
The Sales Cycle



by KEN COATS

I have been in the outside sales cycle for about 12 years now. My career has included sales in home improvement, pest control, counter tops, life insurance, uniforms and equipment, and now I enjoy a career as a manufacturers' representative in the industrial safety and supply business.

I refer to my career as "The Sales Cycle." What on earth could that possibly mean? Well, I cannot take credit for coining the phrase, but it does put the sales profession in prospective. With that being said, it is not important what type of sales career that we discuss, but the means by which we go about gaining our desired result — sales.

To have any level of success at all in the sales cycle you must be able to perform several different tasks and be persistent at all of them. So what do I mean by "The Sales Cycle"?

It's simple, prospect, identify needs, provide solutions and complete the process, referrals and repeat.

Prospect

You must first have a place to go. Does this mean establish appointments with Mr. Prospect?

Yes. In this modern day market that is easier said than done so it requires a large amount of persistence, i.e., no return phone call, call again, call again until you get an appointment or a go away response. This is also an excellent time to qualify your prospect and make your best effort to get into that "corner office" as soon as possible. Good prospecting is a key element in "The Sales Cycle." The sooner you can get into that "corner office," the sooner you can get the opportunity to work with the main decision maker or in other words, Mr. Right.

Identify Needs

Uncover a need from the prospect. This can be accomplished in several ways. It could be the result of some type of survey at the end user's company. It could be as simple as asking the proper questions. Be careful not to ask

questions that will yield a negative response or close a door on your sales efforts. The best identifier out there comes in twos, your ears. Listening to the prospect's comments and concerns will often lead to the request for your products. Make a conscious effort to do some research on the prospect before the call to equip yourself with some tools for the appointment. If you cannot identify the need for your products, your progress within the cycle will not increase very quickly and maybe not at all.

Provide Solutions or Problem Solving

Identifying a problem and providing a possible solution is not something to be taken lightly. It requires a great deal of training and education on applications for your products as well as product knowledge itself. Equally enough,

field experience is an excellent tool but that can only be accomplished by time in the field. However, an excellent tool for all salespeople is education or gaining certifications within your specific industry. An excellent example of this for a salesperson in the Safety industry would be to complete the Qualified Safety Sales Professional (QSSP) course or to gain the Certified Professional Manufacturers' Representative (CPMR) certification. With that being said, let's assume that you are selling safety glasses. Mr. Prospect tells you that the workers in the plant are not in favor of wearing eye protection because they look silly and are not very comfortable. Your question should be one to find an opening to provide your safety glasses that the end user will want to wear. Mr. Prospect, what do you think would help you get the workers to comply more easily? The answer will probably lead to the request for a more comfortable safety glass that looks stylish as well as complying with the current ANSI standards. Intro your product and ask for a wear test in the plant.

Complete The Process

You have found a prospect, established a need and provided a solution. The next step is to ask for an order. Make sure to be prepared for the objections at this point. This is where the listening comes into play again. Mr. Prospect informs you on your follow up call, the safety glass worked great for almost all of our workers, however, we did have a few female workers that claim they were uncomfortable. Response:

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That's understandable; in most cases, females have a need for a slightly smaller frame glass. Let's use this style for the ladies and the other for the rest of the workforce. Let's go ahead and get a requisition established and get the glasses into the plant.

Referrals

Okay, the cycle is not completely over yet. You have successfully navigated through steps one through four and have solved a problem for your prospect. Before we leave, let's ask Mr. Customer to provide us with other possible prospects within the area, within the same plant or within the same organization. If you have done your homework properly and provided a solution to a genuine problem for the customer, they should be more than willing to provide you with some direction to another prospect.

Repeat

Take your new prospect, given to you by your new customer, and start the cycle all over again.

"The Sales Cycle" is a very rewarding concept but will not develop without the proper game plan. The more experience, education, training and certification you can pack into your playbook,

the more tools you have to provide solutions for your customers and in turn create revenue for yourself. Used properly, these tools can help you establish excellent Interdependent Channel Relationships (ICR). These relationships forge the way for the salesperson to complete the entire sales cycle with confidence and efficiency. ICR's will not only help develop long-lasting relationships along the way, they will also help to establish an excellent customer base to support you during the cycle. □

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



Ken Coats, QSSP, joined MANA member United Sales Associates (USA), Cincinnati,

in 1999, as a field sales representative. He graduated from Middle Tennessee State University in 1990 with a B.S. Degree. He had more than six years experience as an outside sales representative for a distributor in the public safety industry before joining USA. As a representative, he was named Sales Professional of the Year for 1996.

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