
12 MISTAKES SALES PEOPLE MAKE

& How to
Correct
Them

by Jim Klein



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1. Ignorance of the Industry & the Competition

Do you keep up to date on what's happening in your industry? Do you know what your competition is doing?

Most salespeople don't. They think they know everything that's happening and is going to happen in their industry.

Do you know what the three major trends are in your industry? How will these changes impact your client's needs and therefore your product and services? What are the causes of these trends? Why are they happening? And if they continue, how will your industry change in the next few years?

Knowing what's going on in your industry shows that you are the expert and not just another sales person putting in their time hoping to collect a check for all their troubles.

Set up an account with Google Alerts. You can set up alerts for keywords pertaining to your particular industry, your competitors, your self or any thing else you want to keep an eye on. Then you can get notified daily on any articles or news stories pertaining to the specific topics, and stay on top of the latest developments in your industry.

I suggest you subscribe to every publication, both print and on line in your industry to keep up on the big picture. Also subscribe to on line newsletters that will keep you up to date. Look for current trends as well as future trends.

By knowing the direction your industry is headed you'll be in a better position to advise your current and prospective clients on changes in the industry and how your product or service can help them.

Sit down with a pen and paper and work out the answers to these questions. Who is your competition and what are they doing? I know you know who your competitors are. You've heard their names mentioned on the phone and in sales presentations. However, do you really know them? The products or services they offer the prices they charge, the benefits they offer?

If you don't, I suggest you get to know everything they do. Find out how they sell. Ask your clients if they've been contacted. Talk to prospects that bring up their names.

Find out all you can. It will give you some new ideas and insight into how you can beat them to the next sale.

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2. Not Differentiating Themselves from the Competition

You have to differentiate yourself from your competition. When you understand your competition and the industry it's easier for you to find ways to be unique and stand out from the crowd.

What sets you apart from every other sales person in your industry? How are you and your company different? Do you specialize in a particular part of your market? Do you offer excellent customer service? Does your product or service come with a guarantee?

What new and different approach can you take from your competitors that will make you unique?

What is your USP (Unique Selling Proposition?)

How will prospects remember you or will you blend in with the other sales people and be forgotten?

Most sales people never think about being different. They only want to be good or maybe just average.

They want to show the prospect the six different ways they have learned to close the sale. Or dazzle them with their flip chart or even better their flash presentation done on their laptop.

Most sales people talk in terms of how long their company has been in existence, how they have quality service and a competitive price. All the companies sound the same so how does the prospect decide who to pick?

Whoever will negotiate the lowest price gets the sale because there's no other difference between you and your competitors. There's no value presented to help the prospect understand why you're worth paying more for. If you don't show them how you're different then most likely the company with the lowest price wins the business.

Being different, special, unique in your client's eyes is basic to your success. Today you need to have more than an advantage over your competition. You have to be seen as the only viable solution, strategy or opportunity for the problem your market is trying to solve.

Your task is to determine what problem your market is striving to solve and in a unique way present your product or service as the only solution.

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3. Lack of Rapport and Relationship Skills (making friends)

Many sales people try to sell to prospects before they have developed a relationship or trust with them.

People only buy from someone they like and trust. If the prospect doesn't know you, the likelihood of making a sale is diminished.

Building rapport is important to getting off to a great start with any prospect. Making a good first impression will go along way towards building trust and rapport with your prospect.

Be on time, relax, present yourself appropriately, smile, be courteous and attentive, and be positive. All of these things can help you to make a good first impression.

Show a genuine interest in the prospect as a person, their likes and dislikes. Find one thing you have in common and build on that. Don't be afraid to get the prospect talking about themselves and then allow the conversation to go on for some time, however, don't get caught up in it and forget why you're there.

Talk to your prospect like you would one of your friends. Ask them about their family, hobbies, vacation spots they've visited lately. Don't be afraid to make a friend. Ultimately that's what you want so the sooner you can achieve it the easier the sale and future business becomes.

You gain a huge edge by practicing active listening skills. Paying attention to the prospects speech pattern, facial expressions and body language are all things that will give you insight into how your prospect communicates and their general feelings about you and your presentation. It will also let you know how the presentation is progressing and the direction to take the conversation.

Keeping the prospects best interest at heart and have a genuine caring attitude, putting their needs ahead of yours and treat them like they are the most important person in the world. Because to them, they are the most important person in the world.

Constantly look for ways to be their friend and then find opportunities to convince them of that fact. This is crucial in ultimately making the sale.

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4. Talking Instead of Listening

One of my mentors Tom Hopkins said “you have two ears and one mouth, you should listen twice as much as you talk”. Many salespeople believe the more they talk the better they sell when actually the opposite is true.

Many salespeople want to show how much they know. They want to impress the prospect with how much knowledge they have of things that are generally of no interest to the prospect. They figure the more they talk the better job of selling they do.

Generally the talk is about them and how great they and their company are. I’m sure the prospect hasn’t heard that speech before and the sales appointment ends before it starts.

One of the main reasons salespeople talk excessively is they haven’t prepared themselves properly. They have no plan for how the appointment with the prospect will go, so they revert to talking.

Determine in advance the questions you will ask the prospect to get them talking about themselves and their problems they are looking to solve.

Write down a script for your sales appointments. I mean the whole appointment from start to finish. Then learn it. When you plan what you’re going to say you won’t babble on about stuff that will bore the prospect.

Another reason they talk so much is they have never learned how to listen. Here are some key skills to learn to become an effective listener.

Get rid of distractions. If it is important for you to listen, do everything you can to eliminate internal and external noise and distractions that interfere with careful listening.

Don’t judge prematurely. All of us are guilty of forming snap judgments and evaluating others before hearing them out especially when the speaker’s ideas conflict with our own.

Look for key ideas. We think much faster than people speak. To help focus attention (rather than drift off in boredom), isolate the central idea.

Paraphrase. Reword the speaker's thoughts in your own words to make sure your interpretation as a listener is accurate.

Suspend your own agenda. In other words, while you are listening, concentrate on what the speaker is saying, not what you think.

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5. Prejudging the Prospect

If you prejudge the prospect by their surroundings or the type of person you think they are, you'll miss out on many sales. If you think "he won't buy" or "she doesn't look like the type" you're setting yourself up to fail. Thinking the prospect doesn't have enough money is the worst of the prejudgments.

Many sales people skip over steps in the sales process because of their prejudgments of certain prospects. They might feel they are smarter or better than a prospect and think they can sell them anything without going through the process. Maybe they feel they have the prospect all figured out, so they can take short cuts to save time.

The second mistake many sales people make is to prejudge what the prospect needs. They enter an appointment determined to show the prospect all the great things their product or service will do without first finding the prospect's problem.

They prejudge the prospect thinking they know what they need and what is best for them. Then the sales person is determined to prove to the prospect that they are right. Often times what happens is the sales person ends up alienating themselves from the prospect.

Treat every one of your prospects the same regardless of the way they look or act and regardless of what you think their needs are or what is best for them.

Lead every prospect the same way through all the steps of the sales process. Qualify them to find their needs and whether your product or service fits their needs. Then make a determination whether they're a good prospect for your particular product or service.

Ask questions to find their problem and then present your product or service as the perfect solution.

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6. Asking the Wrong Questions or None at all

Many salespeople ask questions that are damaging to the relationship with the prospect. Others don't ask questions at all, figuring they have all the answers and they'll dazzle the prospect with their presentation skills.

Other sales people use questions that only scratch the surface. They ask general questions about the problems the prospect is facing or the need they are looking to fill. These kinds of general questions are good to start with; however, the answers will never get at the reasons that will motivate the prospect to purchase your product or service.

The majority of sales people never uncover the deeper problems that will motivate their prospects to purchase, then they're frustrated when they receive the same objection, your price is too high. When in fact they haven't shown how they're different than the competition and why their product or service is worth the price the prospect is paying.

Ask lots of open ended questions. Open end questions begin with "who", "what", "when", "where", "how" and "why". An open end question cannot be answered with "yes or no". Open ended questions require the prospect to tell you what they think, what they want, or how they feel.

Once you have asked a question, close your mouth and listen to the prospects answers for ways your product or service can improve their current situation.

When you are asking specific questions and listening to the prospects answers, do it with a genuine interest in the needs of the prospect

Asking questions and listening to the answers with a genuine interest your prospect will be more apt to tell you how to close them. If you show a genuine interest in them they are likely to warm up to you and give you a better chance of closing the sale.

An important lesson I've learned in sales is that most people will tell you anything you want to know. All you have to do is ask. People love to talk about themselves, and want to share information about their current situation, problems, likes and dislikes. However, in most cases they need to be prompted.

This prompting comes from asking the right questions in the right tone and manner.

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7. Selling Before Needs are Established

Right now the majority of salespeople are telling prospects what they're selling without first finding out what the prospect needs. They claim to know exactly what the solution is without first finding the prospects problem.

What a huge mistake. Offering a solution without first finding the problem would be like a doctor giving you a band aid when your arm is broken. It won't fix the real problem.

You must first ask the prospect probing questions to find their problem and to see if your product or service will solve that problem. Only then can you offer your product or service as a solution to that specific problem.

Develop a list of questions to ask the prospect to determine what their needs are and if there is a need at all for your product or service.

Keep asking questions until you are sure you understand the prospects needs, wants, expectations, and feelings and then give your sales presentation to show them how your product or service will solve their problems.

Another part of determining if there is a need is whether the prospect has the authority to make the decision to purchase on their own or whether there are other decision makers in the process.

Also many sales people attempt to sell a prospect before they determine if they have the budget to complete the purchase.

Many sales people waste valuable time attempting to sell their product or service before covering these three important points in the fact finding process, then they waste more time attempting to follow up with the prospect to continue with the sale.

These three points must be very clear and in the sales persons favor before proceeding with a sales presentation. This puts the sales person in an excellent position to present their product or service as the only solution, and ultimately close the sale.

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8. Poor Presentation Skills

Poor presentation skills can spell doom for even the hottest prospect. Many salespeople fidget, talk very fast or slow, hesitate or fumble their words. They have no idea what to say and what they do say isn't presented properly.

You need to become a master presenter and it isn't difficult to become one. It takes a good coach, a positive learning attitude and the discipline to practice, practice, and practice some more until your presentation becomes second nature.

What you say, the organization of what you say and how you say it can have a lasting positive impression on your prospect or place you in the category of "just like everybody else."

Where do you want to be?

Your sales presentation should be well thought out and then put in writing. Then you should practice your presentation over and over until you commit it to memory.

Some steps you can take to assess your presentations are...taking a fellow salesperson or your sales manager with you on a sales call and asking them to evaluate your presentation. Recording your sales presentations with the prospects permission and then listen to the tape later is another great way to improve upon your presentation skills.

Whatever you need to do to develop a powerful presentation of the benefits of your product or service and then internalize your presentation, do it, because your presentation holds the key to your success.

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9. Being Unprepared – No Systematic Approach to Sales

Many salespeople sell “by the seat of their pants”. They show up at the appointment, chat a bit, ask a few leading questions and launch into their sales presentation.

Selling is a process. There are certain steps you must take to reach the goal which of course is to make the sale. Skip any of the steps and you make the whole process more difficult.

Most salespeople don't want to put in the work to prepare for and learn each of the steps. It requires work. They would rather make it up as they go along. Then they wonder why more times than not they walk away from an appointment disappointed with no sale.

By preparing the steps of the sales process and practicing them until they become second nature you gain an advantage. Only a small percentage of salespeople ever take the time to become really great at sales. The salespeople, who do, close more sales and ultimately have more time and money for themselves.

Also, when you know exactly what to say you're free to truly build a bond between yourself and the prospect. That bond will ease the prospects mind and make them more receptive to what you have to say and it will be easier to close more sales.

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10. Not Effectively Generating Referrals

In my opinion one of the biggest mistakes millions of salespeople make every day is not asking for referrals.

They spend their time getting the appointment, making their presentation and closing the sale. Then when they have a satisfied client they go looking for new leads instead of asking for the best lead they can get, a referral.

Referrals are the easiest leads to turn into sales because they come with a recommendation from someone they know. Turning referrals into new sales requires less time and effort and sets up a chain reaction of quality business.

Where should you begin asking for referrals?

The life blood of any successful company is their customer base. Your current overly satisfied customers would be happy to help you by giving you referrals. All you have to do is ask.

Get comfortable with a system to approach your current clients and give them a reason to help you by giving you referrals.

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11. Lack of Follow-up

Lack of follow up is divided into two separate issues common with many salespeople

The first mistake is not clearly establishing the next step with the prospect. For example, when a sales call is ended with a prospect or client and the sales person doesn't set a specific time and objective for the next call. This may open the door for possible misunderstandings and potentially lost sales.

Make sure you and the prospect understand what is expected, when it will happen, who will be involved, anything necessary to make the follow up as easy as possible.

Poor follow up will get you one thing for sure, poor results.

The second mistake is little or no follow up after the sale is complete. This is critical if you expect the client to keep you in the front of their mind when they have another need for your services. Also, follow up after the sale will keep you on their mind for referrals and gives you the opportunity to ask for them.

Countless salespeople make this mistake. They are so focused on making the next sale they lose track of their past clients. Without proper follow up these clients will be more open to the next salesperson that knocks on their door. And that future business will go to someone else.

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12. No Investment in Yourself

Here's something pretty amazing. No more than 5% of active, full time professional salespeople ever invest in their own growth. That means that only one out of twenty salespeople have ever spent any of their own money on a book on sales, subscribed to a sales magazine, taken a sales course, or attended a sales seminar of their own choosing and at their own expense.

Why is that?

Many sales people think they know it all, or they think they couldn't possibly learn anything from anyone else. So why should they take their valuable time to attend a seminar or read a book?

Some people are more interested in hanging on to their jobs than getting better at them.

I think the main reason is most salespeople don't view themselves as professionals. They view their work as just another job to be worked 9-5 Monday through Friday. They don't realize that sales professionals are some of the highest paid people in the world and to earn that amount of money you need to spend money to educate your self.

Doctors, Lawyers, Business Executives, all spend tens and many times hundreds of

thousands of dollars of their own money on their education. Even after getting their degree, every year they spend their own money going to seminars, subscribing to publications, buying books and continuing their education to remain at their best.

I suggest that you open your wallet and spend some money if you really want to earn big money in sales. Subscribe to industry publications, buy and read books, get yourself a mentor or a coach. Don't wait for your company to do it for you. With downsizing and cost cutting in many companies, it's just not in the budget. Why let your company decide where you get your education anyway.

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Do you know some one who is making any of these mistakes in their sales? Are they making them on a regular basis? Are they struggling in sales? Maybe their successful and not struggling, however, they want to take their success to the next level.

Then tell them to go find help.

I can help you to increase your bottom line.

If you like where you are and have all the customers and the money you need, you can stop reading this now because you obviously know all that there is to know.

One of the major differences between the entrepreneurial world and the corporate world is that entrepreneurs step up to the plate on a regular basis and invest in their own self-improvement. In the corporate world most folks delegate their personal self-development to the company.

On the other hand if you're like me and you're hungry and thirsty for new knowledge and more ideas you should definitely check this out.

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