

STEPHAN SCHIFFMAN'S 101 SUCCESSFUL SALES STRATEGIES

*Top Techniques to
Boost Sales Today*

STEPHAN SCHIFFMAN
America's #1 Corporate Sales Trainer

Stephan Schiffman's

101

SUCCESSFUL SALES STRATEGIES

Top Techniques to Boost Sales Today



ADAMS MEDIA

AVON, MASSACHUSETTS

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Published by
Adams Media,
an F+W Publications Company
57 Littlefield Street, Avon, MA 02322. U.S.A.
www.adamsmedia.com

ISBN: 1-59337-376-7 (paperback)
ISBN-13: 978-1-44050-087-9 (EPUB)

Printed in the United States of America.

J I H G F E D C B A

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Schiffman, Stephan.
Stephan Schiffman's 101 successful sales strategies : top techniques to boost sales
today /
by Stephan Schiffman.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 1-59337-376-7 (paperback)
ISBN-13: 978-1-44050-087-9 (EPUB)

1. Selling. I. Title: Stephan Schiffman's one hundred one successful sales strategies.
II. Title.

HF5438.25.B33388 2005
658.8'2—dc22

2005017375

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Introduction

This book is the result of more than a quarter of a century of front-line selling experience. I think you will find that it is a good deal more comprehensive than other books on selling.

The volume you are holding in your hands is not a cure-all; it doesn't promise an instant turnaround to your sales career the moment you start turning its pages. With out your efforts and your commitment to your own results, no book can realistically make that promise to you. Like any other blueprint for success, this one requires action on your part to put its ideas into practice.

I do, however, want to share my strong belief with you that if you make a concerted effort to follow the 101 “commandments” laid out here, and use the book as a kind of checklist as you move forward, you will be measurably more successful a year from now than you are today.

The Winning Edge

If you've ever watched the Olympic swimming, running, or bobsled competitions, you've no doubt noticed that the winners of these races tend to win by very slim margins—tenths or hundredths of a second. That's remarkable, isn't it? When the top athletes in the

field come together, the amount of time that determines the gold medal is often about as much time as it takes to snap your fingers.

I think sales is sometimes very similar. The competition out there can be brutal. Victories are often decided by hairsbreadth margins. Lose three or four important races in a row by the tiniest of margins, and you're out of business; win three or four, and you're tops in your field.

The advice that follows is designed to help you add to your personal sales efficiency—a little bit here, a little bit there. I'm not out to reinvent the wheel with this book, but rather to give you enough of an edge in enough common problem areas to make victory more likely for you in a tough race.

Sometimes, when people first encounter some of the ideas you're about to see, they discount them immediately by saying something like this: "But that's so simple, so obvious!" When I hear that, I ask two questions:

1. Was it "obvious" before you read what you read?
2. Is it "simple" enough for you to implement on a daily or weekly basis after reading what you read?

You won't find long discourses on psychology or personal interaction here, but rather tangible, pragmatic ideas you can put into practice without a lot of research or second-guessing. If that's the kind of advice you're eager to get—reliable, easy-to-implement insider advice culled from a lifetime of face-to-face selling—read on.

Stephan Schiffman
New York, NY

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following people for their help with this book: Brandon Toropov, Michele Reisner, Gary Krebs, Danielle Chiotti, and, of course, Anne, Daniele, and Jennifer for their unceasing support.

Strategy #1

Be Obsessed

You must like what you are doing for a living—selling—enough to become obsessed with it. Not fifteen-hours-a-day obsessed; rather, I have-absolutely-got-to-do-this-right-day-in-and-day-out obsessed.

For my money, the most crucial word in sales today is *obsession*. Close behind it are two supporting ideas, *utilization* and *implementation*. Let's talk a little bit about what these three words really mean for you.

Obsession

Every day I'm not training, I make fifteen dials. And by making fifteen dials, I can get through to maybe seven people. Once I get through to seven people, I'll usually set up one appointment. I do that five days a week, which, by extension, means that every week I have, on average, five new sales appointments. I close one out of five, so at the end of the year, I should have fifty new customers.

I mention my daily routine—my obsession, if you will, my repetitive, second nature approach to sales—so that you'll know I'm not just talking theory here. Many sales books are written by people who have retired or gotten out of business. I have not retired. I'm

too young to retire, and I'm having too much fun to get out of business. I am an active, professional salesperson. I also happen to be president of one of the country's top sales training firms. Part of the reason for our success is that the people we work with know that we practice exactly what we preach, day in and day out.

In order for you to be successful in sales, you must be absolutely, positively obsessed with your work while you're doing it. You have to be so dedicated to the idea that you can satisfy a customer with your product or service that you move into a whole new work realm: A realm where there is simply no place for watching the clock, wishing it were time for a coffee break, or wondering how the Jets are going to do against the Patriots this Sunday. That's not to say there's no place for any of these things in your life—just that there's no place for any of these things while you're working. Now, this doesn't mean you must take yourself so seriously that you become a workaholic and have a heart attack at thirty-eight. It means you must make a commitment to yourself, and build up a routine that is success-oriented.

Of course, we should note here that obsession without discipline often results in chaos. As obsessive as you want to get about being successful, all that energy must be coupled with discipline or you're not going to get anywhere.

Utilization

This means utilizing everything at your disposal to increase your success. In a way, it's being obsessive about getting the most from your environment.

Burrow through company brochures and catalogs to learn everything you can about your product. Have regular meetings with your sales manager to discuss your performance and get new ideas. Use

books like this one, or motivational tapes, to put you on the right track. In short, utilize your tools!

Such tools needn't be limited to things you can hold in your hand. Have you shown customers your office or plant? Have you reviewed past company successes with your prospect? Have you invited current and potential clients to company social outings? Be creative. Once you stop to think about it, you'll be amazed at how many excellent tools go completely ignored by salespeople.

Implementation

Or, if you prefer, just do it; make the effort in the first place. All the sales books in the world will not help you if you don't try.

Don't fall prey to the "paralysis of analysis." One of the beautiful things about sales is that it's an extremely binary way to make a living. You're either making a sale or you're not. Make every effort to be "on" during every moment you actually communicate with potential customers. Take nothing for granted, and don't get bogged down with overpreparation. Do it.

I realize, of course, that research has its place. But you should never forget that if you don't make the calls, your efforts are going to be in vain. Selling is selling: going after people and talking to them. Don't lose sight of that, and don't let your obsession be misdirected into something that won't help you put numbers on the board.

Three crucial ideas—obsession, implementation, and utilization. How do you make sure you're incorporating them? Here are some tips.

Make a to-do list. Identify important objectives before you start the day; then work like crazy to attain the objectives on your list.

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Keep your motivation up. This book is an excellent start; you might also eventually turn to motivational tapes or seminars. Whatever your approach, make a commitment to find one new idea a month and run with it.

Start early. Try coming into the office forty-five minutes before everyone else does. You'll be amazed at what you can accomplish, and how big a jump you'll get on your day. Don't think of it as an inconvenience—think of it as an advantage. And just do it.

Be obsessive, but disciplined. Utilize everything you have at your fingertips; then implement. It's a proven recipe for success. Remember: obsession is essential ... but obsession without discipline equals chaos!

Strategy #2

Listen

Perhaps the easiest way to distinguish successful salespeople from unsuccessful ones is to watch how they interact with a prospect. Do they do all the talking, never letting the prospect get a word in edgewise? If so, it's a good bet you're looking at a failure.

You must let the prospect speak about himself or herself; the information you'll receive as a result is invaluable. Ramrodding your points through, and merely overpowering the person rather than showing how you can help, is a sure way for you to descend into the stereotypical "hard sell" that no one likes. Such behavior is a great way to lose sales.

To be sure, you and I really believe that our product will help the person we are sitting across the table from. And yet, even though we believe that in our bones, we have to listen—not lecture. Listening is the only way to target the product to the unique set of problems and concerns the prospect presents to us. By staying focused on the objective of helping the prospect (rather than "getting" the prospect), we build trust. And trust is vitally important.

When you get right down to it, a good salesperson doesn't so much sell as help. You can pass along important information, and ask for the sale after you've demonstrated clearly how your product

can help achieve an important objective—but ultimately, the prospect has to make the decision, not you. Ideally, you have to know what it will take for the prospect to do the selling himself or herself. In this environment, listening becomes very important.

Listening doesn't just mean paying attention to the words that come out of the prospect's mouth. Very little of what we actually communicate is verbal; most is nonverbal. Be sure you're "listening" in such a way that allows you every opportunity to pick up on nonverbal cues. By doing this—letting the prospect get across what's important to him or her—you'll stand out from the vast majority of other salespeople, who simply talk too much.

When your prospect wonders something aloud, give the person enough time to complete the thought. When your prospect asks you a pointed question, do your best to answer succinctly—then listen for the reaction. Allow the speaker to complete sentences—never interrupt. (What's more, you should let the prospect interrupt you at any time to get more information from you.) Express genuine interest in the things the prospect says. Keep an ear out for subtle messages and hints the prospect may be sending you.

When you do talk or make a presentation, don't drone on. Keep an eye on your prospect to make sure what you're saying is interesting. If it isn't, change gears and start asking questions about the problems the prospect faces—you are probably missing something important. Of course, you should never come across as hostile or combative to the prospect.

You probably already know that the first ten or fifteen seconds you spend with a prospect have a major impact on the way the rest of the meeting goes. This is because there is an intangible, feeling-oriented "sizing-up" phenomenon that occurs early on in any new relationship.

Much of who you are and how you are perceived as a communicator—brash or retiring, open or constricted, helpful or manipulative—will be on display in a subtle but crucial manner in the opening moments of your first meeting with someone. Make sure you are sending the messages you want to send. Before the meeting, avoid preoccupations with subjects that have nothing to do with the client; these will carry over even if they never come up in conversation.

Perhaps you're wondering: "What if the conversation is going nowhere? How do I listen if there's nothing to listen to? Shouldn't I start talking about what makes my company great? Shouldn't I get in there and make a pitch?"

Probably not. The odds are that early on in the meeting you simply do not know enough about your prospect yet to go into a long presentation. So avoid doing that. Instead, focus your questions on three simple areas: the past, the present, and the future.

What kind of widget service was used in the past? What are the company's present widget needs? What does the prospect anticipate doing with regard to widgets in the future?

Add a "how" and a "why" where appropriate, and that's really all you need. Take notes on the responses you get. After you summarize the points the prospect has made, you may be ready to talk in more detail about exactly what you can do to help solve the prospect's problems. But be sure you listen first.

Strategy #3

Empathize

Put yourself in the prospect's shoes—you'll understand how to sell to the person better.

An empathizing attitude is a far cry from what most salespeople feel about their customers. The typical comment I hear on the matter goes something like this: “Frankly, it doesn't matter to me why the guy bought what he bought. He bought it. And I got the commission.” Does that sound to you like the way to build repeat sales?

Certainly, it is crucial to put the right numbers up on the board. But that's exactly why you must always make sure you're making every effort to see things from the prospect's point of view.

Sometimes salespeople forget to take into consideration what is going on in the other person's head. But think about your own experiences. Did you ever walk into a room where a person was angry, but you didn't know it? Maybe you wanted a coworker to give you a hand on a project you were having trouble with. So you stepped in and made your request in an offhand way, and before you knew it, the other person was barking out orders, stomping around the room, and generally making your life difficult. You probably could have gotten further with your task if you'd taken a moment to size up how the other person was feeling—and why.

Try to establish what is going on in the prospect's life on a given day: what feelings are likely to surface? For example, if you are dealing with someone whose company is going through a merger, you can make a guess that the prospect may well be concerned about losing his or her job. Perhaps this is not the person who should be subjected to your most aggressive approach. Perhaps things should go a little more slowly.

Just as important, bear in mind that the prospect you are talking to is going to be doing something that many businesspeople try to avoid: talking to a salesperson. It's a little naive to assume that your first visit with someone is going to be eagerly anticipated. In all likelihood, the person has probably managed to set aside a few minutes for you out of a very busy day. Treat the prospect with respect, and realize that you are probably not the most important thing that's going to happen to him or her that day.

How do you find out about the person you are talking to, so you can empathize? The best way, of course, is to ask appropriate questions and carefully monitor what comes back to you in response. More importantly, make an effort to be sincere. Sincerity is often the last thing people expect from a salesperson.

Do you really care about the people who you talk to? If you don't, this attitude will show through. One salesperson I worked with some years ago simply could not sell to anyone younger than about forty-five. The reason? Deep down, he really didn't respect his younger prospects. They picked up on that—even though the meetings were always cordial—and his sales suffered as a result.

Exhibit genuine concern about the person and his or her problems, and ask questions that demonstrate your care. React properly to those questions. Above all, keep your conversations straightforward and sincere—avoid peppering the person with probing ques-

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tions right off the bat, and don't let your interest sound fake or forced.

This may be difficult at first. Maybe you have been bruised one time too many, or become a little jaded in your sales career. Maybe you have forgotten the fun of the business, lost sight of the thrill of making a sale as a result of a good, solid, honest initial contact. If so, you must make every effort to relearn the enthusiasm and sincerity that builds trust. That effort will pay off handsomely for you.

Strategy #4

Don't See the Prospect as an Adversary

They have a saying in the advertising world: “The customer is not stupid; the customer is your spouse.” I suppose you could adjust it somewhat for sales: “The prospect is not an enemy; the prospect is your fiancé.”

The prospect should be your friend. Always strive to get the two of you working together.

I'd like to have a dollar for every time a salesperson has talked to me about that so-and-so down the street who just welched on a deal. Or for every time I heard about someone coming on so strong that the prospect slammed down the phone receiver, or—worse still—threw the salesperson out of the office during a scheduled meeting.

I've never had a prospect of mine become an adversary, and you shouldn't either. There's simply no excuse for letting your sales work result in a large number of enemies, rather than a long list of allies.

Don't fall prey to the ridiculous advice you may hear about how you have to beat up on a prospect before he or she beats up on you. This approach is rude, arrogant, antisocial, and unprofessional. But

those aren't the most important reasons not to follow that advice. You shouldn't beat up on the prospect for one simple reason: doing so loses sales.

The prospect would rather be your friend. Just as you want the prospect to like you and give you business, the prospect really would prefer to be your friend. Many salespeople find this hard to believe, but it's true. Most of the situations in which the prospect seems to cut things short have to do with either a hectic work environment or an unprofessional approach by the salesperson.

The degree to which the potential for goodwill is retained is based on how well you do your job. See your prospect as someone you want to do business with; an associate, someone you can talk to while you both work to attain goals.

The best selling arises from win-win situations. That means you win because the prospect wins. You are not out to "get the order now" if doing so is not going to help your prospect. When the prospect buys something from you, he or she is buying a benefit. That benefit (faster production, lower operating costs, higher sales, whatever) is what you must keep your eye on. Not your sales totals.

If you see your prospect as an adversary, someone you are going to outwit, outsmart, or show up, you are never going to be successful. You are, instead, going to lose that potential customer, and probably build up a bad reputation in the process.

Let me tell you a story that illustrates what I mean. Karen was a sales rep who had just started out with a major business machine company with an office in Manhattan. Karen did not yet understand that she wouldn't get anywhere by treating the prospect as an adversary. This led to some major errors in strategy on one sales call in particular. How major? Read on.

Karen had scheduled an appointment with an important prospect, one she'd been phoning for weeks. She showed up at the scheduled time, only to hear at the reception desk that her contact had had to deal with some unexpected problems, and would need to reschedule.

There are any number of ways to deal with that situation. What Karen did, however, is a textbook example of how not to deal with it.

Karen made such a fuss at the front desk that her contact actually had to drop what he was doing and make his way out to the reception area to try to explain what had happened. The contact asked politely if Karen could call tomorrow to set up another appointment. Karen refused. She'd waited long enough, she said. She had to meet with the contact now, today. After about five minutes of this, the contact gave up and started to walk back to his office. Karen tried to follow him.

Exasperated, the contact turned on her and ordered her out of the building. Did that faze Karen? Of course not. She figured she could outwit this guy any day. Karen said to him, "This is too much. I can feel the tension getting to me. If you don't spend the time with me that we agreed to, I am going to have a seizure right here." Her objective: embarrass the guy into sitting down and talking to her.

Isn't that a wonderful way to build up a professional relationship?

It got even worse. The contact said, "I won't do it. Get out of here." Karen then actually fell down on the floor and faked a seizure. Two gentlemen from building security had to come and escort her out of the building. Would it surprise you to learn that she didn't get the order?

Perhaps you're laughing at that story. But ask yourself how many times have you approached it the same way? Do you ever curse under your breath in the middle of a tough cold call? Do you ever

persist in calling people who obviously have no use for your product or service? Do you ever walk into a sales appointment fantasizing about how you're going to "nail" a prospect? If you can overcome these habits—and it may take work—you'll distinguish yourself from a lot of bitter, nasty salespeople out there who can't understand why people don't want to talk to them.

We once ordered some copiers for our office. We'd had two bids; the sales rep that lost called and asked why we bought the other machine. I explained in detail why I had made the decision I did. The salesperson didn't agree with my decision, though, and began to yell at me. Didn't I know that the machine had a 90-day warranty, free this and free that, half-off such-and-such, and advanced thing-amajigs at no extra charge? How on earth could I make such a mistake? What was wrong with me?

Needless to say, that exchange didn't change anything. Well, I take that back. It did change something. It made me absolutely secure in my original decision. Obviously, this was not a customer-oriented organization I was dealing with. And I made a mental note never to have anything to do with the Confrontational Copier Company the next time I needed to expand my office copier pool.

Your goal as a salesperson is to create mutual trust. You simply can't do that in an adversarial environment. Be patient. Make repeat visits when necessary. Always listen to what the other person has to say, and accept your prospect's goals as your own. Most important, don't fixate on closing the sale so much that you lose sight of your prospect's dignity.

Strategy #5

Don't Get Distracted

By giving the prospect all your attention, you will, in turn, win the prospect's undivided attention.

Recently, a young salesperson came to my office on an appointment. He went through a rather lengthy discourse about his product; I sat in silence.

He came to a point where he had apparently been instructed to ask his prospect a few questions. He asked them dutifully, but somewhat stiffly, as though he were reciting a speech. Time after time, as I began to answer him, I noticed that the salesperson was staring off into space, paying no attention whatsoever to what I was saying. He might as well have been on a coffee break. Perhaps he wished he were.

Many salespeople are so busy running down their checklist of things to do that they forget they're dealing with another human being, and start focusing on things that have nothing to do with the sale.

Part of the reason for that has to do with the stress associated with selling for a living. Often, when confronted with a stressful situation, we'll seal ourselves into a comfortable little world of our own—a world that we can usually control, but that carries with it the very real risk of missing something important.

It's estimated that the average salesperson actually sells for less than 5-½ hours a week. In other words, if you're like most salespeople, you're not selling every single hour of every single day. You're doing other things: getting ready to see prospects, making your prospecting calls, writing up proposals, attending meetings, filling out paperwork, and so on. That's why it's so vitally important to make every minute you actually spend with a prospect count. Accordingly, you must concentrate on what's being said; don't daydream or get sidetracked.

When you get distracted during a sales call, you distract your prospect. You begin to fidget; you wonder what's for lunch; you think about the movie you're going to tonight; you let your mind wander when it shouldn't be wandering. This throws off the whole meeting, because your prospect will sense what's happening, and will wonder what's wrong. The atmosphere of trust won't materialize—and that's bad news. You need that trust.

If you need an incentive, remind yourself that, directly or indirectly, the prospect is telling you the single most important thing you will hear all day: whether he or she will buy your product, and why.

Take notes to help you concentrate. Make sure your briefcase is well organized, with everything you need at your fingertips. The tools you bring with you to the meeting should help you, not stand in your way. If you find yourself spending five minutes fishing a brochure out of your valise, something's wrong.

The same idea applies to the common problem of attaching too much importance to a confusing or negative remark from the prospect. If the prospect tells you left is right and right is left, don't get befuddled, don't demand an explanation, and by all means don't challenge the person. What will you gain? Ask politely for a