



The Sales Process (Part 2)

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Obviously, one must earn a place in that inner circle. To do so requires diligence and consistency on the part of the calling Officer. It also requires that he/she ask probing questions of that customer. Questions such as:

“What is your vision of the business several years out?”

“What challenges must you overcome to accomplish your vision?”

“We’d like to be a partner in assisting you to achieve your goals for the business. How can we best assist you now and in the future?”

Also, to the majority of business owners, most banks are all about the same. This has been borne out through many surveys over the years. How are your people differentiating your bank from its many competitors? How are they adding value to these owners on an ongoing basis?

How skilled are your loan/relationship officers at developing relationships? To what extent do your commercial customers consider them trusted advisors?

A few years back, we did a survey on behalf of a well-respected Bay Area independent bank. One of the questions we asked was: “To whom do you go for sound advice with regard to the financial challenges you face in your business?”

Sad to say, bankers seldom made the list of trusted outside advisors. CPAs, attorneys, spouses, and friends all ranked higher than bankers.

In our experience, owners of small to mid-sized businesses are generally very busy people. As such, they tend to rely on a small circle of trusted advisors for input into business issues. Is your Officer corps part of that inner circle of advisors to business customers?

If your Officers were asking the right questions of their customers, calling them on a consistent basis, and continually adding value to those customers, there would be no problem. Unfortunately, this is not generally the way things work, and so this is where the sales management function comes in.

Sales management is about coaching and training, conducting frequent sales meetings to discuss specific customer circumstances, role playing discussions with Officers, and the like. But it is also about commitment and accountability.

If we were all self-motivated, there would be little need for this element. However, when it comes to selling, the majority of Officers would prefer to call on a friendly, loyal customer, whom they are very comfortable with, than call on a challenging prospect or customer.

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If you were able to correlate the frequency of calls by your Officers on customers and prospects, would the frequency of calls to these businesses correlate to the opportunities those businesses held for the bank? Or, would you find a preponderance of calls to select customers who are satisfied with the bank and its services, but represent little in the way of exciting business opportunities for the future?

The old adage “you can expect what you inspect” holds true here. We believe the key in managing Officers is to have them forecast priority calls in advance—rather than merely reporting on calls made. Those forecasted calls should be viewed as an Officers’ commitment. As sales manager for the bank, it is your responsibility to hold them accountable for accomplishing these calls.

If you can be certain that important calls are being made, the challenge then becomes honing the skills of your Officers, in order to ensure that they will accomplish these calls in a highly professional manner.

In general, the “consultative sell” is what works best. This model keys on the customer or prospect, and features a series of questions designed to ferret out the needs/issues of these firms and business owners. There is no “sales pitch” per se, simply a brief credibility statement. The real focus is on finding out about the prospect/customers’ wishes, dreams, challenges, and the like, and all the while, cementing and strengthening your relationship.

In our next white paper, we will delve into a series of questions and a process to accomplish this.

Truelson Associates has served over 200 clients in its 20+ years of existence. Our greatest concentration has been in the independent community banking field. We have served in excess of 50 such institutions, including several in the \$1+ billion asset size range, plus a number of start ups, and every size in between.

We were generally considered to be the leading firm in this field in the northern and central California market. In 2009, we transferred the firm to Oregon, and are prepared to serve the Oregon bank community from our offices in Portland.



We are associate members of The Oregon Bankers Association.

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