



THE BENCHMARK

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Build a sales machine, Part II

I spend a great deal of time these days working with salespeople. This is as it should be, since the great challenge we face is increasing revenues in a declining market. This is no easy task.

In my last column, I talked about five elements of a sales machine: plan, price, person, methods and message. I focused on message. This month, I want to briefly focus on person.

It seems obvious, but do you have the right person in that position? Of course, producing sales can confirm this. But in the absence of results, are there characteristics you can look for? Based on my observations and research, successful salespeople possess the following characteristics:

1. They are persistent. They face obstacles that get in their way. They look for new solutions. They are tenacious. If your salespeople are rationalizing or providing excuses regularly, you may have the wrong people.

2. They are goal setters. They visualize their target, determine how they will achieve their goal, and take action on a *daily* basis. If your salespeople cannot communicate to you a weekly plan outlining number of leads, proposals, meetings and closes they plan to make, you may have the wrong people.

3. They ask quality questions. The best salesperson asks questions to determine the prospect's buying needs. They know that the most effective way to present their product is to uncover their customer's goals and concerns. If you are going on sales calls and not observing this behavior, you may have the wrong people.

4. They listen. Average salespeople will ask a question, then give the customer the answer, instead of waiting for their response. Great salespeople know that customers will tell them everything they need to know, if given the right opportunity. They ask questions, taking notes and summarizing the customers' comments. Again, if you are going on sales calls and not observing this behavior, you may have the wrong people.

5. They are passionate. They love the company and the product. You are not doing yourself or your customers any favors by representing something you can't get excited about. If your salespeople aren't excited about selling your product, you may have the wrong people.

6. They are enthusiastic. They are always in a positive mood and their enthusiasm is contagious. If your salespeople are consistently negative, don't mistake this for "realism." You may have the wrong people.

7. They take responsibility for their results. They know that their actions alone will determine their results, and they do what is necessary. If they consistently blame external barriers, you may have the wrong people.

8. They work hard. Most people want to be successful, but they aren't prepared to work hard to achieve it. Sales superstars don't wait for business to come to them; they go after it. They usually start earlier and stay later than everyone else. If your salespeople aren't putting in the hours (60-plus weekly) in this economy, you may have the wrong people.

9. They keep in touch with their clients. They send thank-you cards, make phone calls and schedule regular "keep in touch" meetings. They send articles of value to their customers and send an email newsletter. They look for new and creative ways to keep their name in their customers' minds. If your salespeople don't follow-up well, you may have the wrong people.

10. They show value. Successful salespeople recognize that price is a factor in every sale, but it is seldom the reason someone chooses a supplier. They know that a well-informed buyer will usually base decisions on the value presented by the salesperson. They know how to create this value with each customer they encounter.

Think about the people you have selling for you. Do they pass this test?