

THE NEW Action Selling



HOW TO SELL
LIKE A PROFESSIONAL
EVEN IF YOU THINK
YOU ARE ONE

DUANE SPARKS
CHAIRMAN, THE SALES BOARD, INC.
AND CREATOR OF ACTION SELLING

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PREFACE

*You are going to make
a lot of money.*

Matt kept the rented car conservatively in the center lane of the freeway while he wondered what to make of his passenger. Joe, the company's new national sales manager and Matt's new boss, was an enigma.

The scuttlebutt had it that Joe was regarded at his previous company as a superhero, a worker of wonders. Supposedly he had introduced a new system that boosted sales, in a very competitive market, by something like 30 percent in a single year.

But while most executives who achieve such quick and dramatic results do it by alienating their subordinates in some way, leading eventually to trouble for their companies, the rumor was that Joe's salespeople worshipped him. When Joe showed up, they began to close more sales. Their commissions skyrocketed.

No doubt Joe planned some kind of major shake-up for his new sales force, but so far Matt had no clue what form it might take. The pair had met only hours ago, when Joe joined him for a ride-along on two client calls during Matt's swing through Seattle, the western edge of his territory. During both calls, Joe sat quietly, observing, talking no more than necessary to be polite, while Matt carried the ball.

The calls had gone pretty well from Matt's point of view. Not that he had closed a blockbuster deal or anything, but as he'd explained to Joe, these were new prospects. His intention at this stage was mainly to introduce himself, to present his company's offerings, and to leave some product brochures, which both clients had promised to read. Well, not promised, exactly, but they had taken the brochures. As Matt said to Joe, "First things first."

Matt was an experienced sales rep, with six years on this job and three with a previous employer. He regarded himself as a very capable salesperson. But Matt also recognized that his numbers were not those of a stellar performer. If the secret to Joe's success was to shoot the workhorses and keep only the stars, Matt could be in trouble.

How to impress Joe with his initiative?

Just in time to make it look like a considered decision instead of a last-second impulse, Matt swung the car into an exit lane. "Say, Joe, we've got some time before we have to be at the airport, and United Systems' headquarters is right there," Matt

said, pointing to a glass office building that loomed just east of the freeway. “Let’s drop in on Shirley Walters. She’s a great client. A terrific person. You’ll like her. I’m sure she’ll be in her office this time of day.”

“What’s your commitment objective for the call?” Joe asked, as Matt made the light at the end of the exit ramp and took a quick right into United Systems’ parking lot.

“My what? Oh, my objective! Well, you know, just to put in some face time with a good client. Let her know I’m thinking of her.” Matt found a parking space near the building’s main entrance and opened his door, prepared to step out. “Oh, and introduce her to you, of course,” he added. “You’re a new VIP in the company. Shirley will like that.”

Joe didn’t move from his seat. “No,” he said, freezing Matt with one foot on the pavement. “Those are objectives, and they’re valid enough. But I mean what’s your *Commitment Objective*? What do you want Shirley to commit to do as a result of this call?”

“I’m not familiar with that term,” Matt said stiffly, suddenly on the defensive.

“Get back in the car, Matt,” Joe ordered. “Let’s go to the airport.”

“But Shirley is one of my best...”

“Matt, starting today, we’re going to become a professional sales force,” Joe said. “We will not waste a client’s time or our

own by dropping in to shoot the breeze. New Rule No. 1: Never call on a customer without a specific Commitment Objective in mind.”

Matt climbed back into the car.

“A Commitment Objective is a goal,” Joe continued, “but it’s a particular kind of goal. Every sale is a process, a series of actions. A Commitment Objective is a goal you set that requires the client to make a commitment—to agree to take some action that will let you both move to the next step in the process. If you aren’t moving ahead, you’re wasting your time and the customer’s. So, no Commitment Objective, no call. Period.”

Matt put the car back on the highway and drove in silence, gripping the wheel more tightly than before.

“I’ve offended you,” Joe said. “Talk to me.”

Matt took a breath and let it out slowly. “OK, that all makes sense, I think,” he said. “But as for ‘we’re going to be professionals,’ Joe, I’ve been a professional salesman for nine

A Commitment Objective is a particular kind of goal in a sales process.

years. I’m raising two kids on my ability as a professional salesman. I don’t like being called an amateur.”

“Fair enough,” Joe said. “Believe me, Matt, I’m not trying to insult you. But the fact is that like nine out of 10 people who make a living in sales, you aren’t a professional—yet. Oh, you have all the basic requirements; that was plain enough in the

calls we made. You're personable, you're empathetic, you're inquisitive, and you genuinely seem to care about your clients and their needs.

"But professionals operate within a certain framework that draws on a body of skills and knowledge that you're not aware of," Joe said. "That's what you're going to learn. When you do, you're going to make a lot of money. And our sales force is going to light up this industry."

Oh, oh, Matt thought, as the airport exit came in sight. The new boss thinks he's Napoleon. Time to update the resume.

"Don't worry," Joe smiled, as if reading his mind. "I don't have delusions of grandeur. It's just that I've learned a system that treats the sales process as a genuinely professional activity, where if you follow certain rules, you can get consistent and predictable results. It's called Action Selling."

It gets worse, Matt thought. Another sales-training program. He stifled a groan and concentrated on looking pleasant. Let me guess: Before the customer is ready to buy, I should try to box him into a corner with phony choices: "Would you like 100 or just 50 of those, Mr. Smith?" As if my clients can't see that manipulative crap coming a mile away.

Out loud, Matt said, "Action Selling?"

***A sale is like a
drama with the
Action moving
toward a
predetermined
conclusion.***

“According to Action Selling,” Joe began, “every successful sale is like a little drama, with the action moving toward a predetermined conclusion. There are nine ‘acts’ in this drama. They take place in a particular order, based on the predetermined sequence in which every customer makes certain decisions that lead up to a purchase.”

“Whoa,” Matt said. “The predetermined sequence of what?”

“The documented sequence of buying decisions that every customer makes in a predetermined order, leading up to a sale,” Joe said. “Don’t worry, I’ll explain. We already started at Act 1, which is where you identify your Commitment Objective before every call. That’s the foundation of the whole thing. But hey, heads up, here’s the airport.”

Matt took the exit and followed the signs to the rental-car return area. Well, the idea of Commitment Objectives sounded interesting, at least. And he had always thought of the sales role as a bit like acting. Maybe this would be interesting after all.