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# The Dumbest Things Salespeople Do



by BILL BROOKS

**T**he truth is, knowing what *not* to do in sales is just as powerful as knowing what *to* do. Make sense? So I've assembled a list of the dumbest things that we've seen salespeople do — things that are virtually guaranteed to completely de-rail your selling career.

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## They Don't Become Students of Their Craft

They begin strong selling careers, and they really get into it — but then they go to sleep at the switch and forget to do things like read industry publications or new books by sales masters. They don't go to sales seminars. They don't listen to audios or view videos on sales-related topics. In short, they don't re-invigorate themselves.

Did you know that the golfer Tiger Woods spends a million dollars a year with his swing coach? A million dollars working on his swing, every year! He is always looking to get better — and look where he is!

I am amazed by salespeople who don't spend more than five or 10 dollars a year on their own professional growth. We're in a

profession that's changing by leaps and bounds, and we're into the 21st century. If you're still selling the way you sold in the last century — you're in trouble!

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## They Don't "Narrowcast" Their Offering

Now, what do I mean by that? I mean that they don't become specialists at a segment, or a particular type of market, or at delivering a specific type of product. They stay generalists.

Think about it. People get paid more to be medical specialists than they do to be medical generalists. The specialist has narrowcasted his or her offering.

The most successful salespeople master the art of narrowcasting their offerings. They become well-known specialists in selling one thing, and people

come to them for that one thing, every time they need it.

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## They Fail to Position Themselves Correctly

The way people position themselves determines how they're seen by their prospects and customers. In short, people pay attention to people whom they perceive as having something important to say to them.

The best way to sell is not to position yourself as a salesperson, but to position yourself as an expert. One of the best ways we've seen to position yourself is to host an information session or how-to clinic on a topic related to what you sell. For example, a realtor might offer a seminar on "How to Get Financed for the Home You Want." Or an industrial equipment distributor might host a

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workshop on how to install a particular piece of new equipment.

See? The goal of these sessions isn't to sell something, per se. Instead, it's to show people that you know a lot about everything to do with your business, and you're willing to share your knowledge. (Other great ways to do this are through trade journals or articles, or speeches or seminars, or advocacy within an association or organization.)

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### **They Fail to Prospect**

This is huge. The biggest cause of failure in sales is having an inadequate supply of qualified prospects. How do you get prospects?

- Host informative sessions for prospective clients.
- Send mailings to targeted lists.
- Speak at association meetings.
- Host user's groups.
- Offer a webinar.

You always should have multiple methods of prospecting, because you want to be sure you've got a variety of types of prospects constantly filling your pipeline. And I have to say, take advantage of all the latest digital technologies that really can make it seamless and simple to deploy effective prospecting strategies into the marketplace.

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### **They Get in Front of the Wrong People**

There's an old statement that goes like this: "You can't get rich selling to the wrong people." You had better be in front of people:

- Who can make a decision.
- Who have a need.
- Who have a perceived problem or a "pain."
- Who are willing to listen to you.

It can be easy to confuse activity with results because you are worried most about reports and numbers you give to your sales manager. You want to be able to go back and say, "Well, I was in front of (number) people." But, my question to you is, "Are they the right people?"

Your own self-image, your sense of self-worth, and how well you've positioned yourself — they're all going to affect whether you're in front of the right people. And the problem is, if you enter at the wrong level, it's very hard to work yourself up! You may alienate the people you first interfaced with, and the people who are at the top won't see you as having something valuable to say, because you didn't get to them in the first place.

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### **They Listen to Their Peers**

Listening to your peers often means you get too much negative input. You hear things like, "This isn't the way you sell. Don't listen to these guys, don't follow

their process. Don't use this; it's too theoretical. You can't make more than 'X' amount of dollars in this business. This company is really bad, they're always out to get us. We've got an inferior product. Our delivery is bad. Our prices are out of line. The commission structure on prices is unfair. The future's bleak, the economy is bad. My boss is a jerk."

It goes on and on and on. You've got to understand something: 80 percent of your peers are only delivering 20 percent of the results. And you know what? They've got nothing better to do than hope *you're* not successful, either. So do you really want to listen to 80 percent of salespeople? Get it?

Instead, listen to positive, upbeat stuff that really does make you feel good and think clearly. Whether it's music, or motivational content, or something else that's upbeat or uplifting: Listen to it — and remember, most of your peers are not doing well in sales!

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### **They Don't Understand the Economics of Their Product or Service**

Here's what I mean: Would you sell something for a buck and a half that cost you a buck? No you wouldn't. But unfortunately, lots of salespeople don't understand 'value costing,' and that's *exactly* what they end up doing!

They don't truly understand what it costs to deploy their solu-

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tions in the field. They don't understand what telephone costs are, what manufacturing costs are, what advertising, marketing, promotion and all other costs are — so they end up giving the product or service away.

And here's a review of Economics 101 — if you're losing money on every deal, you can't *ever* make it up in volume! But what so many salespeople think is, "Look, it comes out of the company's side — it doesn't come out of my side." To them, the company's got a boundless supply of money and resources. But the truth is, the company's money comes out of selling product at a profit. Period.

What salespeople are for is to sell, and to sell at a profit. If you don't understand the economies of your product and your company, how can you ever sell it for the right price?

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### **They Mentally Spend Their Income — Before Earning It**

If your pay plan is somehow designed to reward you for production or performance — not just a base salary for being around — listen to me! The sale is not made until you have received your commission check, it's gone into the bank, and it's cleared — only then is the sale consummated.

Why not? Think about all the things that can happen. You can have delivery problems, you can have delays. You can have cancellations, you can get knocked out of the box. Just because you receive a purchase order, doesn't mean anybody has to exercise it!

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### **They Fail to Ask the Right Questions**

In fact, not only would I say that they failed to ask the right questions — but maybe they failed to ask questions at all. Or worse, they did ask questions, but didn't listen to the answers. So there are lots of important things to think about:

- Are they the right questions?
- Do you listen to the answer?
- Do you ask questions in the right way?
- Do you write them down?
- Do you ask your questions in the right sequence?
- Can you extrapolate one question to the next?
- Are you really listening to what they say?
- Are you anticipating more about what you're going to say next?

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### **They Are Either Digitally Compulsive or Digitally Impaired**

In other words, they are so

compulsive about digital technology that they spend all of their time on the Internet, or in sales force automation products, or on their Blackberries, or whatever. Or, they're so impaired that they're absolutely frozen about using it.

But as simple as it sounds, as basic and fundamental as it sounds, the truth is, the most successful person is going to be the one who's going to be in the middle. Bottom line: You should not be sitting in front of your computer screen all day long. You need to be eyeball to eyeball with prospects and customers.

Computers are tools. When somebody is out building a house, they don't use a hammer for everything. They use a hammer for specific things that they've got to do. This is your hammer. When you've got a tool like a contact management software program — it's a hammer. Pull it out, use it when you need it, and then put it back in your belt. Go on and do what you do — don't live in front of this thing. But, also, don't go out and try to build a house without a hammer in your tool belt. Use it, when it's appropriate.

This is the best that I can give you of the 10 reasons why we've seen salespeople fail. So what does that mean? It's pretty simple: Don't do these things! You'll keep your selling career on the right path. □

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