



Work vs. Knowledge

The upstairs furnace was not running, a quick look convinced me that a repair call was necessary. After introductory comments, the repairman proceeded to find the problem and fix it. Upon leaving he disclosed how he fixed it with “All you have to do is open her up, remove the control valve, dislodge the protector screen, remove the blockage, recheck the pressure differential and button it back up.”

He had done that procedure many times before and now it was routine. The repairman had skill and knowledge, acquired over time. He was no longer aware of the effort required to master the procedure versus the effort required to wrench it apart and put it back together again. This knowledge, for him, had become transparent. The result is he discounts it. He thinks his real effort was executing the task.

Now consider going to Circuit City and talking with a computer specialist. That professional will start everything with “All you need to do is...” He assumes it is obvious, and that any person will see the same thing, and move to the task of execution.

Why is everyone still discounting knowledge? Everything we use today absolutely requires knowledge to work and most things require a multi-step process that if not known and followed will never be divined, not conjured, not deduced, not figured out, not gonna happen. The road to efficiency is paved with knowledge, and we better be prepared with it.

So the sales representative is placed into a territory with accounts that have businesses to run. The rep is “equipped” with sales training and enthusiasm to go solve problems. Marching orders are find more accounts, more opportunities, make more calls, more face-to-face meetings, more closes, therefore more success. Is this a quality versus quantity trade-off? And what about prospects, do they deserve a knowledge-based sales experience? Is there a difference between work and knowledge operating here?

The experienced representative has enough awareness to not worry about determining the campaign’s possible steps. He/she may not plan directly to make the sales campaign the most efficient nor the revenue the most it could be, but reps understand the mistake of focusing on anything else besides the prospect.

The less-experienced rep worries about the uncertain future with respect to next steps. What should my next steps be? How will those steps get me closer to the deal? That rep would benefit by knowing more about the campaign to be run: the type of campaign, characteristics of activities peculiar to that campaign, the qualifying questions needing to

be answered for that campaign. Prior experience should be available, called upon, referenced, and compared.

The challenge is to move the experience from those that have it to those that would benefit. A sideline benefit of sharing the knowledge is that the sales team on any one campaign would understand what has happened and what will be happening. Let us stop assuming the rep will figure it out: trial-and-error failures are expensive, waste resources and do damage to the company's prestige.

Sales success now is highly correlated to knowledge at each step and just like modern warfare; it is a knowledge-based activity down to the single contributor. The less experienced reps need better sales execution knowledge, and experienced reps need to share their knowledge with their campaign teams to be even more effective. How does a rep represent the campaign as a knowledge-based activity? The selling process is dynamic and normal planning tools will not work.

With more thinking invested in the campaign, good ideas will emerge that shorten sales cycles, expand revenue, and win sales. The net value will be to make the forecast more accurate because the knowledge is driving work in sales.

Author:

John McGlenn

Principal, GATEtoGOALS.com

GATEtoSALES, *The Personal Sales Campaign Management System*

for the first-line sales professional and manager

focused on sales of large and complex capital products and services