

The Thinking Salesman Letter

May 15, 2011

Hello Everybody,

Al Brosseau, forty years identifying, setting up and administering distribution networks across the USA, Canada and Latin America as salesman, sales mgr., independent rep and now consultant.

Our Mission:

To openly discuss and challenge all aspects of sales and distribution and to promote the sales profession.

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Former CSI (Vermont chapter) & CDT
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On the Firing Line

In our April 15, 2011 editorial we wrote:

"The Rep who does not communicate, who does not involve his Principals is going the way he deserve to go, the way of the Dodo bird."

It prompted the following comment:

"For years I did an end of year newsletter report for all of my principals. I told them what was going on with us, and our customers; good news and bad. I discussed things that were working, and things that were failing. I offered constructive suggestions, and asked for feedback from the principals in the spirit of teamwork. Typically only a couple people would comment, most ignored my report with comments like "stop wasting your time Tom doing reports and go sell!" If communication isn't two way, and consistent, it's a waste of time for a rep to communicate (spitting in the wind is what I call it!)"

We also had similar experiences with our end of the year questionnaires which evaluated our Principals and asked them to evaluate us.

Sales calls 101 (3)

The joint calls (I)

Making multi line sales calls is the most difficult type of sales calls.

Sales Mgr, when making dual calls with your Reps note how adept your reps are at this art form.

Joint calls are where the Principal's sales mgr. accompanies the Rep on calls to customers.

Joint calls are essential. They should be made at least once maybe twice a year, planned with the Rep. 6-8 weeks ahead of time and be no more than 3 days in territory including arrival and departure. Your Rep. handles other business; respect that.

Joint calls tend to be more relaxed and more general than one-on-one calls. Satisfied customers want to know the Principal and the unhappy ones welcome a chance to vent their frustration and/or make suggestions. Encourage them to do so.

Sales mgrs. are like fish; after a couple of days they stink.

These "joint calls" have several purposes:

- Train the Rep. and his/her associates.
- Discuss budgets and how to attain them.
- Establish a closer "relationship" between the Principal and the Rep (Individuals & Company)
- Learn to know the Reps and observe how they work (remember no two Reps work alike)
- Learn about the territory.
- Explain -and get feedback- on the Principal's products, service, support programs.
- Talk over marketing opportunities (Exhibitions, competition etc.)

Organize the calls:

Sales managers should let the Rep organize the calls but one or two weeks before the meeting they should ask for a tentative schedule to make sure the customers they want to meet are on the list.

It will also give you a feel for the Rep's sense of organization.

First trip into the territory:

Meet at the hotel or airport but the sales mgr. should make sure he/she visits the Rep's office; it says a lot about the individual(s) and the Rep's company. If the Rep operates from a home office, it's more delicate but we had a home office and we always made sure we invited Principals to our place to dispel any misconceptions about home offices.

If it's a multi person agency, the first meeting is usually with the President of the agency and the

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sales mgr. should make sure there's a meeting scheduled with the whole staff for a complete sales presentation on the Company, Product line, communications and support programs. During these meetings there are always one or two individuals who will show more interest than the others. Note their names down, try to have them assigned to your line, make joint calls with them and spend time with them.

Mind set required to work with Reps

Working with Reps is messy. No two Reps work alike; Principals (Mfrs) can't order Reps around (*Remember "Fiercely independent" in anatomy of a Manufacturers' Agent?*) but if handled correctly this "chaos and unruliness" will bring in good will, customers and financial success to Principals, Reps and all.

The key is for Principals to know the difference between controlling individuals and controlling their organizations. Controlling Reps is like holding a baseball bat at the wrong end; what's required are Principals who know their fortes and weaknesses, understand synergy, have an open mind and **hire compatible Reps.**

If your Reps work for you, you'll fail.
If you work with your Reps, you'll all succeed.

Look at business success stories, the same words keep coming back, innovative thinking, unusual approaches, never tried etc.

We've met a few owners -who instead of focusing on immediate, quarterly results- developed a deep gut feeling for their market and industry, invite

challenges, have excellent organizational control and keep pushing the fly wheel every day*.

They're all managing successful businesses and so are their Reps. and most of their distributors.

* From Good To Great by Jim Collins.

Whisky Tango Foxtrot Moment

Keep in mind this newsletter is sent to four groups, University Profs, Associations, Principals and Reps. Occasionally, a Rep feels a Sales Mgr. could benefit from our newsletter and asks us -confidentially- to add his name to our mailing list.

And we do. However, in every initial email we send -especially to unsolicited recipients- we stress in the cover email "*if you don't want to receive this newsletter please email us back with the word REMOVE*".

Although the removal rate is under 3% it's interesting to note that these Sales Mgrs. Who could profit of our newsletter represent the largest single group of people who asked to be removed from our mailing list.

Some people just can't be helped.

Thought:

Motivation is simple. Eliminate those who are not motivated.

Lou Holtz (American Football coach, 1937-1980)

Next issue, June 1, 2011,
Sales calls 101, The Joint Call (II)
Synergy: What it is, what it can do

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