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Productive Thinking = Productive Sales

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The current economy is becoming what is known as “The Creative Economy“. An economy in which corporations are actively telling their managers, engineers, and product developers to become better and more creative problem solvers. That is, to become “Productive Thinkers” in order to gain a strategic advantage.

Yet, as companies have begun to embrace this creative and productive thinking, one group has been left behind - The sales department. In many companies, sales people are not being taught how to adjust their skills nor to take advantage of the learning taking place in the rest of the organization. And, this is something that an organization must reflect on in its own sales practices.

If your sales staff is selling the same way they did in their previous jobs, or the same way as your competition, you must ask - Where’s the strategic edge? Where’s the point of difference?

Your sales people need to have a point of difference as much as your product or service. If you continue to do what you always did, you will continue to get what you always got - In other words, you will be getting nothing new.

If the top management of an organization is still using the practice of holding their sales force hostage to quotas sales, then the problem rests with that management. Basically due to the fact that even though quotas may sometimes be met, in the process, that management is creating a hostage mentality in their sales staff. And, the problem with this is that hostages tend to run at the first opportunity.

The Pareto principle tells us that 80% of a company’s revenue often comes from 20% of its customers. So, if your sales peoples are driven to make the numbers, without some room for creativity, this will send them right back into the parking lots of that 20% of your customers - Because there’s no room, time or incentive to cultivate new sales with the other 80% of your customers. And, this is not a good system for growth.

Company executives, sales managers and their sales people need to change their thinking. And, what I am about to say may sound like heresy for more than a few of them:

Stop trying to get the customer to buy. Stop trying to make the sale to them.

Most sales people have been taught every prospect is a potential sale. They have been taught that they can “create” a need in a client. And, they believe that every time a potential client raises a reason not to buy, they need to respond to that client with a reason why they should buy.

But, think about this from the prospect’s perspective for a moment. - Do you buy every service or product that someone tries to sell to you? Of course you don’t. Because, at that moment, you don’t have a need to buy that product or service. And, as hard as the sales person may try to wear you down, as an intelligent adult you know what you need, or don’t need... And, it is no different for your customers.

What I suggest is that anyone who wants to be a better sales person becomes a “Productive Thinking Sales Facilitator“.

When my company teaches sales people to facilitate the “Productive Thinking Process”, one of the key things we stress is “Don’t get involved in content - But, stay involved in the process“.

And, this is a practice we ourselves follow when we facilitate sessions for our own clients. As with this, we can be sure that we are asking the right questions - The questions that help clients get to their own solutions - Not solutions we forced on them.

After all, who knows better than the client themselves what will work for them - Individually, organizationally or strategically?

How do you become a Productive Thinking Sales Facilitator?

First and foremost, you need to learn how to ask a lot of questions of your potential customers, and listen to the answers. These questions have to be all about the potential customer and their business.

You need to be a “facilitator” to help your customers discover their problems and needs; what works well for them, and what hasn’t worked for them; and, what their future looks like. - What’s going on in 6 months or 12 months?

The same as you would in facilitating a “Productive Thinking” session around an organizational problem; you must facilitate your customer through the process of discovering a solution that satisfies their problem or need.

It is important to point out, that your potential customer may still not buy from you at this point. But, you will have established a strong relationship with this individual. And, this is because you have facilitated them in discovering a need or problem and you've helped them with a solution. So, even though they may not buy from you immediately, the result is that they will probably buy from you in the future.

Additionally, they would then be more likely to refer you to someone who they think might be able to use your product or service.

So, have you really lost a sale?.. No, you have not - you've potentially gained two future sales.

In summary, I suggest that you always keep the following points in mind:

- Do not be afraid of “not” getting the sale, nor should you be afraid to get productive in your thinking with prospects.
- Do not be afraid of “not” taking everything your prospect says and turn it into a reason for them to buy your product - Let them find their own reason and solve their own problems, with your “Productive Thinking” facilitations skills.