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The Canterbury Sales®

The Fourth Fatal Flaw in the Selling Process Relying on strategy to overcome selling weakness

By Andy Gole



Previously I have written of the three fatal flaws in designing a selling process:

1. Assuming prospects enter conversation with serious intent – they won't.
2. Assuming prospects believe what we say – they don't.
3. Assuming prospects know how to make a decision – often they can't, particularly for infrequent decisions.

Management ignores these flaws at their peril.

Selling is further challenged by these self-inflicted wounds salespeople bring to the selling process:

1. Putting social values before business values – the major cause of salesperson failure.
2. Refusing to accept the standard of “earning the right” to business.
3. Operating on a “best efforts” vs. “do or die” basis.

Management and ownership too often ignore these flaws and self-inflicted wounds, itself another fatal flaw that dooms the selling effort. It's an unintended negative consequence of proper risk management.

Risk Adjustment – system design failure

Consider what we learn from the article, “Is Your Risk System Too Good?” which appeared in *Risk Management Association* in October. The article describes how proper risk management often leads to overconfidence and, unintended, more risky behavior.

For instance: if your car has anti-lock breaks, four-wheel drive and passenger and side air bags,

you might feel safe enough to drive 65 mph on ice. After all, you reason, there are safety systems protecting you. Your driving behavior is riskier than it would have been in the absence of these risk mitigants.

The article describes how Bankers Trust and Long Term Capital Management failed despite industry leadership in risk management. The strength of the risk management system led to top executive overconfidence.

Could a similar phenomenon occur with corporate sales management?

Companies invest in product development, facilities, branding, etc., to establish powerful market positions. Ownership's reliance on successful corporate strategy leads to a risk adjustment, regarding both the importance and proper deployment of the sales team. Strategy is supreme, sales a hanger-on, perhaps a necessary evil.

By contrast, in a healthy company selling is embraced as a multiplier of successful strategy, helping provide the cash flow to fund the company's next breakthrough.

Not surprisingly, ownership and management often allow salespeople to become order takers – having concluded they can rely on corporate strategy. The unholy alliance between salespeople and management is enshrined:

- Salespeople don't sell properly because of their value systems, putting social values before business values, and also because they don't have a process to overcome the three fatal flaws.

- Executives aid and abet these defects, relying on their risk mitigants, on corporate strategy. They aren't motivated to solve the three fatal flaws, to teach salespeople to put business values first. (Perhaps they also put social values first).

Successful corporate strategy becomes a narcotic, numbing executives, causing them to ignore their sales management responsibilities.

Fortunately, there is a solution. A change in system design is necessary. It has these components:

1. Sales must be seen as a multiplier of successful strategy. Proper selling increases the rewards of successful strategy.
2. To prevent the natural operation of risk adjustment, the positive impacts of corporate strategy must be divorced from selling.

No matter how strong the corporate strategies and results, the sales department must operate on the premise sales are declining or a decline is imminent. This will defeat the unintended consequences of risk adjustment.

The sales team must be developed into a team of warriors, constantly improving skills, in good times or bad. There must be a permanent crusade.

Such a team can deliver a 20 percent increase in sales and prevent risk adjustment.

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Andy Gole has taught selling skills for 17 years. He started three businesses and has made approximately 4,000 sales calls, selling both B2B and B2C. He invented a selling process, *Urgency Based Selling®*, with which he can typically help companies double their closing or conversion ratio. Learn more about Andy's method at www.bombadillc.com or by calling him at 201.415.3447.