

ON YOUR MARK, GET SET, SELL!

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My wife and I recently went to a fast-casual restaurant that we had never visited before. We looked at their online menu beforehand to see if they had anything special that we might like to try. So, we stopped in around dinnertime to give it a try. The first thing that got our attention was that there was no one at the hostess stand to greet us, we waited a few minutes and then ventured back to another area thinking that maybe we should place an order there, and seat ourselves. At this point, we were met by an employee who said, “if you want to eat at the restaurant today you can’t eat anything that needs to be cooked, because the chef did not show up to work, we don’t know where he is.” I can’t make this stuff up. So, we left. Our ensuing conversation confirmed that we would not be returning – ever.

Yes, one of the most important

things in business but especially in sales is readiness. Readiness is defined as the state of being fully prepared for something. I am surprised that this is not a frequent topic of discussion, considering the financial ramifications of a lack thereof, but it rarely is. Readiness should be a priority because many times individuals and organizations are not prepared to sell their products or services and are losing out on valuable sales opportunities - just as my incident at the restaurant proves. I am sure if you think about your personal experiences you can call to mind similar occurrences.

When I speak about sales readiness what do I mean in a practical sense? Understanding that most businesses are somewhat unique, a couple of generic examples of the physical aspects of sales readiness would include making sure that all sales

presentation materials are in order – brochures, demonstration items, paperwork such as receipts or agreements. Is the actual product available and ready to be shown to a prospective customer? Is there a supply of promotional items or gifts available and prepared to give a potential customer? When we ready ourselves in the physical sense, something remarkable happens - it also prepares us mentally, and mental preparedness is even more essential in the overall picture.

Yes, one of the most crucial steps for sales readiness is your mental preparation. This preparation starts with a documented sales process that you review frequently. If you don’t have a written outline of your process, you may forget steps and omit them from your presentation. Why do pilots review a checklist before every flight? Don’t they memorize everything? No

way! Imagine forgetting one little thing that happens to be critical. Do you want to be on that flight? Their lives and the lives of their passengers depend on them staying on task. A written sales process, although not a matter of life or death, is the same. If you review it daily, you will most likely remember to include all the steps in the process, and it will increase your sales readiness.

The review is something I have practiced for many years. Every day, before any interactions with a prospect, I review my sales process and think about the steps and whether I've been skipping any critical portions of my presentation. Remember, knowing and doing are two different things. I may know how to do something, but I may not be executing correctly. In sales, everything is about execution, so I need to keep myself sharp—and reviewing my process is one of the most reliable techniques to remain mentally ready.

Unfortunately, there are many reasons for the lack of sales readiness. At times various situations are happening simultaneously. Perhaps the salesperson has a steady flow of prospects all the time, so they take for granted the pipeline of potential customers and don't feel that it is necessary to maintain organization or preparation to sell each one. Another reason is the "bought and sold" principle where some are buying the product or service, and others need to be sold which causes salespeople to minimize the need to be prepared for each sales interaction when the

scale leans in favor of the buying end. Unavoidable distractions can be another reason for lack of sales readiness. Perhaps something is going on in their personal life. Maybe the salesperson is required to wear more than one hat in their sales position. They might be responsible for marketing their product as well as selling it, or they become heavily involved in the delivery process. All these factors can sidetrack the salesperson from their primary job which is to obtain new sales orders.

What about the situation when prospects are scarce? You would think that a salesperson with limited prospects would be ready to perform when a genuine prospect comes along, but it can be just the opposite. When a salesperson does not have enough opportunities to deliver presentations to qualified prospects, readiness can decrease.

An example of a lack of physical and mental readiness can be taken from what happened during The Revolutionary War. On December 19, 1777, George Washington stationed his dismal troops into winter quarters at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania.

The conditions at Valley Forge were horrific - provisions such as food and clothing were meager, soldiers were deserting, and making matters worse, British troops were stationed close by, occupying Philadelphia. The British were unaware how bad things were and didn't realize that they easily could have attacked Valley Forge and defeated the Continental Army since they had lost all readiness to fight.

Realizing there was a desperate situation at hand, the French minister of war recommended Prussian military officer, Friedrich von Steuben, to Benjamin Franklin as a solution to the problem and Franklin in turn passed on word of Steuben's availability to George Washington. Von Steuben arrived at Valley Forge in 1778 and implemented a new training regimen and commenced training soldiers in close-order drills instilling confidence and discipline in the demoralized Continental Army. The techniques he shared were far more advanced than those of other European armies. One of the practices he taught was an efficient method of firing and reloading weapons. Through his work, he got the Continental Army in a state of military readiness. There is little doubt that without the training by von Steuben they would have lost the war that spring. Instead, they were able to create a series of conquests that lead to their eventual victory.

It is the same with sales readiness. We must implement strategies and use techniques to stay mentally sharp and be prepared to engage with each new prospect. The fact is that we only have a certain number of opportunities since we can only perform a specific number of presentations in a day and there are just so many prospects. Therefore, since our opportunities are not unlimited, we must be prepared each time. There is no room to waste an opportunity with a legitimate prospect. Get organized and be ready to sell.