



The 25 Most Dangerous Sales Myths

(and How to Avoid Them)

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Take-Aways

- The ABC — always be closing — approach will cost you credibility and customers.
- Ask open questions so that you can learn from your customers and prospects.
- Don't endanger your reputation by sending cute or mysterious gifts to cold call targets.
- Be honest about the fact that you're selling. Never lie about who you are and what you're doing.
- Sell on the basis of relationships, not on the basis of cheap prices.
- Don't try to outfox your customers.
- Don't waste your time and that of your customers with elaborate voicemail messages.
- Don't fight, bully or intimidate a customer.
- Listen more than you talk, and get all the information possible before you make a proposal to a customer.
- Measure your success with sales ratios, not just with straight numbers.

Rating (10 is best)

Overall	Applicability	Innovation	Style
8	10	7	6

Relevance

What You Will Learn

In this Abstract, you will learn: 1) Some of the most dangerous and costly myths about selling; and 2) What to do instead of following them.

Recommendation

This excellent short handbook can benefit every salesperson. The author identifies 25 of the most pernicious sales fallacies and demolishes each one. Then, he replaces them with sound common sense advice. You could summarize the book quite handily in a few words: be honest and respect your customer, listen more than you talk, learn all you can and offer not just a standard product or service but a solution to the customer's problem. This isn't the sort of book you buy to read once. It is the kind of book you buy to keep in your desk drawer and glance at periodically. Be forewarned — the author is in the business of selling sales training, and doesn't make the mistake of giving away the secrets he sells. However, *getAbstract.com* finds that these simple reminders of what mistakes to avoid may sometimes be as valuable, or more valuable, than comprehensive advice on what to do.

Abstract

Dangerous Sales Myth 1: “Always be closing.”

If you are always closing, you will accomplish the following undesirable results:

- People won't level with you — They'll just say what they think will get rid of you.
- People won't refer friends to you — Friends don't give friends' names to high-pressure sales sharks.
- People will tune you out — If you don't listen to them, they won't listen to you.
- You won't gain your clients' trust — If you get lucky and someone happens to buy from you, you still won't have the foundation for a relationship.

Myth 2: “Selling requires ‘can't-miss’ closing tricks.”

Myth 3: “You can ‘warm up’ your cold call with mysterious packages.”

Myth 4: “Sending strange business letters works.”

One salesperson sent a prospect a shoe — with the note, “Now that I've got my foot in the door...” Another salesperson sent a target a series of progressively larger balls, one at a time, and a note with the last, big ball asking whether the target had the you-know-what to meet. Another salesperson sent an envelope full of Monopoly money, just as a warm-up to a telephone call. Well, cutesy tricks may get attention, but probably the wrong kind of attention. Don't send weird gifts or strange letters.

Myth 5: “People love it when you pretend you're not a salesperson.”

Myth 6: “Decision-makers adore unannounced visitors.”

Do not initiate a relationship with a lie. Don't pretend to be taking a survey or researching a term paper or doing anything besides what you are doing — trying to sell something. Treat your prospect or potential prospect with honesty and respect. Don't drop in unannounced. Phone. Keep the call short and simple. Identify yourself and ask for an appointment. Don't linger on the phone.

“Don't try to outsmart your prospects and customers.”

“Unless you feel like resurrecting the worst stereotypes of the first half of the twentieth century, you should treat your prospective customer as an individual and ask intelligent questions about what he or she is trying to do.”

“In practical terms, ‘Always Be Closing’ translates as: ‘Ask for the business at every possible opportunity, regardless of how much — or how little — unique information you’ve gathered from the other person.’”

“Don’t bother trying to memorize ‘can’t-miss’ closing tricks.”

“Make a list of 10 questions you would like to ask each prospect you visit.”

“Skip the ‘stare ‘em down’ approach — and spend most of your time in the information-gathering phase.”

Myth 7: “Price always carries the day.”

Price isn’t everything. Price may not even be an important thing. In one survey, buyers said price was the least important of four vendor-selection factors. The other factors dealt with the sales rep’s competence, the ability to buy a total solution to a problem and the quality of the product or service. Low prices do not compensate for incompetence or poor quality.

Myth 8: “Selling effectively means ‘trapping’ the prospect.”

A solid relationship is the most valuable asset a salesperson can have, but high-pressure tactics and cost-cutting offers do not build relationships. How will a customer judge your competence or the quality of your product or service outside of a relationship? Any reasonable customer will view you with cautious skepticism until you prove yourself. So get the relationship started on the right foot. Begin by memorizing and being able to cite half a dozen or so cases in which your company provided exemplary assistance to a customer.

Myth 9: “Never ask a question.”

Myth 10: “Always try to outsmart the buyer.”

Some sales trainers preach manipulation and control. Part of this approach involves asking only questions to which you already have the answers — and using the answers to steer the conversation toward the close. But this is bad advice. To build a relationship, determine what your strategy is for keeping the relationship moving, what your next step is and what your fallback position is. Ask your prospect or contact to do something. It might be as simple as looking at your website — but it should be something that keeps the prospect involved with you. Asking the right questions means not asking the wrong ones. Some salespeople use their own questions as weapons to keep the customer from asking any at all.

Myth 11: “Long, detailed, and/or wacky voice-mail messages are great selling weapons.”

Myth 12: “E-mail is replacing the telephone as a sales tool.”

Voicemail messages should be short and specific to show respect for the customer’s time. Don’t leave long, detailed messages on a voicemail system. Don’t go into detail unless the prospect returns the call. Even then, be thrifty about how much information you divulge. Your objective is a meeting, so don’t make a meeting superfluous. E-mail is a terrible way to try to set up an initial meeting. Use e-mail for follow up. Keep your e-mails short and only send one when you have something to say. Send no unnecessary attachments — most people have a prudent fear of viruses and probably won’t open your attachments anyway.

Myth 13: “Fight, fight, fight when you hear negative responses!”

Myth 14: “The customer is your enemy.”

Even if you disagree with customers, certainly don’t treat them as enemies to overcome. Hostility is a terrible foundation for a relationship. Yet, almost incredibly, sales training programs often encourage salespeople to adopt an aggressive, hostile attitude toward customers. Arguing a customer into submission won’t help you make a sale. Some variations on the theme of “customer as enemy” offer an array of tactics targeting people from various religious or cultural traditions. They offer precise advice on how to sell to Asians, Hispanics, African-Americans and members of other ethnic groups. In addition to being offensive, such tactics are intellectually untenable and counterproductive in practice.

“Contrary to popular opinion, sales is not simply a numbers game. It is, more accurately, a ratios game.”

“Not everyone you have a discussion with is a prospect. Only those people who make a commitment to take some kind of action within a specified time frame should be considered prospects.”

“Keep voicemail messages short, sweet and to the point.”

“Focus on the ‘do,’ not on what you think the ‘need’ is.”

Myth 15: “You can ‘convince’ people to buy from you.”

“Convincing” a prospect to give you business falls into the same general category as fighting the customer. Spend less time convincing and converting, and more time gathering information. The more information you have, the better able you will be to offer a solution that meets the customer’s real need, and that is the path to a trusting relationship.

Myth 16: “Sales is a numbers game.”

This old saw is not quite correct. Numbers do indeed matter in sales — but they fall short of the full truth. Sales success is more about ratios. Three things matter in sales: making the first appointment, closing the sale and negotiating the best terms. After a certain point, making more calls isn’t going to affect those critical items. You are probably making all of the calls you can make. Sales success isn’t a numbers game. Instead, address the ratios. Examine your:

- The ratios of first appointments to calls.
- The ratio of sales to appointments.
- The ratio of income or profit to sales.

Myth 17: “Stare ‘em down.”

Myth 18: “The quicker you make a recommendation, the better.”

Some salespeople seem to think that faster is better when it comes to recommendations and proposals. A natural extension of this logic is that when a customer objects to the recommendation, the sales call becomes a test of how rapidly and completely the salesperson can smash the customer’s objections. One sales approach actually teaches that after salespeople have overcome all objections, they ought to stare at the customer and mentally repeat “Buy...buy...buy” as if the words were a magic spell capable of forcing the customer to buy! Of course, this is utter nonsense.

Instead of focusing on getting the customer to buy, focus on collecting information. Do not propose anything until you are absolutely certain you have all the relevant information. In fact, be reluctant to propose anything. A proposal should be the last thing on your mind.

Myth 19: “People need you.”

Myth 20: “Slumps are inevitable”

Myth 21: “Go it alone.”

Myth 22: “Everyone’s a prospect.”

Everyone is not a prospect. Prospects are people who, in a measurable period of time, will promise to move ahead with you.

Myth 23: “Fast talk carries the day.”

Myth 24: “The ‘killer question’ overcomes any objection.”

Myth 25: “I know everything I need to know.”

You can never know enough. At a minimum, you must be able to answer the following questions about your contact or prospect:

- How did the people to whom you’ve been talking get to this company and to this job?
- What do they do? What are their job responsibilities? What authority do they have?
- Are they decision-makers or not? Don’t ask this question directly — be roundabout. For example, ask why the contact decided to work with a competing vendor or even with a vendor with whom you are not competing. This conversation will provide you

“Tell the truth.
It’s easier to
remember.”

with the information you need to identify and profile the people involved in that decision and to map how power flows in the contact’s organization.

- What is the contact’s plan for resolving the problem that you have come to help resolve? Try to broaden the scope beyond what product or service the contact is going to use. Ask how and why the contact wants to use a product or service at all.
- Why isn’t the contact already using your company’s product or service? Was there a problem in the past?
- Who else, besides you, is the contact going to talk to about this service?
- What are your contact’s personal goals and motivation? To find out, ask probing but general questions: ‘How do you like this place?’, ‘Where do you see yourself in five years?’ and so on.
- What are the organization’s short term, mid term and long term goals or objectives?
- How much time have you invested in this relationship and how does it compare to the average time you invest in a sale? The length of time you invest beyond your average is inversely related to the probability of closing.
- What is the best next step?

Stay on Your “Decision Making Plane”

Think in terms of selling on a “decision making plane.” On this plane, you present, negotiate and close. But above this plane, another level or, perhaps, an entire series of levels exists. Above your level in the corporate hierarchy, you may find that issues involving people or events beyond your contact’s sphere of influence affect your sales effort: a corporate reorganization, an acquisition, a strategic debate or customer issues.

Below your plane, you might find numerous matters that affect your contacts’ relationships with their peers and subordinates. To formulate your approach and plan of action, become informed about everything that is happening above and below your plane. Most importantly, determine whether you are talking to the right person. If not, you must find out who you should contact and how to establish that relationship. Before you advance a proposal:

- Gather all the information you can.
- Review your plan in light of the information.
- Pay particular attention to the people to whom you will present — are they the right people? If not, do not proceed until you identify and contact the right people.
- Review all of the information you have about budget and finances. Ask your contact whether the pricing makes sense. Don’t wait until the customer objects to the price!
- Review timing considerations. Can you make your delivery in the prospect’s time frame? If not, revisit this issue before you formalize your proposal.
- Make sure your contact knows that you plan to close the sale at a particular time. If the contact does not know you’re trying to close, a formal proposal is premature.

“You never
know ‘enough.’”

About The Author

[Stephan Schiffman](#) is president of D.E.I. Management Group, Inc., one of the largest sales training companies in the United States. He is the author of numerous articles and best-selling books, including *Cold Calling Techniques (That Really Work!)* and *The 25 Sales Habits of Highly Effective People*. He appears often on CNBC television.