

BREAKING PAST **ESCHERS STAIRS**

Top 5 Sales Mistakes To Avoid

Sales is a skill, an art form and a science. With decades of sales experience, rolling sales capability frameworks around the globe for a variety of leading companies and a plethora of industries, these common stumbling blocks may help you improve yours and your teams results.

mistake #1

No Clearly Defined Sales Process

There seems to be such a rush to connect with or be seen by a potential audience (particularly with the explosion of social media) that businesses seem to forget there is still a psychology to buying, and therefore selling.

Coming from a background in travel, I like relating the idea of a sales process to the key stages one navigates taking an international flight.

From the moment you arrive at an airport there are several critical milestones to take in order to make the intended journey.

- Check In
- Bags tagged and dropped
- Immigration process
- Security or customs process
- Wait at the gate (a sneaky refreshing snack being optional)
- Board when advised
- Depart



If you try to circumvent this process or shorten it in any way (commando dropping to the ground to avoid customs or immigration for example) all that happens is you get delayed and sent back to the beginning. You can't short cut the process.

Think about selling the same way. It's a process. It's a process that takes a customer on the required journey. It's a journey to the discovery of value and, ultimately, a commitment to buy.

In the case of airports, you can't really shortcut the process for risk of being arrested. However, with selling, you can seemingly time save. I say seemingly because to slash the notion of a powerful process is to potentially minimise potential success.

Many businesses (especially in the start up and SME space) often sacrifice this idea and focus more on hiring sales people who appear on the surface to have a great CV. A great resume can be manufactured. And even some of the best sales people can't consciously translate or transfer their knowledge to others because they may not be able to articulate the process itself.

Think about your sales force no differently than Spartan warriors; who were the ultimate fighting force in their day. They were so mighty they required no defensive fortress walls. The Spartans were such a competent force because each warrior was trained to use the same tools a specific way: a short sword, spear and shield. Replication, adherence and consistency in the use of these tools meant they mastered being the best fighting force around and was the key to their success.

So, a starting point for you to consider leveraging a sales process are three tools:



Ensuring all of these considerations are included into your sales process and are understood and adhered to by all, becomes a great big picture of building a team with potentially legendary success.

Underneath that, some key milestones (thinking about the transition through an airport again) would be:

- Clearly defined value propositions
- Relevant and powerful customer connection
- Interest creation and engagement
- The voyage of value discovery
- The appreciation of solutions
- The nurturing and maintenance of the relationship

The purpose of this book is to help raise awareness and give some direction. In consulting with companies, the reality of creating and implementing their sales capability framework is bespoke to each. The same milestones apply, but the detail, depth and practical application may differ between organisations and industries. (Hence, we individualise our frameworks of 'Rocket', 'Orbit' and 'Wow' for the clients we service – yet the fundamental pillars still apply).

If you haven't got a sales process or sales capability framework, which is understood by all, then the chances are your sales force and pipelines aren't delivering the potential results they otherwise could.

Get a process and capability framework in place and ensure sales leaders are rewarding, recognising and driving against it.

mistake #2

No Value or Needs Discovery

People don't buy something just because you've got something to sell. And people certainly don't buy something because you've got a target to hit. People buy because the solution is of value to them.

There's a powerful discovery right there. It's amazing how many people in sales and business grasp the basic concept of value, sure... yet they actually can't fully articulate or appreciate what real, often unique, end user value is and therefore fail to discover it.

(Again the purpose of this e-book is to raise your awareness to some quick wins, not a deep dive into every facet that will deliver you success. Value itself is one of the most sought after pieces of IP we deliver from our sales programs. Once mastered, helping people discover and appreciate it becomes far more straight forward.)

In its simplest form this part of the sales process, **'Value Discovery'**, is often the one most shortened or eliminated altogether.

In 20 years of rolling sales capability frameworks throughout the world in a variety of organisations and industries I see it time and time again. I get it. Time is more precious and attention spans more receded. Once a salesperson gets the meeting, eagerness to drive the conversation more rapidly towards conclusion and a close (quite frequently in response to a consumer unconsciously or consciously encouraging them to do so) is actually a premature, rookie manoeuvre.

A key principle of the solution selling era and methodology which, like any classic wisdom, continues to stand the test of time; **'Don't try and close something before its closeable!'**

I often say during sales keynotes that if I were only allowed to train one tangible sales skill then that would be the value discovery skill. Learn patience young Padawan, even when (or especially when) being hammered with price or next step questions.

A masterful sales person understands the importance of captaining and steering the sales process, no matter how rough the ocean is to navigate. It's up to you to allow the real discovery of value to occur.

- Slow the process down
- Learn to ask powerful, strategic and relevant questions
- Be genuinely interested in the answers
- Learn to listen and listen with full attention (not listening with what you're going to say next)
- Take notes
- Ensure deep questioning to uncover all relevant pains and value facets
- In the style of Yoda: Learn patience young Padawan! Racing ahead of yourself, you must not

VALUE

I'm going to relate this one specifically to my industry. As a speaker I'm often presenting at business events and functions. I additionally attend development sessions each year to remain aware of industry and insights.

It amazes me how many speakers and trainers still adopt the heavy, hard, product pushing approach of the Miami Vice fashion dress days. They structure a presentation where maybe half is adding value through knowledge and tools whilst the other half is an undisguised, harsh push of product. In the worst cases the entire presentation has been designed to treat the audience like six-year-olds leading them to the head-nodding conclusion that the product in question is the only reasonable decision to take.



I'm sure it works. I'm sure they convert. Otherwise they wouldn't adopt this approach. Yet more people seem turned off by this strategy. We live in an era where the word disruption (actually over used and not always relevant) and ideas of innovation and relevance are hot topics. So, to me at least, it seems this product package and approach may well have been suitable in the 80's, but is now an unnecessary, aggressive and out of date approach.

Additionally when you hear the salesperson in question using language like 'I am the guru!' or 'I am the expert, you need to listen to me' (actual language from others presenters on stage), the product push becomes one of zero humility or respect.

I'm not deeming this approach as either right or wrong, simply as a perspective. If you feel this suits your style, then proceed as you would. From working across sales for decades there are simply so many more business-case positives to eliminating this head on.

The mantras to adopt for awareness within your sales culture might be:

- Product pushing can be off putting
- Premature product pushing eliminates a collaborative, solution based approach
- Product pushing is a generic one size fits all – but sorry, I'm actually a medium, not an extra large.

To turn that around, the same mantras might be repositioned as:

- Seek to understand the best possible, total solutions we may have
- Align all our solutions, singular or bundled, to the value and needs of the customer
- If you're an extra large we'll find something that works, same goes if you're a medium. And if we haven't got your size, we'll have enough integrity to advise too. (PS, all our solutions are sleek and stylish)

mistake #4

Misalignment with Customers' Needs

Closely linked to the 2nd and 3rd mistakes is this one. It's a knock on effect really.

If you don't spend quality time seeking to understand the pains, visions and points of value unique to a customer, you'll be guessing when time comes to powerfully present and position your solution back to their world.

Hence why I'll say it again, if I were only ever allowed to train a single skill with salespeople it would be the skill of asking questions and listening. Really listening. Because if you do these things really well, the task of tying your solution and service with relevance back to your customer's world becomes far simpler.

If you've done the arduous task of value discovery, then your presentation and solution become akin to an attractive dot-to-dot drawing. Additionally, done well, it becomes the picture your customers now desire.

Some simple tips to ensure you are aligning your solution back to the customers world:

- Take plenty of notes during your value discovery
- Make sure to identify the tangible metrics and pains they are seeking to improve
- Use lots of 'linking statements' during your presentation tying your service or product features and benefits back to their world....

'This will allow you to...'

'This will result in...'

'Thus enabling you to...'

- Listen intently to the style of words, quotes, scenarios or mannerisms with which they describe situations and circumstances. You can mirror some of these back (not through mimicking but rather polite, smart, energetic references) to now transform your solution to feeling like one that is tailored rather than off the shelf or out of the box.

There is no single magic bullet, or silver bullet, in sales that guarantees 100% success or conversion rate. What remains is what I referred to earlier on: classic wisdom. Classic wisdom and skills are what increases your conversion ratios. Often significantly!

If you're not tying your service or product to your customers' world with as much relevance and value as possible the odds decline exponentially.

It's estimated that many sales take a minimum of seven contacts (and many rising into double figures) before interest may be gained or value discovered to the point where closing a deal and forming a new relationship is even possible.

That's why the idea of follow through and follow up, with energy, makes this short list. The well known case for persistence is Thomas Edison who famously said "I've not failed, I've just found 10,000 ways that didn't work' on his journey to inventing the light bulb. Persistence and follow through are a part of the process.

This notion of follow through is such a powerful .gap that rears its ugly head in many ways. For the sake of this e-book I'm going to focus on one label I devised.

It's what I call 'The Activity Cycle of Nothingness'...AKA 'Breaking past Eschers Stairs!'

It goes something like this.

- Sales person phones the opportunity.
- They may have a nice rapport and lovely wee chit chat about the weekend, or some kind of cool insight which may have relevance.
- The opportunity then makes a statement or stand along the lines of "Oh yeah, we're not ready yet, call me back, 'perhaps' next month."
- Salesperson agrees, 'perhaps' puts a note in their CRM - 'called and asked to call them back next month'
- Opportunity drops down in priority until next week, month... whenever, where the process is then repeated.
- Only this time instead of saying "We're not ready yet, perhaps call me back', they replace 'perhaps' with 'maybe'.
- And so another 'activity' is logged in the CRM.
- And so the cycle continues.
- A sales cycle activity of nothingness.

And now you know why I also call it Escher's solution blocked sales stairs. The start and end point of such activity remains the same and you're on a treacherous treadmill like Talking Heads' 'Road to Nowhere'. If you do a lot of this, it means you're getting nowhere either super slow or bloody fast!

Invariably until such patterns of conversations and behaviours are broken the salesperson remains stuck on the first rung. Even after the initial contact process and 'perhaps' getting to the decision maker, 'you shall not pass!' In the words of Gandalf.

The mantras to turn around here would include:

- Sales calls for the sake of calls are pointless
- Activity simply to appease a report for management is a complete waste of time

Conversations without any real purpose or passion are not only unicorns; they are unicorns with dragon scales, wearing trilby hats and singing Elvis Presley songs. They surely, very, very, very rarely exist! (As a motivated, optimist working in the field of emotional intelligence I don't necessarily like the labels of 'never' or 'always' in such circumstances)

- Don't allow people to fob you off with the shallow response of "Call another time".
- Be confident, knowing that you've got something of value to add.
- Gain commitment to definitive follow up dates and times with purpose.

Some quick tips on how to shift your mindset and this pattern of behaviour may include:

- Using definitive language. Hold people accountable for your time. If you don't value your time, why would anyone else?
- Make sure you have insights and ways of adding value in the early stage contacts too.
- Put yourself in the consumer's shoes and ask yourself:
 - What knowledge, insight or experience is going to be a wow factor and interesting enough to make them want to take you off the subconscious trick of Escher's staircase and put you onto the rapid conversational escalator actually going places?
 - Use insights. Use powerful case studies. Get to know their significant pains. Address all of these early.





Take an honest self-assessment. Which of the traits are applicable to you or your team and how can you take steps to make improvements?

Start to see the Matrix that is selling. It's not just conversations. Sales conversations are a process with purpose, strategy, skill and, most importantly, adding and delivering value.

So concludes this e-book of sales tips, more importantly, skills and behaviours to adopt. We release a lot of knowledge and IP through my social channels so please get connected and share with your peers.

'Rocket', 'Orbit', and 'Wow' are some of our sales and customer experience IP programs that live within my online academy in 'OPPORTUNITY'; the professional development catalogue.

Additionally the full development academy targets personal development, leadership development and collaborative wisdom in addition to a depth of professional development skills of which sales capabilities are a powerful part.

Connect with us and contact us for a free exploratory conversation to see how we can decisively (not 'perhaps') help you design, implement and drive a complete sales capability framework that will help you achieve fulfilment, success and your business goals.



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