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Advanced Sales & Sales Management Training & Consulting

“Are You Healthy Enough to Pass a Sales Physical?”

The Six Critical Tests That Most Contribute to Your
Personal Selling Success

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So how healthy are you? Want to find out by completing a simple six question test of your selling skills and effectiveness?

As a sales and sales management consultant and trainer for over 30 years I’ve been able to observe and evaluate the skills and effectiveness of thousands of experienced sales professionals. These simple questions incorporate the six most critical skill sets that contribute to an experienced sales pro’s long term success and profitability.

You can be good as a sales person even without effective answers to these questions.....but you will have very low odds of becoming one of the best sales professionals who out-perform...and out-earn everyone else.

In this advanced skills white paper you will first have an opportunity to write down your answers to each of these six critical skill questions. We will then focus the rest of this paper comparing your responses to the thousands of sales pro’s I’ve observed as well as offer some immediately-implementable ideas to help you increase your selling success.

Ready to Evaluate Your Personal Skills? (Before You Learn All The Answers?)

Before reading any further I encourage you to write down your answers to each of these six questions. They are simple in nature, only require brief answers, but be warned the vast majority of experienced sales professionals get less than two of these six questions correct.

We’re assuming you are an experienced, fairly successful sales professional who has been selling for several years. So as a sales pro write down your responses to the following six questions:

Question #1 – Write down the steps of a sales call. Write down the steps of a sales call that you go through whether you are calling on a new prospect or one of your best accounts.

Question #2 – Write down the steps you are currently using to maintain and grow your best accounts. What are the steps or activities from January 1st to December 31st that you have planned and will complete for your best and most important customers?

Question #3 – Write down the steps you go through when selling to a new customer. What are the steps or activities you have planned and will complete from the time you identify a new prospect until the time you close on the first significant sale (even though the relationship will continue)?

Question #4 – Write down the major points or ideas that best describe your strategic message of competitive uniqueness. List the major ideas or bullets you would answer a prospect or customer who asks you “Why, based on all the competitive alternatives available to me do I want to buy from you?”

Question #5 – Write down the major points or ideas your toughest competitors say when asked: “Why, based on all the alternatives available to me, do I want to buy from you?” What are your strongest competitors saying when that same prospect also asks them why they would want to buy from them?

Question #6 – How Coachable are you? And Are You Good Enough To Get Better? As an experienced sales professional, do you have a sales coach who is working with you right now to improve your selling skills and strategic direction? We’re not talking about “transactional” coaching where they are providing you with special pricing, exception handling, expediting of orders or problem solving...but coaching to help you become stronger and more effective as a sales professional.

So Let’s Talk about How You Did with Your Answers....And If You’re Good Enough to Get Better

These six simple questions cover the major skills, tools and awareness that are necessary to win in today’s hypercompetitive market. Just being good (and competitive) will not win you a lot of business...you have to be better, and more aware than anyone else going after that same business.

How Did You Do with Question #1 – “Write down the steps of a sales call?”

Could you write down the steps of a sales call? And how long did it take you to write all of the steps down? The vast majority of sales professionals cannot write down the steps of a sales call in a minute or less.

Why a one minute deadline? If it takes you longer than one minute to write down the steps then it is likely you either don’t know them having never been through any “steps” training, feel intuitively that each sales call is completely different so you don’t need any kind of standard steps or just sell with a “go in and wing it” style of selling. None of these reasons will generate any kind of consistent results in a sales territory!

The lack of strong foundation selling skills is a major missing piece in most otherwise experienced and successful sales reps abilities. The majority of sales professionals learned how to sell by trial and error. No training, no coaching, no direction, just raw experience trying to figure out how to sell and succeed on their own.

After several years, the sales professionals who survive are able to build a strong enough experience base and establish their customer territory.

But because of the lack of training and structure, their selling skills are based on “gut feel” and intuition. Intuitive sales people can be successful. But they tend to also lack consistency in their skills. On some calls they are brilliant. But on others...they are not as effective as they could be or they do not accomplish all that they could on their calls.

Additional Immediately-Implementable Ideas

1) Pay attention to your steps and processes of how you sell. A way to profoundly increase your overall selling success is to decide to build and reinforce your foundation selling skills by adding more structure and consistency to your daily selling efforts. Take a few extra minutes in your car before you go into your next sales call to think about the steps you plan to go through when in front of this next customer.

2) Observe other sales people selling. It's much easier to see and understand the steps of selling when you are observing them in others. Watch someone go through a sales call. Can you see and identify each step they went through? Any ideas that you would offer to make that call even better?

And if you want to see how you did...

The answers to the “steps of a sales call” are: 1) Lower Resistance 2) Ask questions 3) Present your solutions 4) Ask for the order 5) Agree to your next contract.

How Did You Do with Question #2 - “Write down the steps you are currently using to maintain and grow your best accounts?”

What are the steps or activities from January 1st to December 31st that you have planned and will complete for your best and most important customers? Most sales professionals have no idea what they will do to maintain and grow their best accounts other than reactively showing up every so many weeks to see if they are happy, need anything and to respond to all their administrative and technical questions.

What kinds of items did you list for your best accounts? Most only list the reactive activities of identifying how many times they plan to call on the account and also listing the major scheduled events such as trade shows, social events and major purchasing activities.

But how many proactive activities did you list in your plan? What are your plans to identify and initiate new application selling efforts? How are you working to get “higher, wider and deeper” within your best accounts to increase their stability and commitment to you?

How are you using senior management and technical experts as sales tools (both “face-to-face” and by phone)? Have you identified your next major application/new product/growth opportunity you are working on? And if you do have a new application opportunity identified what are your stepped plans to make this happen and what else do you need from your company and management to make this happen?

Are you bringing your best customers new ideas or are you waiting for them to ask you for help? How often are you initiating conversations on how your customer could save money or become more efficient (or effective) in the use of your company's products or services?

How often are you also offering ideas on how they could proactively grow their company sales or profitability based on their usage of your products/services?

Additional Immediately-Implementable Ideas

1) Offer your best customers a “free day of research.” This would be a full day (or partial day with your smaller accounts) of you and preferably someone else from your company researching how your customer is utilizing what they are already buying from you. You would want to talk to everyone who orders, handles or uses what you are selling to them. Are they dealing with you and your company in the most efficient and effective manner? Are there changes either they or you could initiate that would make things easier, cheaper or better buying from you? Are they having any problems with quality or communications? This is not a day to sell but a day to reinforce the value and service you bring to their company. You want to impress them with your interest to insure they are getting the most value and benefit buying from you.

2) Always be talking, and selling, multiple applications (or products) ahead at all of your accounts. You always want to be setting up your next application/product sale at the same time you are working to sell and implement your current application/product. The best sales professionals see selling as an ongoing process, not just a series of stand-alone product/service sales to the same account.

3) Plan out your entire year of support for your best accounts. How do you plan to support and grow your best accounts this next year? How many moves ahead are you thinking with your accounts? Not thinking enough moves ahead in your selling process is another common problem with even the most experienced sales reps. Salespeople tend to get lulled into a comfort level of only needing to focus on their next sales call on an account. Very few salespeople think and plan multiple moves ahead in their selling process.

Work with your sales manager or coach taking one account at a time to think, and plan what the next several moves ahead need to be. What kind of social functions (like golf outings) do you want to hold? What kinds of technical expert visits or training? How many executive calls do members of your management team need to make on this account? And what kinds of sales and customer service management calls do you need to conduct so your customer is impressed with how hard you are working as their vendor.

Having to answer extensive questions about your accounts, your plans and how you see achieving your goals is one of the best ways for you to be guided into the “multiple steps ahead” selling philosophy. And one of the most effective questions for your manager/coach to keep asking is “And then what?”

This is also the most irritating question a manager can keep asking their sales team. Let’s say you are telling your manager/coach about a new prospect. Your manager/coach asks you what you plan to accomplish on your next sales call on that account. After you answer they then ask you “And then what?” This will force the conversation to now take on a “multiple moves ahead” flavor.

Remember that the job of a sales manager or coach is to help you see and achieve more than you would if you were just left alone. Asking questions is one of the best ways for them to help you see further than you can on your own.

How Did You Do with Question #3 – “Write down the steps you go through when selling to a new customer?”

What are the steps or activities you have planned and will complete from the time you identify a new prospect until the time you close on the first significant sale (even though the relationship will continue)?

Like the challenges of selling to an existing account, even the most experienced sales professionals tend to only think one move ahead when selling new accounts.

Sales reps also tend to be very reactive when selling to new customers. How many times have you watched a sales person sell to a new account by first getting their attention and then asking a few questions to understand their current needs and usage of your competitor’s products/services?

Next they do an “information dump” where they present everything they have and deliver all their literature and samples in a single delivery. They then issue a proposal much too early using it as a qualifier and/or attention getter instead of delaying it so their proposal can be used to confirm what has already been proposed and sold. They keep asking what else you can demonstrate or show them every time they get in front of their customer. But they wind up cutting their price to win the business because of competitive pressures exerted by the customer/prospect to drive their price down.

Additional Immediately-Implementable Ideas

1) Start identifying and tracking your current new business selling process. To improve your ability to win new business you need to first understand and track what you are currently doing.

How many sales calls, on average, does it take you to win a new account?

What are the steps you went through to win new business? What additional steps, or efforts, would help you increase your uniqueness and competitive advantage to your new customers? How consistently are you actually following these new business selling steps you have identified?

Are you consistently selling new business with minor variations of the same stepped process or are you approaching each new account as a completely new, and unique selling effort?

You cannot answer these questions, and you sure can’t improve your steps of selling a new account until you actually start tracking and identifying the actual steps you already are going through. The vast majority of experienced sales professionals cannot write down the steps they are currently going through to win new business.

2) Design the stepped selling “best practices” you believe will generate the greatest probability of winning new business. Work on identifying and designing the best steps of selling a new account. Once you can identify what you are currently doing on a consistent basis to win new business you are ready to work to improve both the efficiency and effectiveness of your new account selling efforts.

Each client will be different in some way but you want to identify the overall steps you see occurring. Also work to see if you can increase the consistency of your new account selling efforts to allow you to more closely, and consistently follow your selling plans.

This is a great time to get the input and suggestions of others within your sales team. What has proven to work best in the past? Getting input from others will allow you to take advantage of the research, experience and awareness of your entire sales team. The best new account sales plans are ones that are constantly under evaluation and being improved and/or strengthened on a regular basis. You want to keep detailed notes of how you actually sold the new account and how well you were able to follow your new account selling plan. Then meet with your manager (and hopefully others from your sales team) to debrief on each new win or loss to evaluate how well your stepped plan worked and to identify ways it can be expanded or improved.

And your answer to Question #3? There is no one right or wrong answer to this third question. One answer is...

A Simple "ID to Close" New Business Selling Process:

1st – SET UP & POSITION - Positioning yourself, your company, your competitive position and your "higher priced but lower total cost" philosophy. This step sets buyer up to better understand why they would want to buy from you.

2nd – RESEARCH/POSITIONING - During your traditional questioning you also work to learn more than your competitors through more extensive research. Goal is to use your research time to get connected higher, wider and deeper than your competitors meeting more people and learning more about what they really want and need. Your research time is also a time to validate your past (or promised) support and working relationship proving how you, your company, your approach and your philosophy are all important and critical to that customer.

3rd – PACKAGING AND POSITIONING OF PROPOSAL - You want to work with your buyer to assemble the components of your proposal to fit their requirements and size expectations. Never deliver a proposal to a buyer that contains new information or surprises. Review major proposal points and pricing in advance so you can defend or adjust what you are proposing while you can still make changes and adjustments.

4th - JUSTIFY AND PROVE YOUR "HIGHER PRICE - LOWER TOTAL COST" PHILOSOPHY - You now need to prove the value in a buyer paying more from you. How are you going to prove you are a "higher price but lower total cost?" Walk your buyer through the ROI (Return on Investment) of - How does the multiple-stepped plan or supporting tools need to be added or adjusted to improve our chances of winning in the future?

5th – NEGOTIATED AGREEMENT - Final demands, adjustments and concessions to win the business. The highest margins (and least amount of price cutting) will always go to the vendor with the strongest value, provable message of uniqueness, and lowest total perceived cost.

6th – POST SALES SUPPORT - Where you deliver, install or begin providing your products/services. This is also the time to identify and begin positioning your next application solution selling opportunity as well as work to get higher, wider and deeper within your new customer's organization. What can your team do to so impress and amaze this buyer that they want to do more business with you in the future?

7th - EVALUATE, ADJUST AND PREPARE FOR YOUR NEXT SELLING CYCLE - How does your multiple-stepped plan or supporting tools need to be added or adjusted to improve your chances of winning in the future?

How Did You Do with Question #4 – “Write down the major points or ideas that best describe your strategic message of competitive uniqueness?”

How did you do listing the major ideas or bullets you would use to answer a prospect or customer who asks you “Why, based on all the competitive alternatives available to me do I want to buy from you?”

The lack of a strong strategic message of uniqueness is one of the most common sales exposures in business today. If you want to test how big a problem this is for you and your company consider asking your fellow sales reps, technical or customer support staff and any managers who interact with customers how they would answer this question.

You will likely find their answers are either generic (high quality product, strong level of support, competitive pricing and you get me/us) or their answers will be all over the place with no consistency.

“Why, based on all the competitive alternatives available to me, do I want to buy from you?” Asking your team to write down their three strongest bullet point answers to this question will probably generate a wide range of responses as well as a large percentage of answers that are also competitively generic.

How many members of your company communicate with your prospects and customers? Look at the exposure you have if several members of your team communicate with a prospect/customer and each provides a different answer to this question.

Additional Immediately-Implementable Ideas

1) Meet with your entire sales team and begin defining how to best answer the question “Why, based on all of the competitive alternatives available to me, do I want to buy from you?” Make sure your message is “you the customer” focused.

Instead of only talking about you and your company. Also try applying as many of the “Four Core Values” terms as possible (“lower my risk,” make my life or work easier,” increase my profitability or lower my total costs” and “increase my competitive advantage”). A strong message will be visual, simple, will include your toughest competition and can be restated in two minutes or less.

How Did You Do With Question #5 – “Write down the major points or ideas your toughest competitors say when asked: ‘Why, based on all the alternatives available to me, do I want to buy from you?’”

So how much did you know about what are your strongest competitors are saying when that same prospect also asks them why they would want to buy from them? Improving your competitive awareness begins with making sure we are both talking about the same types of competitive awareness. How strong is your competitive awareness?

There are three levels of competitive awareness.

The first level of competitive awareness is “Product Knowledge Competitive Awareness.” This level of competitive awareness is based on you understanding your competitor’s products/services and how they compare to your offerings so that you can talk to your customers/prospects by saying “Ours are better than theirs because...” Over 90% of all experienced sales professionals have a strong level of “product knowledge competitive awareness.”

The second level of competitive awareness is “Pricing Competitive Awareness” - This level of competitive awareness is based on your ability to predict and understand your competitors pricing and discounting strategies. When a prospect tells you their current buying volumes from your competition can you guess what kind of price they are paying? Approximately 70% of all experienced sales professionals have at least some level of “pricing competitive awareness.”

The third and final level of competitive awareness is “Message Competitive Awareness” - This level of competitive awareness is based on your ability to predict and understand what your competitors are saying when a prospect asks them “Why based on all the competitive alternatives available to me, do I want to buy from you?” Less than 5% of all experienced sales professionals can accurately describe how their competitors are explaining their message positioning or value differentiation to a prospect.

Consider the last several competitive conversations you have had within your sales team. Where was the focus of the competitive information they shared and discussed? The majority of experienced sales professionals still tend to only talk, and understand their competitor’s technical product/service levels and pricing/discounting activities. They understand what the competition does, they just don’t understand how their competitors are explaining what they do and why they are unique.

Consider how significant this lack of any “message competitive awareness” could be to your selling efforts. How do you know if you are saying anything unique if you first don’t know what the rest of your competitors are saying when they present to this same prospect/customer?

Someone once said, *“If I know more about you than you know about me I have the advantage. But if I know more about you than you know about yourself then I have complete control.”* How much proactive control do you have selling against your competitors?

Additional Immediately-Implementable Ideas

There are numerous ways for you to learn about your competition and still be ethical and professional in your efforts. There is no need, or value, in either spying or lying to collect this type of competitive information. To learn more about your competitor's messages of uniqueness and market positioning consider:

1) Do your homework. Review any printed materials, advertisements, trade show booths or industry articles they have published. Conduct regular internet searches on your competitors. A lot of companies believe in the benefits of posting their entire messaging and positioning on their websites. You might also discover articles or interviews their senior management has produced.

2) Ask any of your customers who buy from both you and your competitors what they like most about your competitor. Also ask them what they see your market niche (or uniqueness) is compared to your competitors'. You might also ask your more loyal customers if they have ever talked to your competitors and what they liked most about them compared to you.

Another great question is to ask "What do you wish we were doing more of that you see our competitors doing?" It is important to only ask positive questions if you want your customer to comfortably answer your questions. Remember that anything negative you say or imply about your competition will reflect more negatively on you, the asker, than it will on your competitor being talked about.

3) Start prospecting your competitor's best or "showcase" accounts. A "showcase" account is a buyer who allows you to parade your other prospects through their business to demonstrate what a great job they have done for this customer. These types of "showcase" buyers also tend to talk to prospects by telephone to share their satisfaction with this competitor.

Prospecting on these accounts can have several benefits but will probably not involve you getting their business. You will most likely have very low odds of winning their business but the excuses you get from these "showcase" buyers as to why they are not interested will also be the same message they share with any prospect who calls them for a reference.

Once you have learned the messaging and positioning of your competitors it is now important to go back and revisit your own message of competitive uniqueness to see if it can be strengthened or at least positioned to defend yourself against any of your competitors market positioning efforts.

How Did You Do With Question #6 - "How Coachable are you? And Are You Good Enough To Get Better?"

As an experienced, sales professional, do you have a sales coach that is working with you right now to improve your selling skills and strategic direction? We're not talking about "transactional" coaching where they are providing you with special pricing, exception handling, expediting of orders or problem solving...but coaching to help you become stronger and more effective as a sales professional.

So Are You Good Enough To Get Better?

I have given this six questioned test to thousands of experienced sales professionals. How did you do with these six questions? Most experienced pro's get only one or two questions correct. I always ask them what they plan to do with all of this new information. The sad part is that the majority do absolutely nothing to change or work to improve their skills.

Thank you for working through this advanced sales white paper. I hope you found the ideas of value and of interest to try in your territory. I'd love to hear your feedback and suggestions on what you thought of this report and what you decided to change, improve or implement.

- You can reach me at jim@pancero.com.
- Connect with me on [LinkedIn](#) [Twitter](#) and [Google+](#)

So now, the only question left to answer is....we know you're good...are you now good enough to get better?

Enjoy the process!
Jim Pancero
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