

Friday, May 15, 2009

Check your level of optimism to boost sales

Denver Business Journal - by [Colleen Stanley](#)

Everyone is looking for a competitive edge during the recession. Should we engage in social media tools? Or hold a strategic planning session to determine course or change course? Maybe we should roll out a new marketing plan?

Here's a thought: Take a look at a soft emotional intelligence skill that yields hard sales results: optimism. There is evidence that supports the theory that sales teams possessing high levels of optimism make companies more money.

One of the best case studies comes from the work that psychologist Martin Seligman did with Metropolitan Life in New York. He convinced Met Life to give him access to their new employees and administer the usual testing, as well as a new test he developed that measured optimism. He followed the progress of new salespeople for one year and found that salespeople who scored high in optimism sold 33 percent more insurance than those who scored low.

After two years, the optimistic group of salespeople were thriving in their positions, which increased retention, decreased the costs associated with turnover and increased sales.

How optimistic is your organization? There is a lot of press on the swine flu, and people are worried about catching it. There is another epidemic to watch out for in today's economy: pessimism. It can be deadly when it hits an organization because emotions are contagious. The clinical term is emotional contagion and is defined as "the transmission of moods."

When people are in a certain mood — happy or depressed — that mood is often communicated to others. What is the mood at your company? What message is the leadership team sending your sales team? What is your sales team communicating to your customers and prospects?

A sales manager shares the story of a rep who started every conversation in the last downturn with, "You probably don't have any money so you don't want to buy ..." The self-fulfilling prophecy was set by the salesperson, and the prospect followed the salesperson's lead. No deal.

So what can you do to stop the epidemic of pessimism? Study and duplicate optimistic salespeople.

When faced with adversity, optimistic salespeople ask themselves:

- What's good about this? They know that adversity is where true character is formed and great lessons are taught. Optimists take advantage of this schooling because they know that lessons learned today make money in the future.
- What can I do about this situation? Optimists know that control equals action, action yields results, and results increase motivation.
- What is funny about this? Humor is a great way to relieve stress which frees up the mind for creativity and innovation.

They choose their friends wisely. The motivational speaker Jim Rohn says, "You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with." Are you hanging out with optimists or pessimists? What kind of emotion is getting spread among your peers and colleagues? Is it healthy conversation or a new version of pessimistic flu?

They remind themselves that adversity is temporary, not permanent. If business is a little slow, optimistic salespeople speed it up by taking care of their best assets: existing customers.

Optimistic salespeople take control. They know sales is the greatest profession to be in during a recession. They can increase their prospecting activity without running it through a board of directors. They can meet with mentors who can help them look at another way of doing business in tough times. They can outwork their competitors. They can invest in learning and outsmart their competitor. Optimistic salespeople manage results, not excuses.

About the Author

Colleen Stanley is founder and president of SalesLeadership Inc. (SLI), a business development consulting firm specializing in sales and sales management training. SLI's team of experts focuses on small to mid-size companies that need to increase sales and want to decrease the gimmicks and game playing that often occur during the sales process. Their clients are forward-thinking, learning organizations that are beyond quick-fix, technique training.

SLI created the EI Selling System™, a unique and powerful sales program that integrates emotional intelligence skills with consultative sales skills. This system provides programs in prospecting, referral strategies, consultative sales training, sales management training, and hiring/selection.

In addition to being President of SLI, Colleen is also a popular keynote speaker, National Speakers Association Colorado Chapter President, author of 'Growing Great Sales Teams: Lessons from the Cornfield' and co-author 'Motivational Selling.'

Reach Colleen at 303.708.1128 or visit www.salesleadershipdevelopment.com.