

The Role of the 21st Century Professional Sales Representative - By Dr. Rick Johnson

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The role of field sales in the past focused around selling products to customers. The role has shifted rapidly to developing solutions and programs for customers that, once sold, allow product to flow through the business-to-business relationship. Today's professional sales person has an obligation to employ all the company resources necessary to create and maintain competitive advantage in their market place.

The company, when developing process management tools for support of the field sales management function, should carefully consider the following necessary requirements for success by the field sales representative.

The professional field sales representative must. . .

1. Plan allocation of their personal time and other available resources to optimize performance against the expectations (frequently conflicting) of their employer, their customers and their suppliers.
2. Gather information from customers, suppliers and their own company regarding independent needs and requirements. Needs would include organization, job and personal needs within all three groups.
3. Continually gather information on both threats and opportunities as well as emerging trends within their industry and their customers industry from sources outside of their customers, suppliers and their own companies.
4. Analyze information from the three constituencies and outside sources to formulate and develop solutions that increase economic value and improve upon all their independent value propositions
5. Plan, present, educate, persuade and implement identified solutions for their customers.
6. Keep the company informed with respect to projects, activities, results, and work in process, threats and opportunities.
7. Support the ongoing transaction management activity including pre-sell activity, transaction activity and post-sell activity. As companies evolve, the role of field sales in this activity shifts from primary to supportive. This means that all company resources must be engaged and the value of 'Team Selling' is recognized and promoted.
8. Ensure that they maintain an ongoing training and development activity to increase their knowledge and professional effectiveness. Self development is a key responsibility of the sales representative.

Becoming a Total Solution Provider

In times past, salespeople were trained to focus on their product. They knew everything about it - what features it had, the benefits, how long it could last and what the red button did when pressed. Salespeople talked about the product until they were blue in the face. Armed with brochures and warranties, they were ready to attack. But, in today's environment, customers want more, not just the latest technology and the best "widget" a person can buy. They want complete solutions to all their problems. Suddenly, the brochure and other marketing materials are simply support functions. Buyers are more educated, more professional and seek more than just products. They want efficiencies, market share growth, and profit generation. They want solutions. That means a sales representative must understand the customer's needs and find their pain.

Finding the Pain

Be more knowledgeable and conscious of your customer's problem. You're no longer selling a product, you're selling a solution to make their life easier, happier, better, less complicated, or more fun. By understanding the customer's business and his customers business, you help them make a profit through both cost reductions, improved efficiencies, increased value and increased sales. Those solutions come in many forms and may have nothing to do with your product. That's okay. Look for the pain regardless of what it is and focus on the solution.

Customers don't want products, they want profits - or ways to make profits. They want satisfaction, feelings of comfort, pride, praise and self-esteem. They are people just like us. Well, maybe they don't have the same crazy genetics that we have as salespeople, but they are just as smart, just as caring and have similar personal needs and feelings.

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