CustomerCentricSelling®
Your road map to revenue growth

# Proactive or Forensic Sales Management

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In your sales career, have you reported to sales managers or sales administrators? Of the managers you've reported to, is there one you wish you son or daughter could work for in their first sales job? My first manager assigned quota, signed my expense reports, told me what to do and frightened me into doing it. Subsequent managers left me alone. All were sales administrators just trying to deliver the revenue assigned to them. Titles containing the word manager imply assessment and development of staff. Most salespeople are motivated to succeed. Sub par performance is due to a shortage of activity or skill deficiencies. Sales administrators tell salespeople the **quantity** of activity (what and how much to do), but are unable to influence the **quality** of their efforts. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing repeatedly and expecting a different result. I'd like to suggest a few ways to address both the quantity and quality of a salesperson's activity.

### Avoiding Train Wrecks

Bad years occur a month at a time. By the time a manager or salesperson realizes things are bad (18% YTD in May?), it may be too late to salvage the year. Consider taking a salesperson's monthly quota and multiplying it by the length of an average sales cycle. Each month the manager can evaluate where the seller is YTD and apply an estimated historical close rate to his or her pipeline to get a sense of where they will be one sales cycle out. If they are behind, prospecting activity must be increased.

### Removing the Rose-colored Glasses

Another reason sellers fall behind is by having pipelines full of stale opportunities. Totaling the line items yields a result larger than the GDP of many small countries. Sellers lack a sense of urgency to prospect when they apply unrealistically high probabilities to their pipeline and convince themselves things will be fine. A closer look may reveal many are low probability opportunities. One easy suggestion is to remove all proposals more than 45 days old unless there are specific circumstances indicating the opportunity is still viable. Getting the pipeline to more closely resemble reality is a critical step in determining how much effort must be place on prospecting.

### Spring Cleaning

For stale proposals, consider having the salesperson inform prospects either in writing or verbally that the proposal or quote is being withdrawn because no action has been taken. I suggest sending a registered letter. One of two things will happen:

1. You don't hear back from the prospect, an indication you should delete it from the pipeline.
2. The prospect calls back in which case you can attempt to resell the opportunity.

If the prospect wants to talk about reviving the proposal, the manager can make a joint call or conference call to determine if the opportunity is salvageable and show how to get things back on track.

### Quality of Activity

Once sellers understand they must find new opportunities, they stare at the phone and realize they not only despise cold telephone prospecting, they aren't good at it. Studies show the telephone is not the most effective way to contact business people. The odds of reaching them improve with an initial letter or fax. Why not work with the seller to identify a vertical industry and likely title of a decision maker and help draft a one-page fax with a menu of likely business issues that title may be facing? The biggest challenge in making initial contacts is having executives understand the potential value of talking with a salesperson. A one-page fax provides a basis to start a conversation with an executive or their assistant in order to schedule a call.

### Avoid the RFP Trap

Salespeople like to put off prospecting and those below quota want to add new opportunities to their pipelines. Unsolicited RFP's address both desires. Consider for a moment your win rate on RFP's that you didn't influence. Many of our clients discover their success rate is below 5% in such cases because a vendor has already "wired" the requirements. One technique to avoid the RFP trap is to contact the person issuing the RFP (seldom a decision maker), and request interviews with two or three titles that would be involved in the decision. Most likely, the salesperson will get pushback because the requirements are all listed within the document. At this point, the seller can explain that to do a professional job and justify the hours it will take to respond, the perspective of the other people is necessary. These interviews may also uncover some unique features or capabilities that could further improve the cost versus benefit. When you consider RFP's can take twenty or more hours to respond to, this is a perfectly reasonable request. If granted the interviews, attempt to bring out differentiators that will change the requirements. If denied access to the people you ask to talk to, consider sending a letter indicating you cannot respond. If the issuer of the RFP wants you to bid, you will do so provided you are granted access to the people requested. This approach is counter-intuitive, but consider **your** competitors' win rate on RFP's that **you** wire. The majority of RFP's have been wired and other vendors are invited to bid only to provide leverage in negotiating the best possible terms and price with the preferred vendor.

### Proactive Sales Management

These approaches can be implemented even if you have not attended a CustomerCentric Selling® Workshop. While sellers want to qualify opportunities, part of a manager's role is to disqualify those with a low probability. Your salespersons' chance of success will be enhanced if you look one sales cycle ahead, and try to focus on not only how much to do, but how to do it.