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Why my Father could outsell today's Salesperson

By John Chapin

I'm amazed by the lack of sales skills I encounter, and the notion that today's salespeople are superior to those of the past. As you can gather from the title, I don't agree. Here's why.

Knowing the Basics

When my father began his training at IBM in the early 60's, "Big Blue" made sure he knew everything about selling. Yes, he learned their products. But his training was primarily sales training. They made sure he knew how to get beyond the gatekeeper to the decision maker, how to present their product, overcome objections, close the sale, customer follow up, how to build solid, long-term relationships. Everything was scripted and he role-played until he could recite it all verbatim.

IBM also covered the basics regarding how to dress, the right way to shake hands, and the importance of popping a breath mint before a sales call. All important stuff! But that was then.

These days I find that many salespeople, when faced with objections, stalls, and "I can get it cheaper down the street," are unprepared to respond effectively. They stammer and trip over their tongues as if hearing these objections for the first time. Seems they lack the "basics" of selling. And too many are lax with dress, manners, and etiquette in general. Sadly, a firm handshake and other common sense practices are more the exception than the rule in today's selling world.

An awesome work ethic

My father and those like him were tough to beat when it came to living up to promises and keeping their word. They felt an obligation to the company that hired them, their bosses, and the families for whom they needed to provide. And they had an immense sense of accountability.

My father's generation would never consider fudging a call sheet or hiding out in a coffee shop or movie theatre when they were supposed to be making sales calls. He was responsible. He tracked his calls and used the call sheets as tools to monitor his success.

Putting in an honest day's work for an honest day's pay, along with taking care of the company, the customers, and his family, was all the motivation needed. It didn't matter how you felt on a given day, the question was about the obligation and commitment you signed up for, and the work ethic that dictated - if you were taking a paycheck from a company, you owed them your best.

And like so many of his generation, his objective was to help and serve other people. His “the-customer-is-always-right” mentality made him the best of the best for over 30 years.

What about today?

If a good salesperson is hard to find, cultivate one. Start with someone who cares about people, is ‘hungry’ to make his mark in the world, has a thick skin and a blue-collar mentality, and isn’t afraid to show up early, leave late, and pound the pavement making more calls than anyone else. Work with them to ensure that they know their product and have studied their craft. Then combine all of that with today’s technology, especially social media, and you just may have a winner. Time to get to work!

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