

There are so few in sales who are truly professional sellers. It's salespeople's own approach, attitude, and behavior that is shooting their sales effort in the foot while causing buyers to perceive them as nothing more than vendors and commodity sellers rather than the professional problem solvers and value creators we so badly want them to be.

1. Living in Reactive Mode

Probably the most common and damaging driver of salespeople being perceived and treated simply as vendors is being late to a sales opportunity. Sales leaders allow their teams to spend way too much time operating in reactive mode. Sellers are waiting for leads, waiting for customers to raise their hands, waiting for beautifully teed-up opportunities.

Reactive sellers are often slow arriving to a new sales opportunity. By the time they're involved, the buyer is far down the path. Buying criteria have been established. Even worse, these reactive sellers end up way at the back of the line.

Often, they find themselves playing catch-up to their more proactive competitors' salespeople, who got there first, who were building relationships before the buyer started shopping, who were in what I call "Position A": Sitting in the consultant's seat, bringing value, sharing insights, and helping define the buyer's requirements.

Can you see why being late to the opportunity often relegates your salesperson to vendor status? How hard is it to be seen as a value creator and consultant to the prospective customer who is already far down the path? Very hard.

It's no fun selling from behind, eating the dust of your competitor who already has a relationship and earned a seat at the table because he was in the opportunity early. In fact, it might very well be that your competitor actually created the opportunity by proactively targeting the customer.

Unless your solution is so radically different from and superior to the competition's, which I hate to tell you is rarely the case, it is very hard to come across as a consultative, value-creating salesperson when you're tardy.

Typically, from that position, it takes a very low price to earn the buyer's attention. And that's a game we certainly don't want to play.

2. Leading with Product

Adding insult to injury, after they're slow to get involved in a potential sales opportunity, many salespeople further reduce their effectiveness by leading with their product or solution. Again, it's untrained or poorly trained sellers who don't know any better.

They put their product out front and make it the focus of the conversation when meeting with potential customers. What are the consequences of making the offering the hero of the story?

That approach communicates -- loud and clear -- to the customer that the salesperson is self-focused, more concerned with what he's selling than with the customer's issues, needs, and desires. Think about it. It's a truly horrible message to send.

When salespeople lead with their product or service, it is impossible to be perceived as consultants or trusted advisors. It makes it as clear as day that the salesperson believes the relationship and sale are centered on his offering, not the customer and its needs.

It's as if the salesperson is begging the customer to put his offering's features and price on a spreadsheet to be compared against every competitor's features and price.

The salesperson might as well show up wearing a company logo golf shirt embroidered with these words: **WE ARE ALL ABOUT OUR PRODUCTS!**

Hear me clearly: When you live by the product then you die by the product. Salespeople who lead with their offering are admitting that they bring zero value to the equation, and they're essentially telling customers to commoditize the purchase decision.

3. Ineffective Sales Calling

Who's teaching salespeople how to plan and conduct sales calls? If what I'm seeing is any indication, nobody is. So much sales training today is focused on macro theories.

Popular sales blogs and LinkedIn posts are filled with articles espousing the virtues of macro sales theories like social selling and insight selling. But there are few sales experts writing about how to better execute the day-to-day basics, the fundamentals.

Talking about sales call structure may not be sexy, but it has never been more needed, especially as sales managers are spending less time in the field coaching

people.

Here are some of the most common sales call sins:

The salesperson doesn't establish herself as a professional or assert control by setting up the meeting, sharing her agenda, and getting buy-in from the customer.

Sellers approach the sales call already in presentation mode and are too quick to jump to a demo or presentation.

Salespeople talk way too much and listen way too little. It's very hard to come across as a professional problem solver when you don't discover the customer's real issues. As I'm fond of repeating: Discovery precedes presentation -- always!

Salespeople give off the vibe that they are there to "pitch at" the prospect, which creates an awkward, adversarial dynamic and often provokes a guarded, even cynical, posture from the customer.

Take some time now to replay in your mind the last dozen or so of your people's sales calls that you observed. Were the salespeople coming across as consultative professionals or product pushers? Did they do more talking or listening? Was their objective to learn as much as possible as to improve the customer's condition, or to launch into presentation mode as quickly as possible?

And, most important, if you were the customer, how would you view the salesperson -- simply as a self-interested vendor or as a true value creator, advisor, and trustworthy business partner?

Amateurish approaches doom the salesperson to vendor and product-pitcher status. You don't earn a seat as the expert or consultant at the customer's table when you're viewed as a pitchman better suited to doing infomercials than to helping your customer address business challenges.

4. Avoiding Objections

Some salespeople bury their head in the sand whenever they sense their prospects have reservations or concerns. Newsflash: Refusing to discuss these anxieties doesn't make them go away. On the contrary, doing so means reps completely lose the opportunity to resolve them.

If a prospect seems less than enthusiastic about a specific feature or detail, ask probing questions. You might say, "*What are your thoughts on [feature]?*" or "*What challenges or difficulties do you foresee around [aspect of deal]?*"

It's also helpful to ask, "*Are there any reasons you **wouldn't** buy?*"

There are only two potential responses to this question. The buyer will say, "*Yes, I'm concerned about X, Y, and Z,*" -- in which case you've successfully brought hidden

objections out into the open -- or they'll reply, *"No, I think we're ready to move forward."*

Either way, the outcome is positive.

5. Doing Whatever the Customer Requests

When the customer or prospect tells a salesperson to jump, a majority respond with the traditional *"How high?"* and typically do so with great excitement. They think, what could be better?

The customer wants me to do something and I will show him that I'm the best, I'm the fastest, I'm the most compliant, I have the best attitude, I follow instructions better than anyone, I'm likable, I present better than anyone, and I'll provide the most creative and in-depth proposal.

The harsh reality is that when the seller does whatever the customer asks and is more concerned with being liked than respected, it often lowers instead of raises the perception of the salesperson in the buyer's eyes. Sure, that sounds counterintuitive, but it's true.