

Critical Factors for Sales Success

By: John M. Brown

Ninety percent of the inquiries we receive, month after month, are about sales-related problems or issues. Understanding that sales is the "engine" running the club, I have pinpointed some components critical to sales success.

1. Sales Opportunity Awareness - Pay attention. Really look and listen. There are literally hundreds of sales opportunities currently occurring in your club right now! These include upgrades, additions, member questions, prospect questions, and random phone calls... not to mention ancillary sales situations. You can't be on "auto pilot" while working in a club. It's a fluid and ever changing environment. When at work, spend some time

every day, or every hour, getting out of the office and watch, look and listen to the minute-to-minute interactions between your members/customers and your staff. Then figure out how to start acting on what you find!

2. The Need for Accurate Records - If your records are not accurate (depending on your version of what's accurate) then you are leaking money. Are your records "close enough", or are they exact? Poor standards of recordkeeping account for tens of millions of dollars lost in the club industry today. Are your member records up-to-date? Is there a photo identifying every member in every record? If not, how do you know it's the bona fide member? Does every phone inquiry get recorded, and is there a result

with each call? Can you look at your guest register and determine at a glance who joined or who didn't join and why not? Do you reconcile these important records every day? If not, revenues are slipping through your fingers every day.

3. Having a "production mentality" - Many sales people in the industry today are simply "order takers", and unfortunately, their clubs sanction this. Sales staffs sit around waiting for the next walk-in or telephone inquiry, and that's the extent of their efforts. Too often, sales people expect management to generate all the new customers. Even worse, often sales people believe that's why management is there! The sales people should be generating the business! The club-generated leads should be extra.

In my book a sales person's job is to produce leads and to sell the memberships that don't sell themselves. If you're not getting that, then reevaluate. Your people should arrive at work with a "plan" and have business of their own lined up for the day when they walk in. They shouldn't just be waiting for it after they get there. In simple terms, sales people should understand they are expected to produce... with everyday diligence and effort.

4. You need a "bias for action" - That's a Harvard term for "make things happen", "sell something, anything, now!" Some of the best advice I ever received came from a little old lady who ran a small country convenience store. She said, "I have three principles of business. First, get the money. Second, get the money, and third, get the money." Tempered with attention to prospects' needs and feelings, do your sales people embrace this outlook?

5. Train & Practice - If your staff is not thoroughly and properly trained in the first place, you may be losing more potential members than you are acquiring. If your staff members don't continually work on sharpening their skills, then sales results will fall short. Create a sales staff culture of a constant practice of observation, analysis and communication. It can be challenging and fun! Not only will the sales persons become more skilled, but energies and job satisfaction will be higher.

6. Get quantifiable information on every prospect - Look at your guest logs and phone sheets. Do you just see first names only? Are there phone numbers? Are there any informational notes or any follow-up needs? Inspire your staff to get all the information and to record an outcome for each call.

A designation on an appoint-

ment sheet is not an appointment without a first and last name, phone number, staff initials, day/date/time of appointment. Don't settle for "I don't know" or "I'm not sure". If the staff member on the club end of a phone inquiry doesn't know, then who would? Casual efforts and incomplete business records, along with the absence of management's attention to these shortcomings, lead to a do-nothing culture. If you are going to keep records, have it done with accuracy and a mindset toward getting the details.

7. Have an "organized" work effort - Your staff can work together in an organized, systematic effort in order to produce consistent, "generated" revenues. A laissez-faire attitude and a fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants effort are not only ineffective, but often they are counterproductive. Motivate the people you are paying. Inspire them to come out of their offices! The litmus test: Seek them out and ask them, "What have you done in the last 15 minutes to help produce revenues?"

Keep in mind, if they are not legitimately busy and doing something productive, then it's most likely your fault. If they don't know how to work in a productive and organized fashion as a team, then lead them. After this, don't be afraid to replace those who often are not prepared or "have nothing going on."

8. Teach them to sell for the benefits of our great product, not like it's a commodity. If they are selling on "price" then they might as well be selling soybeans, wheat, coffee or orange juice. No two clubs are alike, thus we're not a commodity! Selling a membership like it's just leasing a space in your facility is degrading to the club, members and customers. We change lives every day, in every club, all over the world. There is no "price" that can be measured against this! People are joining our clubs for a myriad of reasons, but very few of them are joining because it's "cheap". Teach your staff to search for and find what prospects are emotionally attached to. Sell to satisfy their emotional needs, and back it up with club operations meeting expectations, and you will never have a "sales problem".

9. Sell tomorrow, today - Too often, sales staff focus only on the sale that are right in front of them at that moment. This is shortsighted, not giving credence to the fact that almost 50% of new members come from referrals. If you don't understand and use this concept, then you're falling short of optimal membership sales. Every new member is a potential link to your next new member. Teach your staff



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to ask for referrals and to nurture new member relationships. Their appointment books will be full tomorrow and the next day!

10. Know how to "work" at your job - Many sales people could be far more productive than they presently are. However, I've found out that many have minimal know-how as to what to do to produce new business. Often they are not taught and coached on the "what and how" to produce revenue. In any training program, how to produce new business should be the first thing they are taught. The rest of the job could be done by the water fountain. If they get the prospecting part, their business generating skills will be successful. Those who can just "tour and close" always come and go. Business generators end up making a career out of the industry.

The above are some basics to enhance sales operations in almost all clubs. They are critical to sales success. While it seems very few are willing and able to perform their day-in and day-out, those that do are the ones with the ongoing "sizzling" sales!

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