

Accompanying articles to Successful Selling

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How to prevent the most common sales mistake of all

If you're selling to big companies, it's highly likely that you've succumbed to this most fatal of all sales mistakes. It's not that you meant to, but those darn corporate buyers suck you into making it before you even know what's happening.

You start out the meeting, focused on their business. Leaning back in your chair with a notepad on your lap and a pencil in hand, you transition as quickly as you can to asking questions.

You ask about their goals, strategic imperatives, trends in the market and the challenges they're facing.

And before you know it, they set the trap for you.

With a feigned look of genuine interest they say, *"So tell me about your product/service"* or *"I've heard you're using some new, exciting technology."*

Or with a proper look of frustration or with indignation in their voices they spit out, *"We've had problems in that area"* or *"We're not happy with our current supplier."*

You can't believe what you're hearing. Inside, that little voice is screaming, *"At last, I've found someone who is interested. They want to learn more about what I have to offer. Hurrah!"*

But you try to remain as calm, cool and collected as you can. Slowly, nonchalantly you lean forward. Perhaps you pause momentarily to extract a brochure or sample from your briefcase. Then your forward momentum continues till you're leaning in toward your prospect at about a 45-degree angle.

You smile and begin your description. They ask you more in-depth questions. You respond. They want to know how you handle particular types of situations. You tell them.

They want to know how much it costs. You begin to fidget. You give a range. They want more specifics. You suggest additional meetings to explore their needs in more depth. They don't have the time. They ask for your collateral. You give it to them.

You're dead. It's all over. You're totally at their mercy now and there's nothing you can do.

So what's one single thing you could have done to prevent this whole scenario from happening? It's so simple, you won't believe it. It's so disgustingly easy to correct, you'll beg for something more complex.

All right. I'll tell you.

You LEANED FORWARD!

The moment you did that, you moved out of being a consultative person intent on helping your client improve their business.

At that moment, you became a huckster - someone more focused on giving the product/service spiel than anything else. You shared what they wanted to hear and you were now unnecessary. And no matter what your product or service cost, it was too much.

So how can you prevent this from happening? Don't lean forward. It's that easy.

But what if you suffer from that pernicious problem of premature explanation? Then what?

As soon as you realize it, stop talking and put any brochures back out of sight.

Look your prospect right in the eyes and with a smile on your voice say, "I'm sorry. Sometimes I get so darned excited about our new offering/technology/system. It's more important right now to focus on your business - and to find out if this even makes sense."

Then ask another question. Or two or three. You've self-corrected and you're back on track. That's all it takes!

Should you make more sales calls?

"More! That's the key," said my sales manager. "You absolutely need to make more cold calls, give more demonstrations and write more proposals if you're going to be successful in this business."

That's what we heard every single Monday morning, just before we were kicked out of the office to "go get 'em." Like all reps, we constantly needed more prospects to replace those that closed, purchased competitive equipment or chose to remain with the status quo.

But is "more" really the answer?

Several weeks ago, I spoke with a woman who'd been selling printing successfully for over 15 years. Most recently, she was really struggling to set up meetings with companies that had the potential for decent size contracts. Buyers didn't want to waste their time meeting with another "print" salesperson.

As we talked, it became apparent that the printing firm she worked for was pretty much the same as every other one. Her boss told her to stress their company's great customer service. Of course, that's what everybody said so it didn't have any impact.

Should she be making more calls?

She could, but the results would still be the same. What she needs to do is figure out a different approach since the one she's currently using is worthless.

Because she's been in the printing business for years, she has a considerable base of knowledge that's highly valuable to her clients. She needs to be able to articulate it in a manner that's so enticing to prospective clients that they have to meet with her.

My suggestion: Go interview your current clients. Ask them how your expertise has made a difference.

- Find out what happened when they used other printers.
- Learn about the higher costs of doing business with lower-priced firms.
- Discover the "ripple effect" of the missed deadlines or poor quality work.

The biggest reason she's having trouble getting her foot in the door is because she lacks a strong value proposition. And, interestingly enough, her value

proposition is personal. It's not about her company. It's about her own unique talents.

Whenever your account entry approach isn't working effectively, it's time to go back to the drawing board. The stupidest thing in the world that you could do is to make more calls saying exactly the same thing.

Neil Rackham, author of "Spin Selling" researched what happened when sales management stressed the importance of "more" activities. If the sales reps were pursuing business with decent sized companies, "more" activities actually had a negative correlation with sales success.

Activity-driven salespeople are less likely to research and prepare for sales calls, which makes them less effective. They're more likely to look for the "quick hit" sale which is often of much lower dollar value. Consequently, they don't invest enough time pursuing accounts with significant long-term potential.

So what can you do if you're not getting into enough companies?

Focus on effectiveness first. Here are several suggestions you can use to increase your call effectiveness.

1. Brainstorm with colleagues.

Find out what's working or not working for them. Explore different options and test them out on each other.

2. Interview top performers in your organization.

Get their input into how your account entry strategy sounds. What recommendations for change would they suggest?

3. Listen to yourself.

Buy a recording device and tape your conversations. When you're done, play it back. As you're listening think - if you were a buyer, would you set up a meeting with yourself?

4. Interview your customers.

Find out what's really important to them and what they value about your offering. Ask them how your approach to prospective clients sounds. Get input into what makes them want to meet with salespeople.

5. Invest in your own professional development.

Attend sales seminars. Buy sales books - and read them! Buy audio programs and listen to them. Get lots of ideas. You need to break out of your non-productive paradigm.

Think about how you might experiment with different approaches to get your foot in the door. Give yourself some time to get used to new ways of doing things before you decide if they're effective or not.

While it might be nice to dream of only making one phone call to land a new prospect, that's unrealistic too. You need to find your own "enough" factor.

If you're new to sales, you'll need to make more calls than an experienced professional. If you're an old pro in a changing market, your biggest challenge will be letting go of your tried-and-true, but no longer effective approach.

Most importantly, if you're selling to medium-sized to large organizations, remember to focus on BETTER calls - not MORE calls.

The power of strategic alliances

Several years ago while reading the Business Journal, I came across an article that stopped me cold. It featured IntroWorks, a company that focused specifically on marketing and branding new products.

Most people would have skimmed right over the article. Not me. Suddenly I was struck with a big, audacious idea. I needed to meet the owners of this firm - and soon.

You see, my expertise is in creating demand and shrinking time- to-revenue on new product introductions. My goal is to help the sales organization sell more, faster.

As luck would have it, shortly after that I was speaking at a large conference. And guess who happened to have a booth at that very same event. I went up, introduced myself to the guys and invited them to lunch.

By the time we got together, I'd immersed myself in their website. I liked what they said; it was very aligned with my own beliefs. But I still needed to learn more about the quality of their work, their clients, their thinking processes and what they were like as human beings.

I came away from our meeting very impressed. I could work with these people and they could provide high value to my clients. They felt the same. The big question was HOW to make it happen.

A few months later, at a board meeting for the James J. Hill Business Library, I met the president of inTouch, a firm that specializes in lead generation for the complex sale.

"Very interesting," I thought. "We both work with clients that sell into the business-to-business marketplace. We probably deal with some of the very same decision makers."

As we were leaving, I suggested we get together for lunch. We got a date on the calendar and then I went to the office to check this company out. Again, I was impressed; there was a clear alignment in our business approach and strategy.

Our meeting went well. I also discovered that inTouch shared several clients with IntroWorks - and they'd never met before. It was time for us all to get together.

Let me fast forward a few meetings and a few months. As we got to know each other better, the synergy between our businesses was obvious. One more company, Aware Web Solutions, joined us in these discussions. They did the internet work for many of IntroWorks' clients.

We explored a variety of ways to work together. After much discussion, we decided to do an all-day Product Launch Seminar together. That was 18 months ago. Since that time, we've done a second seminar and we have more & different ideas in the works.

We've all realized major benefits from our strategic alliance:

- Our shared clients get better service. Because we know how to work together and how each other think, we can contribute at a higher level. Plus, everything we do meshes with and builds on each other's work.
- We've all added new clients. Each of us has added several new customers that we wouldn't have had without this relationship.
- We've increased our revenue. In fact, each of us can attribute between \$60,000 - \$120,000 in sales over the past 18 months to our joint relationship.

Developing Strategic Alliances

Over the years, I've tried out numerous networking strategies. Most have yielded minimal results. Strategic alliances are a whole different matter - they work well!

Here are some tips to help you form and leverage strategic alliances:

1. Identify potential strategic alliance partners.

The best partners for a successful strategic alliance are businesses with related specialties to yours and/or firms that sell to the same decision makers.

Any size business can form a strategic alliance. One of my corporate clients sells abrasive systems (i.e., sandpaper) and tape to the automotive industry. A top selling rep at this firm has established strategic alliances with other companies selling into the painting/priming area.

By keeping on top of new paint formulations and other developments, he's able to ensure that his customers don't experience any line-stopping problems. He's so valuable to the client, that low-cost competitors can't displace him. And, his business keeps increasing.

How do you find these partners? First of all, ask yourself, *"Who do I know today that's in a contingent business to mine"* and *"Who else has the same target market as I do and sells to my primary decision maker?"*

If no names come to mind right now, then consider these options for finding alliance partners:

- Attend networking meetings to find related businesses.
- Read the local business press to identify people in adjoining businesses.
- Ask your customers about other suppliers he/she works with and respects.

Remember, all you need to get started is just one other person. You can add more people over time.

2. Get to know each other.

You need to invest time upfront to really understand each other's product/service offering. Also, since your reputation is at stake. When you bring in someone else, you need to be confident in this person's ability to do the work, take care of the account, act ethically and more.

Don't rush this process or you may be sorry. I've seen people blindly trust their 'partners' only to find out that they've gone behind their backs and stolen the work or done something so stupid that no one would want to be aligned with them.

3. Pick an initial project to work on together.

Our first venture was a joint seminar. There wasn't a lot of risk since we weren't bringing each other into our best clients. It was also a good chance for us to see each other in action.

In doing this product launch seminar, we divvied up the work according to our expertise. I wrote copy, developed emarketing material and handled the business details. IntroWorks did the marketing collateral and branding.

Aware Web Solutions developed the web site. We all sent emails about the event to our own private email lists. InTouch followed up with a lead generation campaign. And our 5th partner, the James J. Hill Business Library handled logistics.

The event went smoothly. We all heard each other speak and present. While we didn't make money on the seminar, we broke even with costs. But most of us got new customers - from people who were in our partner's database.

4. Expand the relationship.

Since then, we've had our second product launch workshop. We've also done more together. Here are a few examples:

- We confidently bringing each other into meet our clients. We know that our work only covers certain aspects of our customer's needs and that we now have trusted resources to help out with other areas.
- We co-market in other ways. I did a teleseminar that InTouch marketed to their client base. It's posted on their website. A very sizable new customer came to me after listening to it.
- We sometimes feature each other in our e-newsletters, websites and blogs. In fact, one of my partners helped me get started blogging. And now, I'm telling you all about them in my ezine.
- We've hired each other for projects. That's right. We need each other's services too!

Strategic alliances are the most powerful networking strategy I've ever used.

Big companies often arrange them at the corporate level, but anyone can create his or her own network of strategic partners. A single salesperson can easily form an alliance that catapults his/her business to the next level.

Small businesses, professional services firms and independent consultants can leverage their partners to expand opportunities far beyond where they could go themselves.

As far as I'm concerned, I've only just tapped the surface of what can be done. I'm looking forward to developing my existing alliances to an even deeper level. Plus, I'm talking with several other firms right now with product/service offerings we don't have in our mix yet. Those relationships are in their early stages, but hold a lot of promise.

If you're still trying to go it alone out there, consider forming a strategic alliance with other firms. If you choose the right partners, it will make a huge difference in your business.

One last caveat: A strategic alliance is NOT a merger of your businesses. It's simply a go-to-market method that expands your reach far beyond what you're capable of reaching on your own.

Customer Satisfaction is not enough

Your customers may think you're fast enough and friendly enough, and that your quality is acceptable. They are satisfied. However, when a competitor offers a better price, the customer is gone.

Many companies focus on customer service, but the focal point is in the wrong place. We need to turn that point from customer satisfaction to customer success. Our job is to help our customers and clients be successful. That's what they really want. Then, when a competitor offers a better price, our customers will say *"Sorry. I wouldn't think of leaving the company I'm doing business with now."*

Satisfaction is certainly a part of success. To be satisfied, customers want us to provide our product or service in a timely manner. They expect us to be empathetic and friendly. They want our product to be high in quality. However, we need to go to the next step.

How can you help your customers and clients be successful? There is no easy answer. The only way to know is to look at your customers individually and ask them how they define success and how you can help them achieve it. It isn't enough to have the right phone skills, correct correspondence, and fast turnaround. How do you begin to define what your customers need to succeed? It's simple. Ask them. They will give you ideas that you will find carry over to other accounts as well. Then, take it one step further. Think outside the box and ask yourself what you would need to be successful if you were the customer.

For a window manufacturer whose customers are the lumber yards, it may be training their customer on how to sell the manufacturer's product thereby increasing the lumber yards' revenues. For a bank, it may be a one-stop person whose position doesn't turn over yearly (imagine that), and who completely understands a customer's financial savings and borrowing needs and makes transactions easy. For a health care organization, it may be educating family members on how to nurture their ailing loved ones back to health.

When I looked at my customers on the speaking side of my business, I realized my role as a speaker was more than just giving a great presentation. The meeting planners wanted me to do a good job so they looked good. The evaluations would come in supporting the meeting planner, saying that he or she did a great job in finding the presenter for the meeting or conference.

I was frustrated because I didn't think that was enough. To make a meeting planner successful, I needed to set my goals higher, well beyond the immediate

evaluation. I wanted people still talking about the program a year later, and better yet, still applying the lessons. I felt that most of my competitors let the ball drop by focusing on the immediate evaluation. I went the extra step. I began to explore things to make the session a part of a process as opposed to an event. I began using accelerated learning principles, follow-up systems, and more. Now, the comment we hear most in our office from past clients is, *"Gee, they're still talking about you. As they hit challenges, they refer to what they learned."* Bingo! That's what I wanted: customer success.

When you focus on customer success, it is hard to shop based on price only. You begin to see the money spent as an investment with substantial returns. The customer doesn't want to risk spending less (or more) someplace else and potentially getting less.

It is not the role of the CEO to develop the strategy for customer success. It is the role of everyone within the company. Not only do people need to look at how to help the outside customers succeed, but they also need to look at how they can help their internal customers do their jobs better.

To help our customers succeed, we need to love them. We need to care about them and protect them and nurture them as we would a family member. Love does not mean giving your teenager all the money he asks for and letting him set his own curfew. Nor does love for your customers mean you give away the store. It simply means that you are so wrapped up in helping them succeed that you then receive even more of what you need.

Filling up the Sales Funnel

Many sales reps and managers complain that they can't create a consistent flow of revenues or commissions month after month. Instead of a nice, straight line increasing consistently over time like an upwards pointing arrow, they find themselves staring repeatedly at sales results that look more like a hockey stick: nothing for two months, a sharp increase for a month or two, then back down again to nothing a month later.

So what can you do to keep your sales funnel full of leads, to ensure a consistent, reliable flow of revenues all year round?

Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, a lack of consistent revenues - the "hockey stick syndrome" - is caused by a lack of consistent prospecting. A failure to prospect on a regular basis will inevitably result in irregular revenues, and inconsistent commissions. It's that simple.

This is especially true when we're doing well. It can be so easy to forget about prospecting when we're wrapped up with following a dozen or so hot leads, who are demanding lengthy proposals and multiple meetings, conference calls, demonstrations and references. But this is precisely the time when we need to be prospecting, to ensure that steady sales flow doesn't suddenly dry up.

Yes, prospecting can be a difficult and, for many people, daunting task. The simple fact is, not all sales reps like doing it. But I've yet to meet a top sales professional for whom prospecting hasn't played a pivotal role in their success.

And let's face it, prospects don't fall from the sky. We have to work at getting them consistently, so we can close sales consistently. After all, even if you've mastered all the questioning, closing and objection handling techniques in the world, you'll still almost certainly fail if you don't have any prospects to use them with!

So if you find prospecting always somehow slips to the bottom of your "To Do" list, here are 12 Tips to help you ensure your sales funnel is consistently full of leads:

1. Sell more products to existing customers. This can include selling additional quantities of the same product, selling add-on services or products from your existing portfolio, or introducing your existing customers to a new product they might be interested in. To get started, plan to stay in touch with your current customers through a combination of direct (phone calls) and indirect (email,

direct mail) methods about once every six weeks, with the goal of selling them additional products or repeat orders. Just don't go overboard, or you may cross that magical line between persistence, and stalking.

2. Set a goal for the number of networking events you will attend each month, and the number of new people you'd like to meet at each event. Then don't leave until you've collected that many business cards.

3. Reward yourself for closing new business. Treat yourself to a trip to the spa, your favorite Bordeaux or dinner out at that great little Italian restaurant. Remember: what gets rewarded, gets repeated.

4. Take a look at opt-in email lists. Set up a targeted email marketing campaign to acquaint potential new customers with your company or products, then follow up by phone.

5. Ask your current customers for referrals. The key is to be as specific as possible. For example, don't just adopt a generic, "do you know anyone who" approach. Instead, make a list of all the companies or people you'd like to meet, approach any existing customers who might have a contact at those new prospects, and then simply ask: *"Mr. Customer, I've been trying to get hold of the VP of Marketing at ABC Corporation - you don't happen to know them, do you?"* If it's one of their business partners or associates, or even just a firm that's in the same industry or building, chances are your customer will know the person you want to meet, and will probably be only too happy to make the introduction.

6. Go for a walk or drive around your territory, and take a look at who is in the neighborhood. Then, try making some face-to-face cold calls. The change of perspective can be refreshing, and you never know when you will find business in the least likely of places.

7. Make a habit of having lunch, coffee or breakfast with at least one new person each week. Share ideas, and give them any leads that might help them first.

8. Write articles for relevant on-line or print publications your prospects might read. It's not as hard to get published as you might think, and once you've been published once, it only gets easier. Just make sure to retain full rights to your articles by not being paid to write them. Then, once they've been published, send an email or mailing to your prospects and clients inviting them to read them. Plus, try sending your articles to larger publications, too - trust me, they don't bite, and if your article is accepted, you can't beat the added credibility and visibility.

9. Volunteer to speak at trade shows and conferences. As a rule of thumb, you

should speak at every trade show where you exhibit. This will increase your credibility, and drive traffic to your booth. Even if you aren't exhibiting, you should still submit a proposal for a workshop or showcase. If you secure a speaking spot, let your customers know that you'll be there, and when they can see you. Then invite prospects to visit you at the show, and set specified times for meeting people at your booth. That way, you will get a steady flow of traffic, and others will be attracted to your booth to see why so many people are gathered there.

10. Be excellent at what you do. Word travels fast, so do everything you can to make sure that all the talk about you is positive!

11. If possible, join the trade associations or organizations your clients and prospects belong to. Not only will these associations keep you up to date on what's happening in the industries you sell to, they'll also provide you with a great opportunity to meet key people on a regular basis. To build a successful network, be sure to attend the meetings as often as possible - not just once or twice a year.

12. Lastly, for a cost-effective way to keep your name in front of potential clients, try sending mailings to prospects, complete with relevant items of interest. Send these mailings about once every 6 weeks, and you'll also benefit by learning when key people in the organization leave their positions due to a promotion, reassignment or departure for a new company.

Of course, this isn't a complete list of all the possible ways to build your network and find new prospects. But they are some time-honored ideas that I've found work for almost every business or situation I've encountered.

And remember, you don't need to pursue all of these ideas at once to become a successful prospector. In fact, it might be unproductive to do so! But at any one time, you should be involved in at least four of these twelve techniques, and make sure that the four you choose change as your company - and your clients - evolve.

The key is to make prospecting a regular habit. By committing a set amount of time each day, every week towards meeting new people, in the long run, your sales funnel will be more full than you can handle, and your "hockey stick" revenues will be a thing of the past.

Selling Value when the customer is buying price

It's Not All About Price

"If only our price of my product was lower..I could sell more!"

This is a common sentiment among salespeople. The truth, however, price is only one factor in a buying decision. Customers are willing to spend more if they feel they are getting more for their money. As a true sales professional, it is your job to determine what the prospect defines as "more". Sometimes, higher prices can actually be considered a selling advantage. A higher cost creates a perception of higher quality or a "cut above the average" image. Top sales pro's welcome a price difference, it gives them an opportunity to demonstrate how good their product and they really are! Besides, if price were the only buying consideration, you wouldn't be needed, business could be handled via the telephone!

Building Value Before The Sale

Company's spend thousands of marketing dollars trying to stimulate customer interest prompting calls from customers. Unfortunately, this is the point where we often drop the ball! How effective are you at exciting the prospect into a demonstration or meeting? What is your average response time to a prospect's initial inquiry? Strive to meet a customer's inquiry within 24 hours. A speedy response time not only builds value but customers see it as an indicator of your commitment to service. It also demonstrates how interested you are in earning their business.

Conducting an appointment within one week of a customer's call yields a higher sales average because it capitalizes on his enthusiasm and readiness to buy. Finally, stimulate interest and heighten product awareness by sending product materials or articles in advance. Consider sending the following items:

- Technical or clinical research on your product
- List of product applications
- List of customer testimony's
- List of product benefits

Building Value During The Sale

Resistance is natural.. prepare for it!

Address objections squarely with customers. If the prospect appears to be happy with the competition, they aren't! If customer's were totally satisfied with their current product or service, you wouldn't have the opportunity to meet them. As a sales professional, it is your job to uncover what the prospect feels is missing or could be improved on. Once you discover it--fill it with the unique benefits of your product or service. How can you build value in the face of resistance? Speak positively about the benefits and advantages you, your company and your product or service can deliver. Instead of debating price--factor in what value added services would cost if purchased separately.

Exude an image of quality. Does your image and communication style convey responsibility, concern, and confidence? Do your customers see, hear and feel you are a knowledgeable professional with integrity? Doubt image has anything to do with building value, earning customer confidence or success? Consider how you would feel meeting the cardiac surgeon, about to do open heart surgery on a family member, if he arrived wearing a tee shirt and cut offs? How about meeting your new financial investment manager wearing a Hawaiian shirt and sandals?

Do not over sell product capabilities. Superior quality products, service and representation costs money! Many salespeople exaggerate the capabilities of their product, service and company trying to make the sale. Unfortunately, this only leaves customers feeling let down and angry when these expectations are not met. Demonstrate confidence in yourself and your products true capabilities. They are enough...more than enough to justify the cost.

Listen for the real needs of your customer. Sell or recommend only products that are best for the customer's use and needs. Even if it means recommending a competitive product or walking away from the sale. Selling products that are not appropriate for the customer is wrong! By doing so, you are violating professional ethics and jeopardizing your relationship with your customer.

To test for the real needs of your customer, ask yourself the following questions:

- * *Have I really listened for the customer's true needs and expectations?*
- * *Can my product or service meet or exceed these needs?*
- * *Is there an alternative method or product that would be better suited?*
- * *Have I determined my customers average or expected product use?*
- * *Have I made purchase recommendations based these estimates?*

By filling the real needs of your customers, you will make significant investments in trust, integrity and professionalism.

Create only Win/Win/Win Relationships. If your career intentions are truly long term, build only business agreements that are good for you, your customer and your company. This includes making appropriate product recommendations, adhering to customary pricing and discount policy and making only promises you intend to keep.

Use company services to increase value to customers. Many representatives are "flying solo" by failing to mention the company services, support or programs. Often these options give just what a prospect needs to become a customer and stay one! Examples of these services include, immediate customer service, 24hr technical support, on-line information and educational programs.

Review your company's product literature and sales sheets, again or for the first time. Highlight the customer services and product support features. Make a list of these value building advantages, carry them with you and incorporate them in your sales presentations.

Emphasize the unique features and benefits of your product/service. This information gives the prospect the information he needs to justify the additional cost of your product or the motivation to buy from you instead of the competition. Identify the unique features and benefits of your product/service. Write them down! Be sure to list what special advantages the customer will gain by doing business with your company and from you. How does this compare to the benefits customers perceive in buying from your competitor's?

Building Value After The Sale

The value is in you! After the sale, a customer's buying motivation shifts from a product emphasis to value the representative brings to the business relationship.

** What routine follow-up can customers count from you?*

** How often do you share technical, important industry updates to enhance your customers business or interests?*

** How quickly do you resolve problems?*

Resolve problems quickly and completely.

Problems are to be expected and can't be eliminated entirely. In fact, top sales professionals actually welcome them! Problems are "unsolved opportunities." Your ability to solve customer problems is the single best way you can build customer loyalty and demonstrate your professional integrity. Strive for immediate problem resolution. Maintain continuous contact with your customer during the repair time.

Maintain a routine follow up schedule customers can count on. One of the biggest fears people have in making major investments is that no one will be available to resolve problems. Customers value and are willing to pay more, substantially more, for service and after-the-sale support. Routine follow-up visits and service calls will dramatically cut down on major problems. During an office visit, check the overall operation and condition of your product. Look for potential problems or weak spots. Ask questions about the products actual performance versus the customer's expectations. Make necessary corrections or repairs.

Communicate your actions to your customer. Be sure to explain how your efforts prevented a problem or expense in the future. Follow up visits are a good opportunity to replenish supplies used with your product or explore upgrade possibilities.

Price is not the bottom line--people really want and will pay for top value. Building value is not a mystery. It takes good old fashioned hard work and commitment to the details and good communication. Your ability to build value will significantly differentiate you between the average and the top performers. The next time a prospect brings up price, smile, roll up your sleeves and look to the value.