

Oh The Weather Outside Is Frightful

As I write this in late December, the weather outside is lovely...in Cary, NC. Denver, however, is experiencing it's second major storm of the winter, and there's sure to be more miserable weather in everyone's future. The reason I'm writing about weather today is a comment by one of my Denver-area sales coaching clients. "I guess this will be another short day," she told me this morning. "I'll probably stay until noon and make some phone calls, but after that I'll be going home myself."

This is an employee, by the way, not the owner of the printshop, and the owner is planning on keeping the shop open all day. "All of my production people made it in," he told me, "and the forecast for later in the day is actually better than the conditions we have right now. I figure we'll just work through the worst of it and give the plows a chance to clean things up for the ride home."

When I asked him if it bothered him that his salesperson was planning on working only half a day, he said: "Well, I really don't want her to be out there driving during the day. I guess she might as well go home. Why, do you think I should put her to work here in the shop?"

"No," I replied, "I think *she* should find a few productive things to do and put in a full day, just like the rest of your staff. And I'm not talking about working in production. I can think of at least three things she can do today that will help you to increase sales. I also think she should hear this from you." (It's worth noting, I think, that I was hired to coach this salesperson because she's an underachiever, and part of the problem is that the owner has been letting her set her own schedule and hoping that she'll manage herself. Part of my coaching plan is to get the owner more involved with his salesperson.)

First Thing

"What does her desk look like?" I asked.

"Oh, like a typical salesperson's desk, I guess," he answered.

"Well," I said, "that means about half of what's on her desk is just taking up space, and half of the rest of it is work she should be dealing with today. The other half is stuff she's at least a day behind on—and some of that is opportunity in danger of being lost! Let's sit her down at her desk with instructions to identify which is which and deal with it accordingly."

I'm OK with a little bit of clutter on a salesperson's desk. Maybe a better way to say that is that I'm willing to trade a little bit of organizational time for the same amount of selling time. But if we have some time that's not going to be used as selling time—like a snowy or rainy or too-hot-to-go-outside afternoon—I want organizational time to be a higher priority than going home!

By the way, I hear a lot of the too-hot-to-go-outside excuse from salespeople in Arizona and Florida every summer. Interestingly, it's always from underachievers, never from top performers.

Second Thing

Another of the things I've been working on with this salesperson is to think beyond the next contact with her customers and prospects. I wrote about this concept in *Quick Printing* a while back (Be Specific, QP, June 2006), and it represents a big change for most salespeople, whose basic selling strategy is much more reactive than proactive. The most common obstacle to implementing this new strategy seems to be finding the time to think about individual prospects and customers and developing the appropriate SPMP (Specific Prospect Marketing Plan) or SCMP (Specific Customer Marketing Plan). Again, I'm willing to trade a little bit of organizational time for the same amount of selling time. But again, if we have some time that's not going to be used as selling time, it only makes sense to use it for organizational purposes!

By the way, the top performers never seem to have trouble finding the time to keep themselves organized. Some of that may be because better organized people have a tendency to be top performers. Another part, though, is that top performers tend to work longer hours. They get organized early in the morning, or maybe early in the evening. As one top performer once told me: "I figure I have 8-9 selling hours every day—the hours that people are there to be sold to!—and I need 1-2 organizational hours every day to make the most of the selling hours. Most days that only adds up to about 9 hours, and I think that's a reasonable amount of work to make the kind of money I want to make."

I'm sure you'll agree, that's a really good attitude. The question is, why would you hire anyone *without* that sort of attitude to be your salesperson?

Third Thing

Part of that particular top performer's organizational time involves researching potential customers. "I try to 'look at' 10 new companies every week," she told me. "I usually find the companies in the newspaper somewhere, either seeing their ads or reading about them in the Business section. Then I Google them to see what else I can learn from their websites or anything else written about them. I typically spend 2-3 hours a week doing all of that, usually from home in the evening."

OK, if my Denver salesperson has a "free" afternoon, I think spending some of it adding to a list of potential customers would be a far better use of that time than simply going home.

One More Thing

Here's another possibility. Do you have a mailing list that does not have the names of specific contacts? It's been pretty well established that mailing to "Printing Buyer" is a good way to get your mailers thrown away. Assuming that you do have names, are they correct and current?

Another good use of a salesperson's time on a really-bad-weather day might be to "prove" the mailing list, building a script and making phone calls to get current names and titles and deleting companies whose phone number is "no longer in service." That's not as directly relevant to a salesperson's job description as my first three suggestions, perhaps, but I think it's more likely to help you make money than having him/her work in production. It's certainly better than going home early!

All things being equal, I like salespeople with a "mailman" attitude—neither rain nor snow nor sleet nor heat will keep them from making their appointed rounds. I recognize, though, that extreme weather can make it dangerous to do the outside part of the job. Let's all remember that there's more to the job than the outside part, and that it's supposed to be a full-time job!