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ARE YOUR SALES BEING DERAILED BY A RULE MAKER?

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What can a salesperson do when he realizes that a rule maker manages the business he represents? What do I mean when I say that a rule maker manages the business? It means that over time, an empowered manager implements unnecessary rules to curtail the company's expressed service and to lower expectations on delivered goods or services. We can all agree that policies and systems are an essential aspect of how a company delivers their service, but what I am referring to are excessive rules, beyond the intent of the parent organization. Unfortunately, this problem is more widespread than we would like to believe.

Why would anyone create new rules targeted at the customer? Implementing rules on customers happens for a combination of reasons. First, the manager may believe that he lacks the necessary resources to deliver the service the way the company expects, so he puts rules in place to limit the service. Second, the manager had prior experience with an unruly customer, which then prompts him to implement specific new policies that negatively affect all the good customers, but it prevents bad behavior from the unruly customer - which may only be one out of one thousand customers. Third, the manager believes that there is strong demand for his product and everyone wants exactly what his company is selling. His motto is "Get in line, and when your number comes up, we will get to you." Ultimately, he makes demands on any customer that expects certain services. He forgets that as the manager for an organization, he is entrusted with a business that must attract customers to compete with other companies, he is not running a department of motor vehicles.

If you are feeling uncomfortable reading about a rulemaking manager and the adverse effect it has on sales, you should. It is a significant problem that will impact sales and customer retention.

What does this issue have to do with sales performance? Well, after a new customer is acquired and the service begins to be delivered, if it is not the way the salesperson described, the conflict starts. The customer makes a complaint to the salesperson that the service was misrepresented and now the customer is unhappy. However, the salesperson did not mispresent the deliverables at all! He explained them precisely as the company describes them in their brochure. Unfortunately, the local manager who is "in charge" of delivering the service is curtailing it through rulemaking. The result? In many cases, the business is going to lose a customer.

Here is a hypothetical example: An office equipment salesperson tells the prospective customer that his company will provide service calls on all copiers seven days a week, and there is no additional charge if the customer is under the service agreement. However, the manager of the local branch office unilaterally decides to charge for weekend service calls, even if the customer has a service agreement, and if there is no service agreement, they will not perform any weekend repairs. The local manager never informs the salesperson of this decision.

Yes, at times salespeople can overstate the services to be provided, but that is not what I am discussing. In this case, the salesperson explains the deliverables correctly, but they are not being delivered because of a rulemaking manager.

In the article, "Too Many Rules Can Kill Your Business," by Paul Larue, he describes the bad outcomes on the business that results from this behavior:

> "When customers, and employees, feel there are too many rules, the following fallout can occur:
>
> - The advantage of doing business evaporates
> - The customer experience diminishes
> - The mission and vision of the company gets obscured
> - The enjoyment of working becomes more duty-oriented
> - Revenue dries up as customers find more user-friendly business"

As you review Larue's comments on the consequences of rulemaking, it is obvious that this conduct is harmful to the overall business.

It is especially hard on salespeople if the deliverables are continually changing - one day they are one thing and the next something else. This makes it much more difficult to sell the service. Why? Because the new rule is not communicated with the salesperson. This ultimately undermines the morale of the salesperson. What can be done about this? One option is to be alert to the rule maker adding unnecessary rules and adjust your description of the deliverables accordingly. That is, of course, if the new rule does not affect the overall product or service and it is insignificant. However, if it is changing the service in a significant way, you may want to consider working for another company. It may be that you are no longer selling a viable service, and you need to take your talents to a company that is more client-focused.

If you are a business owner or manager and you have the power to do something about this problem, I have a completely different suggestion - don't put unnecessary rules on your customers since this has the potential to "kill your business."