

The Power of a Process for Increasing Sales

HOW TO SAVE TIME, REPLICATE YOUR SUCCESS
AND IMPROVE YOUR ODDS OF
CLOSING EVERY DEAL

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The Power of a Process for Increasing Sales

What would you think of a surgeon who told you after he had just performed surgery on you that he didn't have a process or system for the operation; that he just improvised? How would you feel? The first thing I would do is check to see if he fixed the right organ, joint or limb. Then I would probably lie awake at night wondering if there were going to be complications. If I ever needed additional surgery, you can be certain I would find another surgeon.

Wouldn't you feel that way about any professional? After all, accountants have systems for completing tax returns. Lawyers have systems for creating contracts and documenting business deals. Financial planners have systems for developing investment strategies and financial plans. I wouldn't be comfortable using the services of any professional that doesn't use some kind of system in his professional work. Systems not only save time for the busy professional, they ensure a consistent level of quality for clients. If respected professionals have a system for what they do, why should it be any different for the professional salesperson or for the business owner who is fulfilling the sales role?

You may not think this is a fair analogy. After all, surgeons are involved in matters of life and death. But is anything more important than sales to the health of a small business? Maybe if we took a more professional approach to sales, more small businesses would survive.

To be successful at selling you need a system, a process for selling that ensures you do the right things in the right way every time you are in front of prospects. A selling system is an overall strategy and set of techniques designed to ensure that you handle every buyer-seller interaction in the optimum manner. Our selling system is called the Client Builder Selling Process.

In my sales training workshops, I often have the participants do an exercise that illustrates the benefit of using a system. The participants are given a piece of paper with the numbers 1 through 100 randomly placed in rows across the page. They are then asked to circle the numbers in sequence starting with the number one. They are given 30 seconds to find and circle as many numbers as they can in sequence. On average, most people find and circle about 10.

They are then told the secret for improving their score. They are given a new copy with the same set of numbers and asked to fold it into four quadrants. They are shown how the 1 is in the upper left quadrant, the 2 is in the upper right quadrant, the 3 is in the lower left, and the 4 is in the lower right quadrant. They go back to the upper left quadrant to find the 5, the upper right to find the 6 and so on. Once again, they are given 30 seconds to find and circle as many of the numbers in sequence as possible. Using this rudimentary system, their results improve dramatically. The participants are usually able to double or even triple their original score.

Here are the top ten benefits of using a system for selling:

1. It saves time.
2. You make fewer mistakes.
3. You can readily recognize and correct the mistakes you do make.
4. You can learn from your mistakes.
5. You can work at avoiding these mistakes.
6. You can replicate the things that you do right.
7. You always know where you stand in the process, and have a greater ability to correct course if you get off track.
8. It increases your level of competence and confidence.
9. You increase your ability to stay focused and on track during the appointment.
10. It gives you and your colleagues, a common language with which to share ideas, analyze past sales calls, and strategize upcoming appointments.

The Seven Steps in the Client Builder Selling Process

Our selling system is comprised of seven steps separated by what are called “Advance Agreements”. Each step is critical to the next and they must be performed in sequence.

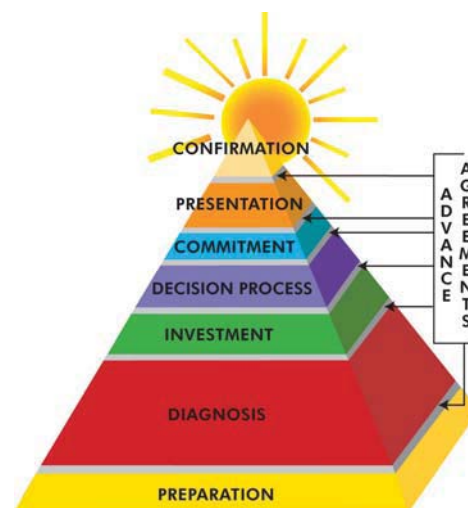
Here is an overview of the seven steps in the sequence they are performed.

Step 1 – Preparation

The objective of the preparation step is to gather information about your market and

the individual prospects within it so as to know who to target and how to engage them in meaningful conversations about the problems you can help them solve or the opportunities you can help them capture. In the preparation step you also want to learn as much as you can about the people you will be calling on, the companies they work for, and the industries they are in. Today, your prospects have neither the time nor the patience to educate you about these things. With so much information readily available on the Internet, they expect you to come to them fully prepared.

The most important aspect of the preparation step is learning about your customers and their common complaints. Your common complaints are what you will use to jog your prospects’ memories and get them talking about the problems you can help them solve so that you can quickly determine whether they are a good fit for your product or service. When prospects are not readily aware of their pain or don’t realize that solutions exist for the challenges they face, you often have to chum the water to get the conversation moving in the right direction. Your common complaints are what you use to get your diagnosis started.



Step 2 – Diagnosis

The objective of the diagnosis step is to determine whether your buyers have “pain” – a compelling, personal, emotional reason to change what they have been doing or whom they have been buying from. First you must ascertain whether your prospect has a problem you can help solve or an opportunity you can help capture. Second you must determine if your prospect acknowledges this problem or opportunity and feels compelled to take action.

The diagnosis step is also where you uncover the buyer’s concept of a solution. By the time you reach the end of the diagnosis step you should understand how to turn your prospect’s problems into a plan of action to solve them. It is also where the prospect comes to believe that you truly understand his problem. It’s where the relationship is built. The sale is usually won or lost in the diagnosis step.

The secret to doing an effective diagnosis is to listen and ask questions. This requires skill and patience. The right questions cause *prospects to uncover their own pain* and move from an intellectual state to an emotional one.

Too often, salespeople attempt to fix their prospect’s problems too soon. They find out *what* a prospect’s problem is and immediately offer a solution. They learn of the prospect’s symptoms and jump at the chance to provide a solution without fully understanding the cause and impact of the problems they have identified. Before a prospect is ready to make a buying decision, the salesperson needs to find out not only *what* the prospect’s problem is, but also *why* it is a problem. This moves the conversation closer to the emotional pain that will cause a

prospect to take action. Your goal is to help your prospect paint a mental picture of the consequences of not taking action. The greater the consequences, the greater your prospect’s sense of urgency.

Step 3 - Investment

The goal of the investment step is to uncover whether your prospects are able and willing to make the necessary investment in terms of time, money and effort to fix the problems you helped them uncover in the diagnosis step.

The investment your prospects will have to make to acquire your solutions often involves more than just money. Your prospects will often be required to invest time and energy in implementing your solution and endure the inconvenience of making a change. Sometimes, this means your prospects have to relinquish the relationships they have with your competition and accept the risk that you will not make their situation any better than it currently is. Before you leave this step, you need to be certain that, from your prospects’ perspective, the value you’ll be bringing is worth the investment they will have to make.

Step 4 - Decision Process

Although the questions asked in decision process step are simple, they are often overlooked. As a result, salespeople frequently find themselves presenting to people who do not have the authority to make a decision. That’s because this step is where prospects deliver the second most often told lie to salespeople - “I make the decisions here.” (Of course, the biggest lie is “Your price is too high!”) Therefore, it is especially important in the decision process

step to double-check your prospects' answers to your questions.

There are five fundamental questions that need to be answered in the decision process step:

1. *Who* makes these kinds of decisions?
2. *How* do they go about making these kinds of decisions?
3. *When* do they foresee making such a decision?
4. *Why* is that date important?
5. *What* proof do they need in order to make that decision?

The answers to these questions determine what you need to do next in the process. If you discover there are additional decision makers, you need to make arrangements to meet them so that you can diagnose the pain and discuss the investment required from their perspective. If the person you are talking to is the only decision maker, you want finalize what he will need to see or hear from you to make a final decision and establish the commitment.

Step 5 - Commitment

Salespeople typically invest lots of time, energy and money in the preparation of proposals and presentations to prospects. Before investing the time and effort necessary to prepare a proposal or deliver a presentation, you want to make certain your prospects are committed - committed to solving the problems you helped them uncover in the diagnosis step, committed to investing the time, money and effort needed to gain your solution, and committed to making a decision in the manner and timeframe you discussed with them. If they are not committed, you don't want to spend

any more of your time, money or energy pursuing them until they are.

If you present your solutions without this commitment, you are at serious risk of becoming an unpaid consultant and doing a lot of work for nothing. You also run the risk of losing your leverage, which thrusts you into pursuit mode. You want to make sure every aspect of your diagnosis, the necessary investment, and their decision process has been thoroughly uncovered and discussed and that both parties are in agreement about what will happen once you deliver your demonstration or proposal in the presentation step.

Another name for this commitment is what I call the "preposal." In big ticket, long cycle sales where a written proposal is required, the "preposal" should also be in writing. In smaller ticket, shorter selling situations, the "preposal" can be delivered verbally. Regardless of what form it's in, the objective of this step is always the same: to co-build a plan that both parties are comfortable with and committed to and that defines exactly how to bring the sales process to closure in a mutually agreed upon timeframe.

Closing a sale is not about wrestling your prospect to the mat at the end of a long selling cycle. It's about developing a strong agreement in advance of the proposal that a decision will be made in accordance with a specific plan. The commitment or "preposal" lays out that plan.

Step 6 - Presentation

Your objective in the presentation step is to bring the deal to outcome by delivering to your prospects the proof they need to make a decision in the manner discussed in the decision process step and agreed upon in the

commitment. Believe it or not, the presentation step is often the shortest step in the entire process. The decision to buy is typically made long before you even get to this step and oftentimes a presentation or a proposal isn't even necessary.

Your presentation should only include solutions to the pain or opportunity you uncovered in your diagnosis, at a price or commitment consistent with what your prospect is willing to invest, presented in a manner consistent with how your prospect makes decisions. Done right, the proposal itself should be nothing more than a summary of what you and your prospect have already agreed to in the commitment step.

Don't rush into the presentation step. Spend the bulk of your time uncovering the essential problems and concerns of your prospects and discussing the investment they will have to make and how they make those decisions. As I mentioned earlier, the sale is usually won or lost in the diagnosis step not in the presentation.

Step 7 - Confirmation

After you win the sale you still have one more step in the process - the Confirmation step. The goal of the confirmation step is to strengthen your new agreement and eliminate buyer's remorse by giving your prospects the opportunity to back out while you are still there. There is nothing worse than closing a deal only to have the competition take it back or to have some hidden concern prevent the prospect from taking action.

After making a buying decision, everybody experiences buyer's remorse to some degree. This can be exacerbated by your competitor who will do whatever it takes to win back

the business; or somebody else in your prospect's organization who is impacted by the decision to change, prefers the status quo, and consequently attempts to sabotage the organization's decision to change.

The time to deal with this buyer's remorse is when your prospects are still in front of you. If you are going to lose the sale, the time to discover this is now. In the confirmation step, your job is to raise any issue that could potentially kill this deal and rehearse your new customers on how they will handle it when talking to your competition or others within their organization.

The confirmation step is also the time to set the expectations for how you will begin working together. Discuss what could go wrong and how you will handle it if it does. At the very least, establish an agreement in advance as to how often you should meet to discuss the work you are doing or the effectiveness of the product so you can ensure you are meeting your clients' expectations.

Finally, this is the point at which you want to establish an understanding with your new clients that your primary means of growing your business is through referrals and introductions. This may not be the time to ask for them, because you have not delivered any value yet. However, you at least want to discuss when it would be appropriate for you to ask for their help in meeting other people they know who might also benefit from your products and services.

Advance Agreements – The Mortar that Holds the Process Together

The entire sales process is held together by a series of small "Advance Agreements". An advance agreement is a

specific understanding between you and your prospects as to what will take place at each step in the sales process. The purpose of an advance agreement is to manage expectations. When you fail to manage your prospect's expectations, both of you are likely to feel pressure.

Pressure is caused when there is surprise – surprise that comes from the prospect doing something you didn't expect or you doing something the prospect didn't expect. The way to eliminate surprise is to set clear expectations of what will happen in advance.

It is easier than you think. One of Stephen Covey's favorite sayings is "begin with the end in mind." When you open a sales call you should begin by establishing an agreement with your prospect on three things: (1) the amount of **time** you will spend together; (2) what you plan to accomplish during that time together (in other words, the **agenda**); and (3) the **potential outcomes** for that meeting or the decision you will you make at the end of your time together.

Similarly, at the end of every sales call, you should proactively set the expectations for your next interaction. Once again, your advance agreement should establish the (a) timeframe, (b) agenda, and (c) the acceptable outcomes of your next call.

Your agreement must be mutual. You cannot force your agenda on a prospect, but you can certainly make a suggestion that is in everyone's best interests. Just as you shouldn't ask your prospect to make a buying decision before he is ready, don't let your prospect set an agenda that puts you in a subservient position or that could potentially be detrimental to you or him in the long run.

The advance agreement is the framework that keeps the selling process on track and prevents any surprises. It even works with closing. If prospects know in advance that they will be expected to make a "yes" or "no" decision at the conclusion of your final meeting, it eliminates any surprise or pressure that comes from your attempt to finalize the transaction. It also eliminates the need for tricky, manipulative closes. Your prospects know in advance that they are expected to make a decision. All you have to do is ask for it.

Three Simple Rules for Following the Client Builder Selling Process

There are three simple rules for following a process for selling:

1. Never skip a step to get to any other step.
2. Make sure you and your prospect are in the same step at the same time.
3. Don't leave a step until you are certain you have completed that step.

The magic in our process is in the sequence by which you do the different steps. Selling is the act of qualifying or disqualifying a prospect. If you do it in the wrong sequence you waste a lot of time and put yourself in a disadvantageous position. You cut short the information gathering process that will give you the best chance of making the sale. You risk creating a proposal or making a presentation or that misses the mark. You give your prospect the opportunity to shop your proposal with your competitors. You often wind up in the role of an unpaid consultant solving your prospects' problems for free.

The whole idea behind the Client Builder Selling Process is that you should only present your solutions in the context of how it will solve your buyer's problems or expand his opportunities, within the investment parameters he has shared with you and in a manner consistent with how he makes purchasing decisions. This should only occur once the prospect has agreed to make a decision within a mutually agreed timeframe. Without a linked sequential process you simply can't do this.

Should You Stay or Should You Go?

As you work your way through the Client Builder Selling Process, you should constantly be asking questions of yourself. The answers to these questions determine whether you should continue to pursue an opportunity or whether you should close the file and move on. These are the questions you want to ask yourself at the conclusion of each step in the process.

Preparation: Is the prospect worth approaching? Does he fit your target client profile?

Advance Agreements: Have you agreed in advance what each of you (you and your prospect) will do and what will happen once you have delivered on your respective promises?

Diagnosis: Is there a problem or an opportunity that is compelling enough for your prospect to change what he has been doing and possibly buy from you? Do you have a solution to the prospect's pain?

Investment: Are the problems or opportunities you have uncovered compelling enough for your prospect to give up his money, time and current comfort level to make the changes you will be

suggesting? Does the prospect have the money to buy your solution?

Decision Process: What proof does the prospect need from you and who needs to see this proof in order to make a decision to buy your product or service? Will the prospect give you access to the decision maker? When do they plan to make a decision? Why then?

Commitment: If you deliver the proof your prospect has requested, will he make a decision one way or another (yes or no) on whether to buy what you are suggesting? Do you have the proof the client is looking for?

Presentation: At this point in the process, you are providing the proof they requested to make a final decision in the form of a demonstration, presentation or proposal. The only question you should be asking yourself at the end of this step is "Did I get their decision?"

Confirmation: Is the sale secure? How will your prospect handle questions from his superiors or challenges from your competitors that might tempt him to cancel your new agreement?

If you cannot answer each of these questions in the affirmative as you and your prospect make your way through the selling process, the prospect is disqualified, at least for the time being. In order to get the sale back on track, go back to the prior step and uncover the information needed to answer these questions. If you can't obtain this information from your prospect, the sales process is over for now. You are free to allocate your time to someone who is better-qualified and more likely to buy.

Without a process, you are at the prospect's mercy. Without a process, whatever sales

you do close will be random collisions of the prospect's pain and blind luck. Without a process, you won't know how to allocate your time and energy. Without a process, you simply cannot be effective today. You probably have a system or a process for running every other aspect of your business.

Businesses operate according to processes in order to save time, reduce mistakes and maximize effectiveness. The sales department shouldn't be any different. To save time, reduce mistakes and maximize effectiveness, you and your salespeople should use a process as well.

About Larry Lewis. Client Builder Sales & Marketing LLC and the PBCA

Larry Lewis is the founder and president of Client Builder Sales & Marketing LLC, a company that provides practical, hands-on sales and marketing training to businesses and independent professionals. Larry's street-smart approach to lead generation and selling has helped hundreds of sales executives, small business owners, and independent professionals increase their sales and profits with more control, greater confidence and less effort.

In 2011, Larry joined forces with the Professional Business Coaches Alliance ("PBCA") to make his training tools and resources available to a broader audience. In addition, many members of the PBCA are now licensed to provide Client Builder Sales Training to their clients.

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