

# Do You Know For Sure If Your Salespeople Are Asking For The Order?

By John M. Brown  
President - Professional Club  
Management, Inc.

After traveling the country working at and visiting hundreds of clubs over the last 22 years, I've come to one clear conclusion. 90% of the clubs I visit do not directly ask or do not know how to ask me to join their club! Anyone who doesn't believe me is welcome to go on one of my two weeks trips and walk in to the clubs with me.

## My Methodology

As a club owner, operator, manager and consultant to over 80 clubs consistently across the country, I'm always interested in how the competition is doing and what I can learn from them. As a result, I always shop most, if not all, of the facilities we are involved

with initially and on a twice-a-year basis after that. I always approach the shopping experience the same way. I am professionally dressed, suit, tie, etc. I always pretend to be in town closing on a new home in the area and have been sent on a mission at the explicit instructions of my wife to find a good club for us. Because I travel so much, I have always carried this big wallet. Not because I have a lot of money, but because it keeps all my tickets, receipts, credit cards, identification in one place. I guess some people would call it a man's purse but I call it my wallet. My point is that when I walk in to these clubs, I am trying to send multiple buying signals to the person who is supposed to be selling me my new membership. Just to give them the benefit of the doubt, I always make sure I explain to them very clearly why I am there. Oddly enough, even after all of that, most salespeople

still launch into their standard tour and qualifying lecture asking me questions that really have no relevance to my situation, which confirms my opinion that most salespeople don't listen very well or at all. But, listening is a subject that should be covered in another article. After the standard tour, which I always match my wants, needs, desires with what the club offers, we usually sit down to talk about becoming a member. I say usually because many times, maybe as much as 30% of the time, the salesperson doesn't sit down with me but ends the tour with something like "Are there any more questions I can answer for you?" And when I say no, there is usually a long silence, (about 15-20 seconds) followed by my saying "Thank You" and walking out! The other 60% of the time here's what happens. We sit down and chit chat a little and the salesperson stumbles into their price orientated presentation. I always set my big wallet on their

desk directly in front of them. Sometimes I will even go further and open it acting like I'm looking for something and then leave it open, revealing about 100 credit cards in plain view. After their price presentation, they almost always say one of the following things: "Well, that's what you are looking at to get started." or "How's that sound?" or "The infamous push the price sheet and they say "Okay"? I've never understood that one at all.

At which point I pick up my wallet, thank them and walk out. Usually, as I'm leaving, they say: "Call me if you have any more questions." or "Let me know what you decide". They say the truth is stranger than fiction. I'm sure there are those of you out there saying, "That doesn't happen at my club". Yeah that's what I thought, too. Until I started checking my own operations a little closer and found out it was happening to me, too! Without naming names, this has happened to me in big clubs, small clubs, clubs in metro areas, clubs in rural areas, big chain clubs, and some of the finest clubs in the world! No one seems to be immune. I read with great interest an article a few months ago by another club consultant, who in this article stated that high pressure, prehistoric selling techniques are outdated and continue to hurt this industry. I totally agree. But, in my opinion a bigger problem is more people are NOT being asked to join than are EVER high-pressured. It makes me sad to think of all the people out there who have summoned up the courage to finally come in a club, and then we don't even ask them to become a member! Just as bad and closely linked, is that many salespeople are woefully undertrained and under skilled to even know how to ask! So what are we to do about this silent epidemic? Here are a few suggestions that we have implemented in our operations.

**1. INSPECT, DON'T EXPECT.** Send your friends to shop your facility on a regular basis. Ask them for their honest evaluation. Most importantly, see if they were specifically asked to join the club today at least once! When your salespeople are well trained and compassionate and selling from the platform of conviction in the prod-

uct and not Price, Price, Price, then they have the ability to be very persuasive and are able to ask the prospect several different times in several different ways to join the club without any hint of pressure at all!

**2. HIRE COMPASSIONATE, BUT BOLD PEOPLE.** There is one major reason salespeople don't ask for the order. FEAR. Fear of rejection, fear of failure, fear of repercussions from their manager, fear that the prospect will say no. You want to know something? In all my years, after personally selling tens of thousands of memberships and being responsible for selling millions of memberships over the years, I've never had a prospect say "No! I'm not joining this club". We try to instill into all our salespeople that it is their "duty" to ask that prospect to start a regular exercise program today. We believe that if a person doesn't ask or know how to ask, then we are failing the customer, not to mention losing the sale.

**3. TRAIN, PRACTICE, TRAIN, PRACTICE, TRAIN.** Compare it to any highly skilled athlete. They have practiced and practiced and continue to practice the fundamentals day in and day out. If they don't, their skills begin to erode. Why should we be any different? In my experience, most staffs are undertrained and horribly underpracticed. Stop for one minute and think. How much more could you be accomplishing if you were sure your salespeople were fully trained and highly skilled? Would you realize a 20% income increase? In many cases, probably so. So many owners, managers don't train and practice with their staff, because they don't think they have sufficient knowledge or don't know how to. There are many materials available to assist you, but some training is better than none. If necessary, hire someone to do provide training on a regular basis. It will be well worth the money. Training/Practice should be done for your experienced people as well as new hires. I hear all the time from experienced salespeople "I already know all that". My experience has been that they may know it but usually are not practicing it every day in  
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the sales process.

**4. HOW YOUR SALES FORCE PERFORMS** is directly related to how well you manage them. Salespeople left to their own devices will routinely take short cuts that they perceive to be "A better way". Our philosophy is we want it done "Our Way". There are very few people who will "Self Manage" very well. It's up to you to consistently monitor, guide, train, teach, and direct the efforts of your sales team. Be open to new and improved ways of doing things, but keep abreast of the basic immutable laws of sales and don't "Let the tail wag the dog."

**5. TRACK and STUDY YOUR SALES DATA DAILY.** Investigate. See if you can reconcile every sales opportunity, which occurred yesterday? If your staff isn't closing over 60%, something is wrong. 50% of the people tell you they want to join without you even asking them! You need to ask yourself, "Am I better off with a sales team who can only sell half

the time or flipping a coin with the potential member?" You can manage your staff to improve dramatically if you have and understand the facts.

**6. TRAIN YOUR PEOPLE TO SELL OUR PRODUCT, NOT OUR PRICE!** Are your people selling product or price? My bet is 8 out of 10 are really selling price. It's so much easier to ask people to join when your people actually care about people and truly understand that their job as salespeople is to get every individual who walks in the door started and maintaining a regular exercise program! Remember, price is only a consideration, not the deciding factor in the prospect's mind. If they like it, if they like you, if they feel good about the whole product, that is what's really important. If they like it, they don't care what it costs. My experience has told me that price is always more important to the salesperson than to the customer.

**7. DON'T THROW UN-TRAINED SALESPEOPLE** "In the Creek without their knowing how to swim!" I would like to have 1% of all the money lost to

untrained staff. It's not their fault. It's yours, if you allow it. But the amount of lost revenue due to missed telephone inquiries and mishandled guests is staggering. If you think training them is expensive, then compare it to the cost of the equivalent of just one membership per day in your club. In most clubs that would equal somewhere in the vicinity of \$150,000 per year! Let me tell you, the loss of one membership per day is a very conservative estimate in most clubs. Forget the money for a minute, think about the human costs. That means 365 persons didn't get the chance to improve the quality of their lives. We should not forget that we truly do make a big impact in peoples lives everyday lives.

**8. MAKE SURE EVERY GUEST IS TREATED EQUALLY WELL.** This is a big problem in clubs these days. Salespeople try to read or qualify guests and don't discipline themselves to treat every guest as a legitimate sales opportunity. I would like to meet the salesperson that can qualify

guests accurately, even 50% of the time. Know why? Because no one can know what people are thinking. You have to take the time and effort to find out. The best advice is to treat everyone with a blank slate and treat every guest equally well.

**9. WHEN PEOPLE DON'T JOIN, FIND OUT WHY!** I once had a very wise man say to me after I had missed a sale, "Brown, what did you say to talk that person out of joining my club?" Years later I realized the wisdom of that statement. The assumption and core belief down to your very soul should be that if they came in the front door they MUST want to join. Salespeople in their infinite wisdom tend to give the "Gettysburg Address" when talking to potential members. Meaning they talk too much and love to hear the sound of their own voices. My vision of the perfect tour/presentation would be if the salesperson didn't say a word. Just listened and took notes. That is probably never going to happen, but at least move towards letting the potential member talk more than you. Investigate why people didn't join. Ask your staff

immediately after their presentation while its fresh in their minds and try to identify and learn from it.

**10. IF NOTHING ELSE, MAKE SURE** every guest is receiving a direct, sincere, urgent invitation to join today. Once this concept is securely entrenched in your people and culture then you can begin to see and pursue all the other opportunities available to you. Remember, secure it, check it, recheck it, recheck it.... After years of being in this business, one night I sat straight up in bed about 3am thinking I better check my own backyard. Lets take the opportunity that is right in front of our eyes every day and make sure we are doing this one key core skill well. It benefits everyone, especially the customer. I wonder, have I visited your club lately?

*(John Brown is a nationally known consultant, speaker and author. A veteran of the club industry for over 23 years, he owns, operates, manages and consults with over 80 clubs across the country and in South America. His company, Professional Club Management, Inc. is a leader in developing clubs. He can be reached at: (913) 557-9018 or email: Jbrown8137@aol.com)*