

"Gimme more"

The title of this 2007 hit for Britney Spears neatly captures what many organisations are asking of their sales force in these difficult times. They are driving up activity; demanding more sales calls, more customer visits, in the hope of producing more sales.

This is what we call 'pushing the efficiency (more) button'.

What if the problem is effectiveness rather than efficiency?

Efficiency is about **how often** people meet customers; effectiveness relates to **how well** they perform in those meetings. Clearly, if sellers are ineffective, putting them in front of more customers is likely to be highly counter-productive, especially long term. It doesn't take long for poor selling skills to 'burn' a prospect base. And how long might you have to wait before you can go back?

For a sales manager, the easy way to find out if the sales productivity problem is efficiency or effectiveness is to do a quick comparison of your sellers. If your top performers have more customer meetings than your average guys, it's efficiency. If it's the reverse – as is often the case in major sales environments – the secret of their performance is not their activity levels but their effectiveness.

How do we know it's working?

In a simple sale environment it's easy to see the impact of increased efficiency. At the end of most visits the seller will either pick up an order or leave without a sale. But what about complex sales? They require several visits, often meeting several people within the account to produce a sale. How can we know if the efficiency button is working in our favour, when it may be months before we get an order?

A wider definition of success, which we developed to guide our research into complex sales, may be useful to any seller or sales manager trying to measure sales progress.

We developed four possible 'call outcome' classifications:

- **An order:** The customer makes a firm commitment to buy.
- **An advance:** The customer makes a commitment that moves the sale forward – for example, agrees to arrange a meeting with another decision maker and does so. The key to an advance is that the customer makes the commitment to action that moves the sale forward, not the seller.

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- **A continuation:** Seller and customer continue to meet, but no specific action has been agreed by the customer to move the sale forward. The customer hasn't said "no", but hasn't made a commitment to move the sale forward either.
- **No Sale:** The customer or seller terminates the sales cycle.

In our researches we classified Orders and Advances as successful outcomes and the other two as unsuccessful.

This call outcome model allows seller and sales manager to assess the success of every sales call made.

So, even in complex long-cycle sales we can quickly measure the impact of pushing the efficiency button. However, our experience is that you will commonly find that it is likely to produce only an increase in Continuations.

Conclusions?

Working smarter, rather than harder, brings real sales success.

Throughout the past thirty years we have found that teaching people to be more effective, rather than working on their efficiency, is the real key to success in major selling. Understanding the difference between a Continuation and an Advance is the first step in helping salespeople to be more effective in converting more calls into Advances.

More advances ultimately means more sales.

This was the approach used by Bank of America when Huthwaite trained salespeople to set measurable, actionable, outcome-oriented call objectives prior to sales calls. As a result of the training, a 47% increase in such actionable objectives was achieved. Not surprisingly, more calls then resulted in Advances. This ultimately resulted in a 27% increase in calls that won new business.

So if you want to be more successful in these difficult times, measure the effectiveness of your sales calls using the criteria set out above. If you find there are too many Continuations, you need to work on the effectiveness of your sales calls. Continuing to make more calls, on more customers, could be squandering your prospect base.

Ultimately "Gimme more" results in no more to give.

If you would like to know more why not download our document **Winning more business in a recession.**

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