

Quality Time

To show your salespeople the true value of making sales appointments, teach them to measure the quality vs. quantity of their efforts. By Rick Davis



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Of the many aspects of sales performance that a manager must evaluate, perhaps none is more difficult to measure than “time management.” Seemingly identical performances by salespeople often can yield very different results, and many managers feel stifled when it comes time to discern the reasons. The reality is that time management success is relative not to the *quantity* of effort but rather to the *quality* of those efforts.

The means by which you can improve the quality of your time management is simply to make more appointments. While this is hardly a surprising statement, the reality is that many salespeople, in spite of this obvious knowledge, still spend much of their time driving around showing up at offices and jobsites unannounced.

You probably are aware of this and have fallen prey to the unorganized salesman who “pops in” with little more purpose other than to say he “showed up” (or delivered

donuts). One salesman I recently traveled with made more than 10 stops in a day without having scheduled even one appointment. As you’d expect, we were met with resistance or empty offices, or had short, unproductive meetings; little was accomplished that day. When I asked him why he took this tack, he stated that he didn’t want to give customers a chance to tell him not to visit!

His manager was mystified why his highly active sales performer was not achieving good results. The problem is that the manager was busy measuring the amount of sales calls his salesman was making and not the method by which those calls were being scheduled. Instead of focusing on the quantity of activity, this manager obviously would have gained much greater insight into his employee’s performance had he evaluated the number of *scheduled appointments* relative to his overall activity.

Naturally, our industry is one in which pop-ins and unscheduled appointments will remain common practice. In order to improve the quality of

time, salespeople should not rely on this practice as a crutch, but should strive to schedule better quality time without reducing the quantity of sales calls.

Taking Stock

Every sales call report you have ever seen includes various items of information, including the name of the contact, location, purpose of the call, and even the result of the call. But what these creative writing assignments fail to record is the *method by which the meeting was scheduled*. Gathering this pertinent piece of information will allow managers and salespeople to systematically measure short-term behavior to improve long-term results.

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Sell Sheet

independent study that revealed how waiters can increase their tips and improve customer satisfaction simply by engaging in three behaviors—

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crouching at the table to meet customers at eye level, smiling broadly when greeting customers, and even, at appropriate times, making casual physical contact, e.g., a touch on the shoulder or a handshake. The study determined that waiters' gratuities would increase an average of 10 percent when they engaged in these three behaviors.

The conclusion of this study is note-

worthy in that tips were not guaranteed to rise with every customer, but would create a trend toward more success. It was the long-term effect of the system-

atic short-term behavior that was significant. This approach to client management (i.e., the diner) yielded better long-term results for the sales agent (i.e., the waiter). Most significantly, the power in the information enabled the manager's power of persuasion. How

difficult will it be to persuade a salesperson to engage in desired behaviors when you can document and prove what powerful results will occur?

There is, in fact, a formula we can use that will yield predictable, positive long-term results for salespeople based on short-term behavioral adjustments. In the same way that the restaurant manager molded behavior based on the hard data, a sales manager

can compare sales behaviors with results and conclude which techniques work best.

Consider a sales manager who evaluated call reports of two salespeople. Salesperson A averaged only 24 sales calls a week while Salesperson B consistently had an abundance of activity, averaging more than 30 sales calls a week. But despite having fewer calls overall, Salesperson A had better sales results. Upon further investigation, the sales manager found that Salesperson A scheduled an average of 12 appointments with customers and prospects a week while Salesperson B typically scheduled less than three appointments a week. As expected, Salesperson A had more fruitful dialogues while Salesperson B occasionally lucked out by catching a client at the right time. While both salespeople will have successes and failures in the short term, the relative use of time by Salesperson A is dra-

matically more powerful than that of Salesperson B, and in the long run Salesperson A will achieve better results.

So, in the same way that a restaurant study determined which systematic short-term behaviors would more frequently result in positive long-term results, we can apply a systematic approach to measuring short-term sales activity on a relative basis to predict long-term success.

1. Define the relative quality of your time in the field. My system is to rate meetings in three categories—appointments, warm calls, and cold calls. An *appointment* is a scheduled meeting at a specific time. A *warm call* is a visit to an office or jobsite that is “expected” but without a specific time being designated. For example, a superintendent might say, “I’ll be at the site until 10 o’clock, so try to get me before then.” A *cold call* is simply a stop-in

in which the customer or prospect has no warning of the visit.

2. Count up and categorize all your stops in a week. For example, Salesperson A’s 24 sales calls were made up of 12 appointments, seven warm calls, and five cold calls, while Salesperson B rarely scheduled an appointment. Any simplistic system will do, as long as the salespeople are willing to be honest about their records.

3. Evaluate your results. Most people would predict that, on average, appointments yield better results than warm calls, which in turn yield better results than cold calls. But measure the results for yourself. Over time you will see that salespeople with more appointments demonstrate noticeable increases in sales results. You will most likely discover that your results improve as

you increase your number of appointments—and make the job easier and more fun to boot!

Rather than enforcing rules and regulations on your sales team with no explanation, utilize the power of data to show them why certain techniques work better than others. Once they see the beneficial results of making

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appointments laid out with their own sales numbers over the course of a few weeks, they will be able to see the value of quality vs. quantity and will be more willing to adjust their selling strategies for the betterment of themselves and the bottom line. ■