

Turning Down the Volume on the Pain

The End of Manipulation Selling

Dr. Jean Norris, Managing Partner, Norton|Norris, Inc., Chicago
David Hanlon, Director, The Right Mind International Pty. Ltd., Brisbane

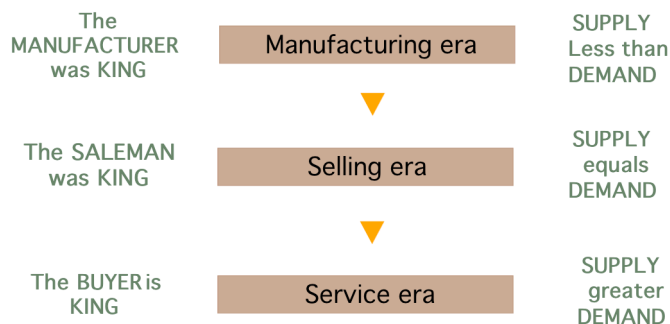
All sales people start off eager to help their clients. The product they have is seen as a way to "help"

How many of you more seasoned salespersons remember the "good old days": days when you were so eager to learn all you could about helping your clients in every way possible. However, in-house training methods which regularly promoted techniques that played less to partnering with prospects but rather setting up a controlling relationship put a damper on many young salespersons genuine wish to help. We were told to position ourselves as the experts and our focus became one of "knowledge masters". And in the process ego and arrogance replaced the desire to service our customers. For many of us these methods did not sit well - so we adapted.

The transition

Through the years, sales training methodologies have evolved, but the core foundation used in sales remains stagnant. We sometimes forget history and the relationship between having a product that was commonly in less supply to today's world where supply generally outstrips demand. It is in this environment that we are constantly surprised that so much selling continues to lag behind using outdated approaches that not only negatively impact the bottom line but fuel a poor brand image of the organisation. The recent spate of off-shore telemarketers hounding the family household at dinner time and weekends brings back images of the 1940's door to door salesmen (yes, they were predominantly men in those days!) in cheap suits pushing everything from vacuum cleaners to encyclopedias on our grandparents.

From Manufacturing to Buyer Servicing



In the mid 1980's there was a shift from the "Reverse Selling Approach" to one in which prospective customers were included in the process through the use of engagement through questioning. This approach commonly called "Relationship-Selling" or "Consultative Selling" is still widely used today and includes extensive questioning to help the prospect identify a key problem or obstacle preventing them from buying. Of course the rep is armed and ready with "solutions" to every obstacle and programs that would make whatever they desired possible. Only too frequently this approach is fraught with inconsistencies and questions are used in a manipulative fashion to have the prospect admit to some need that relates to the product. "Turn the volume up on their pain", is a sad reminder of the phase used by some old style sales trainers. This statement is the core of the approach. Surely anyone would want your product once they have found it offers the solution to their problem, right? Wrong.

If this were true than why aren't there 100% close rates? Why is the "churn rate" of young sales aspirants so high? The excuses are the same just the language has changed. We hear of lead quality, problems with internet converts, etc., etc. Or even better, "We don't have the right type of people in sales positions any longer." What we are suggesting is that these factors are not the sole reason why leads don't convert. We need to look outside of the traditional sales funnel for the answer. The problem, from the very beginning, is we have only ever focused on the sales process instead of the buying process.

A change of focus

Consider these examples. The methods used in selling today are built from Dale Carnegie's model - a sales model that was built before computers were invented (Morgan, 2003) or mobile phones were commonplace. Today, sales staff are no longer the "gatekeepers" of information since prospective buyers can (and are) shopping via the Internet before they inquire in many cases. Frequently your prospects are well along in the buying process courtesy of the speed of technology but how do you uncover what stage they're at in the buying cycle? Do you have a variety of sales approaches to adapt to the needs of your prospective buyers?

We also tend to focus on the front end selling process and we forget about the buying process our buyers are going through. According to Sharon Drew Morgen, a focus on the process the buyer will be going through is the key (Buying Facilitation, 2003). The buyer is far more likely to choose your product once they have thoroughly worked through all the factors associated with having that product. Yet the selling techniques used by sales reps are heavily concentrated on pushing the product and how it can solve problems. **And here is a news flash – not even the most talented sales rep can fully understand all the unique elements of a buyer's issues.** This is why a rep can uncover all obstacles and solve them; create amazing rapport; do good follow up; and the buyer still doesn't buy. Each individual is in their own unique space. What we can control is our approach to helping them work through all the decisions inherent in buying cycle.

There are several ways to adapt your sales process to accommodate how people buy in today's world. The good news is we don't need to completely start over either – just update our approaches. There are still components of consultative sales that will work well along with this new approach. First, it is imperative to educate sales staff to understand and appropriately

diagnose where a prospect is in the buying cycle. Since they are typically further down the purchasing path, they have processed a lot of product information already. We can't be afraid of giving too much information over the phone or sending out too much information any longer. People are buying items sight unseen off of the Internet these days. Find out where they are in the buying cycle and give them what they're looking for or they'll go elsewhere.

Secondly, sales representatives would better serve prospective students by serving in the role of a facilitator. Think of it in this way – the sales rep has a macro view of the product and what its features and benefits are but it is the prospective buyer who is the expert when it comes to their personal situation. This modified approach calls for a partnership between these two experts to find a solution. Using questions is no longer a tool to manipulate a prospective buyer but rather one to help them examine a variety of aspects to identify all the issues that need to be accounted for in order to make an effective buying decision. When using facilitative questioning, a sales rep can lead a prospective buyer through a sequential process to uncover what to look for; what needs to be accounted for; what needs to change; what is in the way – even beyond things related to your product.

Do you want to sell... or have someone buy?

The sales approaches used in business have served us for a long time. Some would debate if they've been used beyond their usefulness, however. Could this be why we are hearing more about problems with unhappy buyers? Do they feel like they were sold and lied to because many sales reps are using the old manipulation sales approaches? Maybe we can't attract the right people to the role of sales rep due to the outdated approaches, too. If we can update our approaches to selling by respecting the process the prospect has gone through prior to contacting us as well as the decision process that lies ahead, might we not set a higher level standard? Could this method bring a new level of values and integrity into the relationship between sales rep and buyer? I believe so; and as Morgen (2003) mentions, "buyers must go through this process with you or without you; it might as well be with you."

To learn more, join Sharon Drew Morgan on her first Australian Webinar.

Title: A New Way to Sell - Balancing Ethics & the Bottom Line

Date: Wednesday, 18th September, 2007

Time: 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM AEST

JEAN NORRIS and has served in a variety of roles in US higher education marketing, admissions, enrollment management, and organizational development. She has also served in the academic arena as a dean and faculty member. Her company is one of the US's leading trainers of sales staff who specialize in marketing higher education programs.

DAVID HANLON is an international business strategy and marketing consultant and is ranked as one of the Asian Development Bank's leading strategic market analysts. David designed the ExecutiveLink for Supply Chains program that won the Logistics Association of Australia's Training and Education Award.