

THE SEARCH FOR THE “SILVER BULLET”

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Over the years, many sales trainers have told their audiences they knew the secret of sales success. There are literally hundreds of “methods” out there that promise to increase sales. The problem is, there are so many different places where sales failure occurs there is no way any particular tool can be applied across the board.

I do have one recommendation I put in the “Silver Bullet” category because of its value. This sales tool can be used once contact has been established with the customer. (This means it is not relevant with people the salesperson does not know.) The neatest thing about this particular tool is it is also a sales management tool.

Are you ready—here it is—the most effective sales tool that I have seen is:

THE SCHEDULED NEXT STEP

As I have worked with hundreds of salespeople, the only common thread I have seen between the really good ones is they always schedule a next step with the customer. Personality doesn't seem to matter, relationship varies dramatically, product knowledge can be small--even communication ability does not seem to be the most important factor in sales success. The most important factor seems to be a discussion at the end of every sales call (on the phone or in person) that goes like this:

- Customer, **what are the things that you think we need to do next?**
- **Who needs to do them**—you or I?
- **When do they need to be done?**
- **When should we next talk to each other?**

Notice how the four questions presented develop the customer's commitment to whatever issue is being discussed. As the customer is asked to define what needs to be done; who needs to do it; when it needs to be done—and then the kicker, the customer sets the next appointment with the salesperson. This assures the continuity of the sales process.

Remember, in today's world, getting the next appointment is often the hardest part of the sales process—so why not let the customer do it for you?

I also want you to notice this is not the same thing as telling the customer what is supposed to happen next—you are asking, shutting up and listening. Asking these questions does not guarantee success—because the customer may not answer any of them—but at least this occurs in front of the salesperson so the salesperson knows they have a problem—**while they are still talking to the customer.**

This is especially true of the closing call. You will increase your hit rate on closes for key opportunities if you insist this process be done when you are delivering the quote/proposal. The other real value here is to sales management. Imagine how simple it will be to review key calls with your salespeople.

All you have to do to check their effectiveness is to ask these questions:

- What are the things the customer thinks we need to do next?
- Who needs to do them—the customer or us?
- When do they need to be done?
- When is your next **scheduled** appointment to talk with the customer about **this** opportunity?

If you want to get an insight into the quality of the sales process—your salesperson should be able to answer all of these questions.

Till next time,

Joe Ellers

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