



Tough times don't last. Tough sales teams with great leaders do.

Enough! How many of you are tired of gloom and doom and ready to take a break and watch 20 episodes of "Happy Days?" Go ahead. Humor is one of the many things that get sales teams through tough times. If you are charged with leading a sales team, please don't make the mistake of being part of the bad news. The team is already getting enough of that through TV, radio, print media and internet. Focus on what you can control during tough times and quit ruminating on what is out of your control. Here are three things you can do tomorrow that are in your control.

1. Stop confusing frustration from your sales team with excuses.

I am president of the "No Whiners Club," however, it's important to remember your sales team is human. They are probably getting stumped on a few calls and don't know why. All of us get too close to a situation and experience the "forest for the trees syndrome." It's more important than ever to spend time in the field with your reps and observe firsthand what your sales team is saying and doing. During tough times, sales reps have a tendency to push too hard for the sale. Sales calls are conducted with "desperation breath" and the focus is on closing the deal rather than listening to the prospect. This type of sale often leads to closed deals at lower margins or no deal at all.

2. Focus your coaching time on cost justification or "dollarizing the cost of the problem or opportunity." Different economies require different and better selling skills. Case in point: After the dot-com meltdown, the "who, what, where and how" of decision making changed. Many bad decisions were made during the dot-com bust because, 1) Money was flush, and 2) Common sense was short. After the meltdown, prospects were nervous about being the final sign-off because of potential repercussions. It was hard to figure out the true economic buyer. During that phase, sales managers increased their coaching focus on the decision process of the sales cycle. Today, prospects are worried about letting go of money. And if they do, they want to make darn sure there is a way to measure and justify the return on investment. Sales coaching needs to focus on cost justification selling skills. The number one coaching question sales managers should be asking their team is, "What is the problem or lost opportunity costing this prospect?" If your sales rep can't provide a specific answer, you are on your way to no sale or a discounted sale. There are still companies investing money. Make sure your sales team knows how to earn it.

3. Examine, adapt and execute.

An old saying goes, "Your best thinking is what got you here." The good news of recessions is they shake companies out of complacency and make them take a hard look at all parts of the business. Here are a few questions to ask yourself:

- Does your current sales team have what it takes to bring in business during tough times? As we all know, good economic times cover many flaws that leaders often ignore because the pain isn't great enough to address or fix during flush times.

- Do you have what it takes to lead your team? The sign of a great leader is his/her ability to transfer knowledge and skill. If you are still in the position of being the head closer, you are not a leader. You're the senior salesperson.

- Is your product/service offering being delivered in a medium that is desired by the customer? The recent presidential campaign is a great example. Barack Obama capitalized on the internet as a way of getting money in the door. The other candidates never caught up to his strategy. What are other ways of bringing money in the door at your company? (It just might be time to visit YouTube!)

- Is your team equipped with the right resources and enough resources? A consistent mistake made by companies is to cut back on marketing and training during tough times. Ironic isn't it? Let's make sure no one knows we are in business and let's make sure the sales team is less equipped for running tough sales calls. (It's kind of like sending a soldier to war without training or armor.)

Dirk Knemeyer, a leading international business consultant, says, "Marketing dollars spent during a down economy are far more powerful than similar dollars spent during good times, because each dollar represents a greater percentage of the overall marketing expenditure in your industry." Research has also shown that coached teams outperform non-coached teams by 20%. You do the math and figure where your time is best invested.

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Good Selling,

Colleen Stanley
Chief Selling Officer