

## Without Commitment From Both Of You, Your Relationship Will Fade!

In 1984, I was fortunate to join a global manufacturing company known to be a sales and marketing driven company. At that time, this company was one of the 10 most recognized brand names in the world. In the United States, we marketed an industrial line of tools and accessories through tool distributors that were run by the owner of the company. I was taught to close early and close often, in other words, get the order! As you can imagine, it could become a bit of an adversarial relationship at times. We were focused on selling our product **to** that customer. In fact, I once had a supervisor tell me, "A loaded customer is a loyal customer."

Today, a lot has changed in our selling environment. Today, sales representatives are facing a different selling environment, making sales more complex than ever. Customers have more product choices, and they are more educated on inventory and productivity costs. With national distributors, the sales representative has little direct impact at the corporate headquarters and their decision on purchases. That does NOT mean we are powerless to drive business in our territories. It JUST means that we need to take a more strategic approach.

Earlier, I wrote about the beauty of planning with your DSM. This article explained three important steps.

- The mantra of understanding the needs and motivations of your contact
- Applying relevant strengths from your value proposition
- And gaining commitment

As I worked in the field, most sales people intuitively understands what the contact is trying to accomplish. They also have a very good at understanding their company strengths and applying them. The challenge is to fine tune and improve on these talents, and more importantly asking for an appropriate commitment.

How do you ask for an appropriate commitment?

1) Start with "Appropriate"

An appropriate commitment starts with "appropriate". What is appropriate for the individual you are working with?

For Example: A sales person at XYZ Co. can't commit to stocking product in their warehouse in Chicago. That is obvious. It is appropriate for them to commit to setting a joint appointment at a local customer of theirs. If that customer commits to our solution, it is appropriate to go to the manager, and work out supporting inventory locally.

A good question to ask yourself:

Is the commitment appropriate to the buying & selling cycle for both you and the contact you are working with?

In your first meeting with a branch manager, you may not have earned the credibility to ask for a list of his/her top accounts, but he/she may give you a list of target accounts.

2) Next is the “Commitment” (This is where I feel like we can improve the most.)

Commitment moves the selling process forward. You both need to make a commitment, or one will get left behind. We don't want to be left behind!

In working with a sales person in Florida, he was determined to gain commitment from one of his distributors around target customers with a premium product. He asked for specifically, and received a commitment for his contact to send a list to him by Monday. It showed that the distributor contact had interest and had “skin in the game.”

On the next call, this sales person needed to have a forecast on product from a new distributor before he would quote pricing and commit to them. The distributor refused. The sales person knew he should invest his time elsewhere.

Asking for appropriate commitment speeds the sales (mind share) cycle. It also helps you understand when and where to invest your time. **Commitments must include specific actions, with a set date and time.**

Planning is not a commitment. You should be able to video tape their actions. (That's figuratively not literally.) Without the specific action, date and time, it is NOT a commitment.

In 1984, it was close early, close often, with little regard to appropriateness of the commitment. I'm not advocating commit early, commit often. I'm advocating gaining specific commitments on every sales call to move the process of earning mind share forward. A good standard question to ask ourselves before each sales call should be “What commitment should I expect to receive from my customer before I leave them today?”

Understand the needs and motivations of your contact, apply the relevant strengths from your value proposition, and **gain appropriate commitment.** Good selling to each of you.