

The sales standards manifesto



Introduction

“Sales People...how would I describe ‘em? That’s easy...Scum of the earth! They’re crooks, all of them!”

78 year old male consumer – Journal of Education for Business 2006

This brutally honest view was highlighted as part of a research study to discover how people really viewed the sales profession. You don’t have to look very far to find less than savoury stereotypes of sleazy sales people: In the 1987 film, Wall Street, Gordon Gecko typified the “Greed is good” image. Think of Arthur Daley’s dodgy car lot and “Del Boy” in the BBC’s Only Fool’s Horses, described as a “loveable cockney rogue and wheeler dealer”. These characters say it all about the images some people have of sales people. Mis-selling scandals throughout the last two decades have done little to dilute these negative images. And yet, for every one rogue, there are probably ten honest sales people doing excellent work in their sometimes very challenging role.

Our philosophy

We believe it’s time for the sales profession to fully embrace, well, being professional. What does this mean in practice? It is sometimes said that an “amateur hopes for a good result, while a professional makes sure of one”. We believe excellence comes from consistently working to a high standard every day: Setting our own standards higher than those of our customers, so we should always delight rather than disappoint.

That’s why we created the Sales Standards Manifesto: To start a debate about exactly what professional sales behaviour means. It’s based on over 15 years’ experience working with thousands of sales people, and our own research into sales excellence and the psychology of influence.

We have created it in “open source format:” You are free to copy it, develop it, improve it and generally use it to help all of us in sales raise our game so we can leave the fast talking, dishonest fly-by-night, and sloppy in-it-for-themselves species in the past.

How to use the standards?



Positive influence

You take being on time for client appointments very seriously, always in the reception area at least 5 minutes before the set time.

You pay close attention to your personal image; clothes, case, PC, documents, business cards. Perfection is your goal.

You take great care in managing first impressions, eye contact, handshake, and personal introductions. You have researched their role & interests before your meeting. You commence all your meetings with a clear agreement upfront concerning objectives and timeframes.

Your written communication is prompt, accurate, and clear and answers what your customer expects. It uses direct, active language and is reviewed and spell checked so they don't pick up errors.

Preparation & research

You have researched your customer's organisation & objectives well.

You write down the questions you need to ask to understand customer needs.

You plan in advance what the next steps could be that you would like your customer to agree to.

You do personalised document / presentation preparation to ensure you can clearly communicate your message to customers.

You plan the structure of the meeting so you can effectively lead it.

Listening & questioning

You master fully the use of open and closed questions.

You are adept at finding exactly the right question to understand your customer's issues.

You listen actively, focusing 100% on what is important to your customer, allowing them to finish their point without interruption.

Adaptive selling / customer orientation

You are highly sensitive to your customer's changing emotions and needs.

You tune in to the way they prefer to give and receive information, and adjust your approach to fit, for example modifying the amount of detail and mode of presentation. You adapt your selling approach according to the expressed needs & ambitions of your customer.

Managing objections

You anticipate the likely concerns your customer could have before meeting them.

When customers raise objections, you acknowledge them without being defensive, and ask further questions to make sure you truly understand the objections, BEFORE responding.

You regularly research what your competitors offer, so that you can easily help a client see why your offer is to their advantage.

Committing, closing and creating actions

During customer meetings, you make sure you clearly summarise and write down any actions that emerge, so that it is clear to your counterpart that the action will be followed up.

You make sure all your customer meetings have concrete next steps, which are written down, and either dealt with in a short time frame, or sent to them by email within 24 hours.

You take care to follow up on all actions, and where delays occur, you update the customer, living by the principle, "Do as you say you will."

When you have made proposals to customers, you follow up quickly to confirm / close the sale.

Opportunity management

You track all your sales opportunities and update them at least weekly, using the list to prioritise what actions need to be carried out.

You are active in managing your sales pipeline, by finding new leads, following up on proposals, replacing "drop outs" and ensuring there is sufficient overall opportunities to meet targets.

You manage your pipeline actively without intervention from above; you see it as a core part of your role.

Time management, planning, personal organisation

You have regular "time management meetings with yourself", defining important goals for the week, month, year.

You are disciplined and work diligently on the important tasks in your sales role, without getting distracted.

You prioritise and drive the important activities that will contribute to meeting targets.

You respond to all customer communications in less than 24 hours, so they have the feeling you are delivering excellent service.

You optimise your travel arrangements with a high level of discipline to avoid wasted hours.

Presentation skills

If asked to present to a group of customers, the presentation you give will be very well received by them, because it is tailored to their needs, easy to follow and lively.

Drive and persistence

You do what sales work needs to be done, even when it is hard going, or means eating into social time.

You are tenacious with opportunities, calling back several times when customers do not reply, finding new ways to approach customers, rather than giving up and moving on.

You are never satisfied with the status quo, always looking to find new leads, new opportunities, networking events, or simply increasing the chances of success on projects in progress.

Political sensitivity

You make enquiries early on in sales encounters to understand who might influence the decision to adopt your products / services.

You carefully influence your prime contact to help you meet other influencers, adapting your approach according to the differing roles. You take care to understand and work with organisational politics as you navigate around organisations.

You use your allies to help you convince sceptics.

Product knowledge

You make sure that you know your products / services / solutions inside out, so that you can offer true value to customer in discussions. There is definitely value in meeting you above what customers can find out from the web site.

You do your homework to ensure you fully understand what value your products / services offer to your customers.

Internal influence

When you have to drive internal changes to serve customers better, you have the ear of senior people.

You often find yourself lobbying for changes internally to help the organisation be more customer focused and win more business.

You respect reporting needs of internal staff, giving them the information when they need it, without having to be chased

Social media competence

You regularly manage your own on-line profiles / visibility so that any customers & prospects searching for you would see a competent industry specialist who is motivating to meet.

You contribute regularly to on-line forums where your customers are active to raise your / your organisation's profile.

You are vigilant in monitoring on-line communities where your customers are active to spot and follow up on.

Negotiation and ability to defend offer

You prepare well when you expect to negotiate aspects of the sale. You negotiate confidently with customers and work hard to preserve the relationship while defending your organisation's margins.

The sales standards



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