that they made a great decision. In both situations, an inexperienced salesperson is going to lose the sale if they don't take the time to use questions that encourage the customer to fully express their needs. In general, new salespeople often lose the sale shortly after they've stated their price. Thus, it's only natural for them to believe that the price was the determining factor. However, when digging below the surface, the price was not what prevented them from closing the deal. Rather, they lost the sale because they didn't ask enough questions to fully establish the needs of the customer.

Top-performing salespeople ask questions that allow the customer to elaborate on their needs and then demonstrate their listening skills by asking appropriate open questions and probing deeper with great follow-up questions. They use the information that they learn to better explain how their product or service can be beneficial to the customer. In my 25 plus years of selling, I've learned that the customer's real needs, hurts, and wants don't often surface until you're demonstrated genuine interest in what their thoughts and goals are. Ironically, this means that you can throw out their initial comments, as it is rarely the need they are looking to fill. If you expect to base your price-value relationship on what you first hear, you'll never come close to achieving your maximum price point.

In summary, today's economy is full of opportunities for top performing salespeople to ask really good questions that get customers talking. This allows both the customer and the salesperson to see, feel, and understand what their true needs are. When the salesperson can experience this across multiple customers, they will begin to develop the assurance they need to be able to confidently convey the maximum price point their company expects them to receive.

## MAXIMIZING YOUR PRICE—THE VALUE / BENEFIT EQUATION

Price increases are currently occurring at a faster rate than we've seen in the US economy for nearly 25 years. The driving forces behind these increases seem to be the rising costs of labor, raw materials, etc. Although these are certainly valid, the real reason for these price increases should stem from the value of the product or service you're selling, not the cost associated with them. Unfortunately, for the past two decades, there have been many companies leaving billions of dollars of profit on the table because they've been basing their pricing on cost rather than the value / benefit equation.

Why should anyone pay more for something than the amount incurred to produce it? For many companies, this seems like a logical question. They determine the cost of their goods and services from a cost-plus model which says that the price you charge should not be out of line with what it costs you to produce it. However, if this was true for all items in today's marketplace, then we'd all be paying a lot less for tickets to concerts and sporting events, as well as items like computer software, DVDs, etc. When companies understand that the real profit is made by pricing their items according to the value / benefit of what the customer is going to receive from their product or service, their bottom line will reflect it. Over the years, I've found that the larger the company, the more confident they are with their role in the marketplace, and thus the more confident they are in pricing themselves based on the value / benefit equation. Small companies, on the other hand, are less confident and are more likely to set prices using the cost-plus model. Although there are many successful companies that use the cost-plus model including Costco and Wal-Mart, I believe it's imperative for every salesperson, no matter who they work for, to push themselves to the value / benefit equation.

The value / benefit equation is very simple. It is built entirely on understanding the benefits that the customer is going to realize from using your product or service. To discover these needs, a salesperson is required to

not only ask them questions during the sales process, but also to really ascertain how their product or service will be used for the long-term. Do not equate value to low-price. On the contrary, the best value is many times the highest price (or at least what appears to be the highest price initially). Take, for example, the price to fly from New York to Los Angeles. I'm sure a person could take a bus across the country for a lot less money, but the value / benefit equation would be low for the bus trip because of the time it would take. Conversely, flying would cost more initially, but provide you with far more time once you reached your destination.



As a salesperson, you should never allow yourself to get steamrolled into a price increase discussion with a customer that is centered solely on raw costs. Whenever you present a price increase, always begin by asking them questions about the benefits they receive from what you're providing them. This allows the customer to better understand the importance of you and your company to them. Encourage them to explain how you fit into their supply-chain model or how you impact their overall business process. The key is to get the customer to share with you something specific and unique about how you help them. Then, to further drive this point home, ask them follow-up questions based on what they tell you. Their specific responses will reiterate the fact that you and your company are an important asset to them. Once you have achieved this level of dialogue, you can then share your price increase. Because they realize how crucial you are to their success, they will be less likely to raise any objections. At this point, you will have achieved the value / benefit equation you're looking for and the higher price you deserve.

Despite the grim economy that seems to be driving many price increases, the outlook doesn't have to be hopeless for salespeople. By focusing your customer's attention on the value / benefits your products or services offer, you can help them see that it is imperative that they continue in business with you because of how you and your company contribute to their overall success.

## TAKE THE MESSAGE TO THE TOP

Sales is really all about closing deals. Anytime "business things" get tough, people and companies become more cautious in their buying process. This usually means that buying decisions which were often being made by people lower down in an organization are now being made by those at the top. To help deal with this issue, consider the following. First, make sure your cold-calls and prospecting calls are made to people further up the in the organization than you would have contacted previously. It's important for you personally take the message to the top when you can. Second, when you are talking to someone at the same level you had been talking to earlier, provide them with a message they can take up in the organization and do it in a manner that will help them look good. However, don't allow this to drive your sales process. I suggest this because although you may be currently cutting them out of the buying process, at a later point in time, these people may once again be the ones driving it.

## SELLING A PRICE INCREASE IN A SOFT MARKET

Selling a price increase can be difficult in nearly any type of situation, but trying to sell one in a soft market can be downright brutal. Yet, as unpleasant as it can be, it is often essential. The problem of selling a price increase in a soft market usually stems from the fact that the salesperson and the customer are coming at the situation from different perspectives. Especially in times like this, it is imperative for the salesperson to understand that regardless of what the market or economy is doing, if a price increase needs to be sold, it needs to be sold. This means that the salesperson can't go into the sales process believing that the customer is going to reject the price increase unless the deal can be saved by offering some type of discount. If they approach the meeting with this attitude, they almost guarantee failure because a customer will never pay more than a salesperson tells them to.

In these types of situations, the first thing that often happens is a comment from the customer about how soft the economy is, how prices are really going down, and therefore, how a price increase at this time doesn't make any sense. When the salesperson hears this, they usually agree because they hear and see the same thing. However, as soon as they do this, the battle is lost and 9 times out of 10, the only thing that can save it is some type of discount. To counteract this problem, when the salesperson hears the customer make this type of statement, they should ignore it. Yes, ignore it. The reason? Many times the customer merely wants to get it off their chest and by telling it to you, they feel better. The first response the salesperson should make is to ask the customer questions about how they intend to use what they're buying and whether or not they've been able to achieve the results they're looking for.

If the customer continues with their line of discussion about the economy and they can't accept the price increase, then the salesperson should ask about the steps involved in their buying process. The objective is really to get the customer talking. Initially, this can be a little scary because the customer may begin ranting about how they always go for the low price. After they get done explaining their process, the salesperson should question them about how their own customers decide to buy from them. It's in this part of the discussion that the customer begins to see how and why quality and confidence are such big items in any purchase decision. A good salesperson will then pick up on these two items and reinforce them with follow-up questions that get the customer to further explain the importance of quality and confidence. When the customer sees what they're buying in this light, the price increase becomes a much smaller issue.

Sometimes even after this conversation, there will be customers or purchasing departments who will still not accept the price increase. They usually comment that they will find another vendor to buy from. This is often a veiled threat to get the weak-kneed salesperson to cave in with a discount. For the salesperson, this type of discussion is best thwarted by ensuring the end-user fully understands the value and benefits they will receive from their product, as well as by clearly communicating the amount of pain the customer will go through should they decide to switch. First, the cost of converting to a new vendor is always much higher than initially thought, so the discount the new vendor has to offer needs to be significant. In addition, it might be easy for

a customer to find a new vendor at a lower price, but on many occasions, the lower price vanishes after the initial order and, suddenly, the new vendor is at the same price as the original one. Furthermore, the new vendor will not have nearly the knowledge or expertise as the original company about how to service the customer, so the switch often winds up costing more money in the long-run.

As a final line of protection, I strongly believe the salesperson communicating the price increase should not have the authority to make any price concessions. When this power is taken away from the salesperson, it's amazing how much tougher they are in executing a price increase. By requiring the salesperson to get approval from someone else, it also takes the salesperson off of the hot seat and, many times, as soon as the customer is aware of this, they will stop badgering for a discount.

Selling a price increase in a soft economy is certainly harder than selling one in a booming market. However, as professionals, salespeople need to take the time to know and understand how to sell a price increase in all types of markets. It doesn't require herculean skills. It requires the diligence and patience to keep the discussion focused on the benefits the customer is looking for from both the product and from you, the salesperson.

## HAVE YOU SOLD YOURSELF?

You will always be your number one customer. It's not the big account you service, nor is it the hot new prospect you just uncovered; it's you. The reason is simple. If you're not completely confident in what you're selling, you will never come close to maximizing your sales potential.

The current sales environment makes the need to sell yourself even more important. If you think you're the exception to this rule and you're not completely confident in the products or services you offer, ask yourself this simple question: Have you ever offered a discounted price to either keep a customer or attract a new one? Few salespeople can honestly say they have never done this. If you have, it means that you were not 100% sold on your product or service.

As a consumer, when we don't fully believe in what is being offered to us, we naturally expect a discount. We want something in return for not being completely confident about what we're buying. Since the salesperson hasn't communicated the level of confidence we need in order to buy the product at full price, we want some type of concession to make us feel better about the purchase.

To be completely sold on your product or service, not only do you need to use what you sell, but you also need to understand all of the benefits that your product or service provides. As a sales consultant who works with thousands of different professionals each year, I'm amazed at the number of salespeople who admit that they don't even use what they sell. How can anyone be totally committed to a product or service if they don't even use it? Furthermore, it's not uncommon for me to see salespeople shortchanging themselves because they are unable to identify and explain the value of what they are selling. Although this sounds basic, many

salespeople cannot name five benefits their customers receive from using their product or service. They can usually only list five features. Without understanding the full array of their product's benefits, there's little chance the customer will ever see them too.

A poor sales process is usually a good indicator of whether or not the salesperson is sold on the product or service they are offering. Nothing conveys a lack of confidence faster than a sales process that is not professional. Unfortunately, for many salespeople, a disorganized sales process is the norm and it only serves to destroy more sales and, ultimately, a huge amount of profit. Despite the customer's desire to buy, an unorganized sales process creates an air of skepticism that often can only be countered by offering some type of discount to close the deal.

With the current state of the economy, it is imperative that sales professionals be both confident and competent to achieve maximum success. In any sales call, you best communicate these qualities by being completely sold on your product or service. If you are not, find ways to better educate yourself so that you can become your number one customer. Remember, "No customer is ever sold until the salesperson is sold."

## SALES GOALS IN A TOUGH ECONOMY

Making your sales goals in a good year is one thing, but attaining them in a difficult year is an entirely different challenge. Putting aside the common cliché that when times are tough, great salespeople are made, the reality is that making your goals puts more money in your pocket. Therefore, I keep reminding salespeople to think of how many times in the past they've watched a customer materialize out of nowhere only to become a major player in helping reach their year-end objectives. If you've been in sales for any length of time, you've had this happen. I am not advocating that you kick back and relax while you wait for the big customer to appear. I understand that it takes work to make your goal, but, at the same time, don't lose sight that occasionally nice breaks do occur. The good news is that you can be successful if you're willing to take the time to work through the following steps, despite the current state of the economy.

The first step to help you make your sales goals in a tough economy is to break down your goal into weekly objectives. Keep in mind, however, that these should not be based on closing "x" number of sales, but instead on accomplishing "x" number of activities that you've found are critical to your success. When your goals are strictly measured in terms of sales dollars or units, you can easily become dejected by numbers you're not happy with. Activities to monitor may include making prospecting phone calls, conducting customer presentations, or having follow-up meetings. This breakdown strategy is similar to the way coaches successfully motivate their teams. By dissecting the game into a series of activities that the coach knows the team can accomplish, they will be in a better position to win the game.

Second, find a peer with a positive attitude who is willing to take an interest in you. By reciprocating the interest, you will motivate each other. Meet together at least once a week, preferably in person, but by phone or web conference if that's not possible. Keep your conversation focused solely on the positives of the previ-

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8



ous week to discuss the lessons you've learned from them and then how you'll be able to leverage those lessons in the weeks to come. Remember, there's no point in bringing negative baggage to the meeting. If you blew it, don't dwell on it. Move beyond it! We all know that it's very easy for one person's attitude to rub off onto another. A positive outlook can create a heightened level of energy that will result in both of you being able to think more clearly and foster new ideas and opportunities. At the conclusion of the conversation, make yourself accountable to the goals for the upcoming week by discussing exactly how you intend to make them. Then, at your next meeting, make sure you take the time to review each other's goals to ensure both of you kept the focus where you expected it to be.

Next, use the time in between each meeting with your positive peer to focus on your key activities. At the end of every day, ask yourself what you've done toward accomplishing the week's objectives. By doing something daily to move yourself towards achieving the goal, it will give you motivation for the next day. Try to avoid putting expectations on yourself to accomplish an entire week's goal in one day. If you can attain it in that short of a time period, you've set it too low and you'll never reach your full potential in sales. At the same time, don't allow the weekly goal to be so difficult that you rarely achieve it. Remember, the breakdown of the activities must be achievable. Missing your weekly goals too frequently will cause you to walk away from the entire process.

Finally, never allow yourself to be influenced by negative voices. Today's economy has created an incredible amount of pessimism, especially in the news media. If the news is negative, don't listen to it! This may include not reading the newspaper, avoiding certain websites, and changing the dial on some radio stations. Furthermore, your friends and fellow employees may even contribute to the buzz. Consider cutting them off before their opinions sway you. For those of us in sales, it's important to remember that people who aren't going to make their goal are going to do everything possible to ensure their peers don't either. The last thing they need is for somebody to show them up. Don't allow anyone to take control of your goals.

*Never allow yourself to be influenced by negative voices.*

It goes without saying that achieving your sales goals in a tough economy is not easy. But, like a leaky roof, ignoring it and refusing to take action doesn't make it go away just because it isn't leaking on a sunny day. Resolve to stop the problems that contribute to your discouragement. You can't control what the economy is doing, but you can control what YOU are doing. Take the necessary steps to motivate yourself to achieve those weekly goals, which, in turn, will help you successfully reach your year-end objectives.

## HOLDING ON PRICE IN A DOWN ECONOMY

Discounting on price is not a sales strategy. It's an impulsive move made by desperate salespeople. In a tough economy, customers think and expect everything is going to be discounted. Because of this, salespeople feel it necessary to oblige the customer to close the deal. Unfortunately, however, this leads to a down-

ward spiral, much like an addiction to an illegal drug. Once a discount is offered to one customer, it becomes easier and easier to offer it to another one. Before they know it, the discount is being offered to everyone. Like a drug, the “fix” is in the additional sales the salesperson is able to gain. However, just like with the addictive drug, there is a “withdrawal.” Sales come at a reduced or a very reduced margin. To make matters worse, the discount ends up altering the attitude of the customer who now believes the real value of the product or service they bought is the reduced price and not the full one. Overcoming this mislabeled sales strategy of offering a discount can only be done when the salesperson is willing to change their way of thinking, despite how difficult it may be.

The first step necessary to correcting the salesperson’s mindset is to help them believe in their ability to close the sale. Competent salespeople know why the customer is looking to buy and are able to capitalize on the needs the customer has disclosed. When sales professionals begin to feel the need to discount, it’s usually because they don’t believe they’ve established a solid reason why the customer should buy from them. They have failed to ask the right questions to get the customer talking and then avoided the critical skill of following up. When a salesperson has spent all of their time touting product features and not uncovering the benefits to the customer, their presentation may not include what the customer actually needs. Only when the salesperson has taken the time to probe deeper will they truly understand why the customer wants to buy. They need to ask the right questions and then listen to the responses. Then they will be able to capitalize on the information provided them.

The second step necessary to avoid the need to discount is to keep the message on the immediate return-on-investment the customer will receive when making the purchase. Keep in mind that businesses don’t buy anything, they only invest in things. Every purchase made by a business is seen as an investment in helping them achieve their own goals. For this reason, the message must focus on the immediate gain that will result from their decision to buy. This emphasis is best brought out when the salesperson ties their questions into exploring how and what the customer expects to achieve immediately, as well as how they’ve measured results in other purchases they’ve made.

The third step is found in knowing how to respond when the customer asks for a discount or states that the price is too high. Salespeople need to be ready for these objections and not be concerned or disarmed by them. The first time the customer brings up this issue, the salesperson should not even acknowledge what was said. Often, customers feel an obligation to inquire, and once asked, they’ve done what they were “supposed” to do. The salesperson should only respond to the customer when they have brought the issue up for the second time, and the way they handle it is critical. They need to ask a question that is pointed directly at the most significant need the customer has. This will serve to shift the customer’s thinking back to why they’re looking to buy to begin with. After they respond, the salesperson should continue the dialogue with a series of follow-up questions designed to uncover even greater needs. The more the customer is focused on their need, the less they will be focused on a lower price.

Finally, salespeople must keep in mind that there will be times when they must be willing to walk away from an order. Although this can be scary and risky during these tough times, it's essential for them to believe they don't need every sale. Not only does walking away help them realize that there are other opportunities out there, it also serves to strengthen their resolve to hold their line and maintain the value of what they are selling.

Holding on price in a down economy is not easy, but it is doable, and, in fact, it is essential! When sales professionals believe in their product or service with complete conviction, focus on the immediate ROI, and ask the questions necessary to uncover the customer's greatest need, resorting to the mislabeled sales strategy of offering a discount will be unnecessary. Maintaining your pricing integrity in a down economy is truly a winning strategy because, in the end, profit margins are higher, the ability to service a customer is better, and the confidence of the salesperson is greater. Especially in today's marketplace, that's worth pursuing.

## YOUR PRICE CONVEYS CONFIDENCE

Salespeople who are discounting their price are also discounting their confidence level. Remember, anytime you discount your price, you're telling yourself that your normal price is not right and, as a result, you put a chink in your level of confidence. I firmly believe that just because some people believe your price is too high, it doesn't mean it is. In fact, if people are not pushing back on your price, then it's too low. When people push back on price, they're either challenging the price/value relationship or merely doing what they believe they should be doing. This is when your price point, matched with the level of confidence you exhibit, will determine if the customer sees you as offering a price/value relationship.

To practice conveying confidence, try reciting your price to yourself 20 times every morning before you start selling with the exact body language and tone of voice you use when you're closing a sale. The only exception is that your practice should always be done while standing up. This will help you be more comfortable and confident. If you think this is crazy, remember Tiger Woods never starts the final round of a major championship without first taking time to practice.

## PRICE INCREASES AND LOST SALES

I've had a lot of discussions lately with clients about pricing and how to determine what the right price is. I believe that your product or service is under-priced until you have lost at least 10% of your potential business due to price. (The % is not always the same for every industry....call or email me and I'd be happy to explain how to determine what your exact % should be.) However, before saying the business is lost to price, make sure it really is because of price. I often find customers will say the price is too high, when really it's just the price/value relationship is not high enough. Price increases cause problems when a company institutes a price increase without really thinking through their pricing strategy and how they will expose the customer to it.

Note my word choice of “expose” instead of “explain.” “Explain” automatically conveys a lot of talking by the salesperson. “Expose” uses questions to get the customer engaged, and to allow them to explain to you what they feel the price / value relationship should be. Unless you can objectively and authoritatively say you’ve lost 10% of your potential business to price, you cannot even begin to say your price is too high.

A word of caution: don’t use this to justify why you should institute a price increase. I’m a firm believer that once you take a price increase, you don’t step back from it. If you’re facing resistance, it really means you need to step up your sales and marketing efforts even more.

## **CLOSE WITH CONFIDENCE!**

When communicating the cost of your products and services, always do so with pride and confidence. It’s definitely not the time to appear to be begging.

Confidence is more important now than ever! Companies and individuals are being more hesitant in their purchases, so it only makes sense that confidence is a huge issue. If you’re not 100% confident in your product or service, there is no way your body language will override what you are trying to communicate and your customer will never believe in what you’re selling.

Over the past few months, I have watched some salespeople move into the “begging” role and be successful in closing a deal. However, they were only successful once. I believe this occurred because as soon as they began to appear as if they were begging, they lost complete confidence in what they were selling and couldn’t muster the strength to get even one more prospect to the point of closing.

## **CONFERENCES AND ASSOCIATION MEETINGS**

The last couple of weeks, I’ve had the opportunity to speak to several different associations and groups at their annual conferences. I have noted that the people who are attending these conferences are the ones who are serious about their business and about not letting the economy impact their success. Attitudes have been very positive. These individuals are focused on finding the things they can be doing now to ensure that when the economy turns around, they are the ones who will grow the fastest.

Consider this. If you’re somebody who is thinking you can’t attend a trade association conference of some type because you need to save money, you’re making a huge mistake. My observation is that attending a trade association meeting now is more important than ever.

***If you’d like to invite Mark to participate in your next sales meeting, you may contact him at the email address or phone number listed below.***

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12



## SELL TO THE IMMEDIATE ROI

*Companies don't buy anything. They only invest.*

In a today's down economy, customers need a payout now, not later. Sell to their immediate return on investment.

I've used this line a lot lately: "Companies don't buy anything, they only invest." This is more true than ever today and it applies not just to businesses but also to individuals. Nobody wants to spend money unless they have to and due to all of the changes occurring in the economy today many people aren't quite sure what to expect years from now so the focus is on today. The more we can demonstrate to customers how their investment in what we're offering will provide them with an immediate ROI the greater our opportunity for success. To understand what a customer's ROI is requires us to take the time to ask questions to determine what their expectations are. A simple rule I don't want you to forget is to make sure you always follow-up with another question on what the customer has told you because many times what the customer initially tells you is not the real issue and to find out the real issue you have to dig deep with the customer.

## WEEKLY SALES MEETINGS

An important way to keep sales motivation high is by having weekly sales meetings. They don't have to last more than 30 minutes, and although they're best done in person, you can do them very easily over the phone to minimize travel time.

During the meeting, the sales team (anyone and everyone who deals with a customer) should come together to talk positively about what's happening in the business. Each person should be required to share one way that they impacted customer sales in the previous week, and the sales manager must be committed to doling out praise to any and all who achieved success. In addition, part of the agenda should include what the 10 biggest customers are doing, and what the key sales focus is for the coming week. Sales goals should be discussed, as well as strategies and techniques to achieve them.

Most importantly, once you start having meetings, don't stop! Don't let them become a "flavor of the month." Attendance (including yours) should never become optional. Make these gatherings a key part of your culture, your success, and your sales motivation.

## NETWORKING IN A TOUGH ECONOMY

Networking is a key part of sales, and in a difficult economy, its role networking is even more important. In light of the current state of the market, remember to keep your comments and questions positive while networking. Avoid dwelling on the negative. It's very easy to get down on things when you're talking to someone who's having a tough time. On the flip side, people always enjoy talking to someone who is positive, especially when things aren't going well for them.

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13



## CREATING MOMENTUM

Your level of sales motivation trumps your level of product knowledge when it comes to the number of sales you will be able to close. I believe this to be true no matter what the economy is doing. You can be the brightest salesperson on the street in terms of knowing more about your products / services and the industries you serve than anyone else, but if you're not motivated, you're not going to get anywhere. The only sales you will close are the ones that are staring you in the face, and even with those, you'll never get the price you think you should be getting. On the other hand, a motivated person is the one who will find a way to work around any lack of knowledge they might have to close the sale, and usually for a higher profit. Think about it: in order for them to get that far in the sale, they had to do their homework and listen to the customer, not what the media is saying. The motivated salesperson is driven by one thing: serving a customer who knows that by doing business with them, they will win.

Instead of pursuing greater knowledge about what you sell, spend your time today making a list of how your customers benefit by buying from you. After you've written the list, review it and be thankful that you provide your customers the opportunity to benefit from your products / services. Finally, take the time to come up with three open questions you can ask a prospect that will help get them thinking about one of the benefits you wrote down. By completing this exercise and believing in what you've written down, I guarantee you'll have success when you get out and do it!

## YOUR "E-REPUTATION" AND SALES LEADERSHIP

Profitable sales will always go to those who demonstrate the greatest amount of sales leadership. One way to develop and refine your sales leadership is by monitoring your "e-reputation." I ran across this phrase the other day and was struck by it. Your e-reputation is what others may find out about you and your company via the web.

Maintaining a reputable status on the web is a worthy endeavor. I've always advocated checking your name in Google to see what others may or may not be saying about you. I'm not advocating trying to cover up bad news. All great leaders will always have people who are in disagreement with them. I believe that you need to take the time to see what is out there so you are mindful of what the negative news is and then can be ready to deal with it should it come up in a conversation.

The idea of developing your e-reputation is a lengthy topic for another time. For now, do what you do well. By taking the time to serve others and demonstrate sales leadership, the rest will take care of itself.

## LEVERAGE TIME APPROPRIATELY



Time has a price. Know how to leverage it in both the sales process and the delivery.

Two items that I've found can drive more sales are the elements of time and risk. Time is a wonderful tool to leverage because when we accept the fact that companies don't buy anything - they only invest, we can begin to put a cost on each day they fail to make a decision. Another way of putting it is that they can add profit to their bottom-line for making a decision faster.

With the current focus on driving decisions that can impact a bottom-line in the current quarter, this makes that much more sense. When you're calling

on a prospect, make sure you know what their financial calendar is and how the calendar may either speed up or slow down the decision making process. Be prepared to alter your offering to fit it. Just as you want to maximize cash flow within your own business, many times by flexing your offering to fit their financial calendar, you can increase your overall profitability. If you practice this across all of your prospects, you'll find you are able to increase your cash flow because for every customer you back things up for, there will be another customer that will want to accelerate the process.

## THE "NO DECISION" SYNDROME

Because of the current tough economy, a common approach many customers are taking is to put off their critical buying decisions and proclaim their decision is simply, "no decision." Therefore, as a salesperson, it is imperative that you shift your focus to helping customers see the immediate ROI they can achieve by deciding to buy from you. This process starts by asking the prospect when their fiscal year-end is and how they measure ROI in their company. Once you have this knowledge, you can then shift in one of two ways. You can either focus your comments on the ROI of buying from you or on the lost ROI of not buying from you. Either way, you will keep the discussion on the short-term, allowing the customer to see the reason why they need to buy from you now.

## YOU DRIVE YOUR LEVEL OF SUCCESS

Lately, I've heard many salespeople complaining about how difficult it is to sell in this economy. My first response is that your market is only as tough as you make it out to be. Your level of success is not driven by others; it is driven by what YOU do.

For example, the iPod was not created by Microsoft. It was created by Apple at a time when many people had written them off as a company that had been run over by everyone else. The folks at Apple took what they did best and found a way to leverage it. In doing so, they rewrote the rules of the music industry.

Whatever you're selling, remember it's your market, your decisions, your time. It's how you choose to use them that will ultimately decide what your market looks like.

## BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU OFFER

Never offer the customer anything they have not expressed a specific need for. It's too easy to throw in items that will cause you to give up profit with little to show for it.

When the market gets soft and sales become a little harder to come by, it's easy to start flinching at every hesitation you see from a prospect. The problem is that each time you acknowledge a flinch by the customer, you make another commitment and give them something extra. At the time you may think it's critical to close the sale, but it rarely is, especially when what you end up offering the customer is something they really don't need.

Think about this for a moment: if you're offered something for free, would you turn it down? No, you'd accept what's being offered, but you may not place much value in it. In fact, you may not even use what was given to you. In the same way, your customer will readily accept what you offer them, but they may not place any value on it. The end result? You cut into your profit and, in some situations, wind up making a sale with no profit at all because of the little extras that were offered up along the way.

## ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING

Attitude trumps knowledge anytime, but right now your level of sales motivation is being driven far more by your attitude than by your product knowledge. Each day, your objective is to ensure you first sell yourself and second sell your customers. And, in order to sell yourself, you have to have a good attitude. I've met many knowledgeable people that are absolutely depressed. I almost hate to admit this in a sales motivation blog entry, but it's the truth and it's putting a huge damper on their success.

Your attitude has a HUGE impact on both your sales motivation and your ability to close deals. Take a few minutes and read through some of my recent postings on things you can do to drive your sales motivation. In addition, I have several motivational podcasts on iTunes that can be downloaded for free. Finally, take a few minutes each morning to be thankful for the privilege you have, no matter what is you sell, no matter what your territory, no matter what else is going on in your industry, of positively influencing those people you're going to come in contact with.

## CELEBRATE SUCCESS DAILY

At the end of each day, congratulate yourself for accomplishing whatever you believed was your most successful event of the day, even if it is something as small as getting an email from someone. The key is to never allow your day to end with a negative thought.

I use this technique myself and have shared it with thousands of others over the years. Those who do put it into practice often come back to me later on saying how much of a positive impact it had on them.

Many times, the most successful tips are the simplest and this one doesn't require any great skill. It just requires you to find the positive in everything you do. Even on bad days, there is always something to be grateful for. Don't waste time lamenting about the bad stuff. Focus on the positive and use it to influence your outlook.

## NARROW YOUR NEWS

The worst thing you can do for your level of sales motivation is to allow yourself to be swayed by reading too many news headlines. Be careful what you read, especially when it comes to the headlines. The media is saturated with negativity regarding the economy right now, so avoid jumping from one news website to another merely to catch the blurbs. If you need to get your news from the internet, only go to one source. This will prevent you from being inundated by the pessimism so it should interfere less with your sales motivation.

## FIND SUCCESS BY SETTING WEEKLY GOALS

Most salespeople set annual goals. At the beginning of every new year, it's easy to put them off thinking that you'll eventually accomplish them. I'd like to suggest that you break those yearly goals down into weekly ones you can achieve. By doing so, you can create early momentum to help drive you through the year.

I can't emphasize this enough, especially in the current sales environment most people find themselves in. The worst thing anybody can do is to start looking at their annual goals as being unattainable and, therefore, throw in the towel. When you allow this type of a feeling to overtake you, there's no way you'll be successful in sales and I'll be happy to advise you to immediately start looking for a different job because sales is not for you. Harsh, I know, but I mean it. There's no reason for anyone to give up on their annual goal one month into the year. Take your annual goal and break it down into monthly, weekly and even daily chunks. This will help keep you motivated.

Keep in mind success is not made in a day, a week or even a month. Success comes by moving forward each and every day.

## “SURVIVING THE ECONOMY” IS NOT ENOUGH

“Surviving the economy” has almost become a mantra for a lot of salespeople today in an effort to keep their motivation up. I do not believe the state of the economy should be a reason why anyone’s sales are down. When you acknowledge the economy as being the reason why your sales less than stellar, you’re giving up control and saying that factors beyond what you control are dictating your success. I absolutely refuse to believe this! Sales is all about controlling your environment by being confident in what you’re doing.

There will always be things that will be unmanageable in sales. However, it is your job as a leader to know how to work around these things and not allow them to interfere with your results. This economy is creating significant opportunities for those who are willing to get outside of their comfort zone, to challenge their current selling strategy, and to step up their game. I firmly believe the economy will come back, and those who have been focused on how they are selling now will be the ones who are able to fully leverage the opportunities when it does respond.

## AVOID NEGATIVITY

Don’t hang around with negative people. Winners hang out with winners, and winners don’t make excuses.

With the economy in its current state, it’s more important than ever to ensure you guard very closely what is entering your mind. Negative people can have an incredible influence on you in ways you never expect. Rarely, does a pessimist convert a positive thinking person into a negative one in just a meeting. However, the optimist usually doesn’t realize how their thought process has been impacted by the negative person. The answer is quite simple: if you know a negative person, then wipe them out of your network. You don’t have time for them and, more importantly, neither does your pocketbook.

*Don’t hang  
around with  
negative people.*

This concept has developed from the many times I’ve found myself working with an in-house sales group. Usually, one of the most effective solutions I’ve used to improve their sales is to weed out anyone in the group with a negative attitude, regardless of how successful they may have been. Time and time again, the total sales of the group has risen to record highs because of the absence of negativity.

## KEEP YOUR MESSAGE TIGHT

The business environment today has never been more challenging, with countless distractions that influence your level of sales motivation. With all of these negative distractions, your message can easily become vague and misguided. Your message is every element of what you say, think, and do.

Success in today's environment requires a level of focus few people have had to deal with in their sales career. Each day, each week, each month, make sure you're staying focused on your objective. Your message will only be tight when you're focused on your objective and your objective will only be tight when you're focused on your message.

We're now nearly 10% of the way through 2009. This means that in order for you to achieve your annual goals, you need to be starting to hit your stride. Look at your day and find the distractions. It might be the time you spend checking out websites, or watching some new video your friend sent you a link to. It may be the time you waste on phone calls, or merely wandering aimlessly in your travels.

There's no reason for anyone (no matter what industry or territory you're in) to miss their goals for 2009. It's not going to be easy though. If there are changes you need to make, make them now while there's still 90% of the year left. Keep your message tight with what you say, think, and do.

## SELL TO THEIR NEED

Sell to the customer's immediate need, not to their future problems.

With the economy performing at less than stellar levels right now, it is important to make sure your sales strategy fits the economic environment. In normal times, I've always been one to sell the future benefits because it allows you to develop a more attractive ROI. In the times we're in, however, many customers have absolutely no desire to examine what tomorrow is going to look like. They're only concerned about today. For this reason, I am strongly advocating salespeople to ensure their sales strategy is designed to appeal to current needs. Although I'm not wavering from my belief that sales professionals must not allow the economy to become an excuse, I do believe that we need to use the state of the economy to create opportunities, and the best opportunity in our current economy is to sell to today's needs.

## DON'T JUST RIDE IT OUT

Closing deals in a tough economy can be a challenge but let me give you something to compare it to. If you've ever gone white-water rafting, you know that when you come to a rough stretch, everyone needs to have their oars in the water and work together to steer above and beyond the rapids. If, instead, you were to



choose to hunker down in the raft, you'd find yourself at the complete mercy of the rapids and, in many situations, being carried into a very dangerous situation.

The same thing applies when selling in a tough economy. The last thing you should do is try to ride it out or think if you just hold back on your marketing, you'll be OK. In reality, this is far from the truth. In a tough economy, the need to do more marketing and selling is even more important. I understand that the results may not be

as perfect as you'd get in a good market, but by selling and marketing aggressively in a tough market, you'll be in a much better position to gain from it.

Just as in white-water rafting, by rowing your way through the rapids, you'll be in a better position at the end to take advantage of the calm water. In today's economy, by increasing your sales and marketing efforts now, you'll be in a much better position when the economy does turn to take advantage of the market.

## GIVE THEM A REASON TO BUY FROM YOU

When a customer says times are tough and they can't afford to buy from you, respond with, "I wouldn't expect you to buy from me if I didn't think I could make a positive impact on your business."

I am always amazed at the number of salespeople who have never taken the time to demonstrate to the customer the value and benefit of what they have to offer. People only buy things when they will benefit from a product or service. Therefore, salespeople must ensure that the customer understands their product or service's value to them. Many times, salespeople will try to communicate what they believe is the key reason why a customer would want to buy from them, only to be rejected. This rejection occurs because the salesperson is not stating what the customer is truly looking for.

So, begin to perfect your selling skills. If you're not willing to upgrade them, there's no reason for your prospects to be inclined to do business with you. To begin the upgrade process, I'd like to suggest that you take a few minutes to read some of the other postings in this blog, or articles or tips on my website.

## WHAT DO YOU COMMUNICATE?

People will always expect a discount anytime there is risk involved, whether it be real or perceived. On the other hand, people will always pay a premium when they feel confident, whether it be real or perceived. What are you communicating in your sales presentation?

If you fail to communicate confidence, then there's no way you will ever be able to achieve the maximum profit possible from your customers because they will never truly believe in what it is you're selling. Everything we say and do helps to provide confidence. This is a big reason why I believe that you should make your im-

portant phone calls while standing up and you should never call an important customer or prospect while you're driving. Take a look around at people you see who deliver confidence. What are they doing? Watching these people will no doubt benefit you because confidence from one person can create confidence in another - you!

## THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY

Don't think for a moment the appearance of a soft economy is a reason to back off on your sales efforts. Just the opposite is true. If you buy into the belief that the economy is soft, then you also must accept it will come back. Unless you're out selling every day, you'll never know when it comes back until after it's too late.

It's in difficult times when superstar salespeople are born. Anybody can sell when times are good and in reality, in those periods salespeople are only taking orders. During tough times, top salespeople create and stick with strong selling habits, they keep up their momentum, and they don't allow themselves to get swayed by public opinion.

Never allow public opinion to derail your sales efforts. A great example of why this is critical to your sales success is the price of oil. Just last summer, we were hearing reports of it hitting \$200 a barrel and it was projected in a few years that we'd see \$400. Oil has now come down to \$65 and could easily go lower. This is the type of bad public opinion that the media loves to create and shape.

Superstar salespeople don't allow themselves to be impacted by this type of noise. They stay committed and focused to making the number of sales calls each day that they know will lead to success. They are continuously reviewing their sales process to find ways to improve and to close more sales. Superstar salespeople don't give up; they press on.

There's a great quote I love to use regarding this theory. I'm not sure where it came from, but it goes something like this: "when everyone else zigs, it's the best time to zag." I'm personally using this economy to take my business to new heights. I'm not allowing it to slow down anything I'm working on and, in fact, I'm finding more ways to "zag" than I ever thought imaginable.

Keep on selling! Don't back off! Whatever you do, don't allow yourself to get swayed by the many doom-sayers out there.

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21



## MARK HUNTER

Mark Hunter, "The Sales Hunter," helps individuals and companies identify better prospects, close more sales, and profitably build more long-term customer relationships. He is a consultative selling expert, specializing in custom-tailored sales programs that allow businesses to gain the edge they need to compete and win in today's marketplace.

For nearly 30 years, Mark Hunter has been in sales. The first 20 years, he worked for three Fortune 100 companies managing sales territories worth more than \$200 million in annual sales. Other roles included directing more than 200 sales people and \$700 million in annual sales. For the past 10 years, he has been a sales consultant who speaks and works with leading global companies. It's Mark's experience in key sales positions of top corporations that gives him the confidence to deal with CEOs and other senior-level people in today's corporate environment.

The experience Mark has had combined with his communication skills and keen sense of the industry make him a highly sought after sales speaker and sales consultant for corporations and associations. Since creating the brand, "The Sales Hunter," in 1998, he has had the privilege of speaking to and working with thousands of sales professionals and business leaders. His passion for sales combined with his engaging communication style make him a favorite presenter of numerous companies and associations. He is best known for his sales motivation speeches that not only educate the audience, but also leave them empowered to succeed.

"The Sales Hunter" provides wisdom, motivation, and inspiration every week to sales professionals around the globe. His insightful videos and podcasts are popular downloads on YouTube and iTunes, and he has been quoted in numerous magazines and newspapers. His free, weekly *Sales Hunting Tip* email is received by thousands of salespeople worldwide. Additionally, many of his articles on Sales have been reprinted in some of the industry's leading magazines and business websites.

To find out more about Mark's selling philosophy, you can visit his blog at [www.TheSalesHunter.com/blog](http://www.TheSalesHunter.com/blog). In addition, his numerous articles on Sales can be found on the website in the "Resources" section.