



THE BENCHMARK

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How to manage a salesperson

PART 2

What keeps salespeople from achieving greater success? My observations suggest there are several areas where salespeople can improve with the help of a sales manager. If you are willing to take the time and work with your sales team to address the issues most relevant to them, they will get better. The areas where they can benefit most include the following:

▶ **Time:** Salespeople waste time working on “low-return” opportunities. You can help them by insisting they produce a two-week plan every week that identifies their lead, call, appointment, bid and presentation activities. The key is to ask, “Will that activity get you closer to your goal, and have you allocated too little or too much time to it?” Then be willing to help them rearrange the calendar.

▶ **Process:** Salespeople should spend time on high-value activities. These include networking, cold calling, appointment setting, phone call and email follow-up, face-to-face meetings, presentations and closing. You don’t hire them for their measuring, estimating and proposal-producing skills. You can help them by delegating these important tasks to others.

▶ **Product:** In recent months, it has become painfully apparent to me that many salespeople do not truly understand the product they sell — in a way that matters to the customer. While they do not need to be horticultural experts, they must

understand how your service benefits the customer in terms of your service features. For example, a basic knowledge of irrigation technology and its application to proper lawn care can demonstrate a practical problem-solving expertise that can close a sale. You can help them by identifying their gaps in product knowledge and training them.

▶ **Story:** Many salespeople talk too much — often without saying a lot. This is especially true when responding to the most important customer question they face: “Why should we hire you?” You can almost hear the rambling begin and the wincing that follows. A simple, value-based story communicated in three to four sentences is sufficient to answer this question. You can help them by having them commit your story to memory.

▶ **Personality:** Account managers are gatherers, and are good at it because they have a need to be liked. Great salespeople are hunters, not gatherers, and are not as concerned with being liked. They are more concerned with winning. As a result, they will generally be better at qualifying and not waste theirs or the customer’s time. You can’t really train this demeanor; you have to hire it. That’s why I tend to shy away from great talkers and hire hunters to sell.

▶ **Poise:** Many sales are lost in negotiation. A negotiation starts after the first customer objection — “you are too high-priced,” “we like our current contractor,” “we are in year two of a three-year contract,” etc. Lots of salespeople freeze up at this critical stage, including myself. You can help your sales team keep their poise by role-playing a simple formulaic method: Validate the objection, ask a question to clarify it, restate the objective, provide a possible solution, then trial close on the solution.

Salespeople respond to coaching if they believe it is honest, direct and practical, and will help them win more often. Don’t wait for them to learn on their own time. Observe their performance and address the right issues.

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