READY- FIRE-AIM

DON'T SHOOT FIRST AND ASK QUESTIONS LATER

You can't hit a bull's-eye if you don't aim first!

Ready-Fire-Aim

I laughed hard the first time I heard this line, and when I recently heard it again, it reminded me of a conversation I had with a sales manager who was lamenting about his reps *presenting vs. questioning*. It's like shooting first and asking questions later.

Most sales people know better than to use this approach. So why is it that so many still walk into a client meeting armed with a range of product literature, and just start firing off features and benefits hoping to hit something? Then once they are done presenting, trying to zero in and close.

Its like *Ready-Fire-Aim*. Where *Ready* means gathering literature, *Fire* is presenting and *Aim* is the close. It's no wonder this approach rarely works, and in most instances, annoys the prospective customer as well.

I recently did a sales training where one of the key take-aways from the experienced sales team was the benefits of effective pre-call planning. I was surprised that pre-call planning resonated so strongly with them, but in review, I can understand why.

Most of this sales team had been selling for years, and were not only very knowledgeable about their products, but were experts in their field.

Because they were so knowledgeable about their products, markets, and customer needs, they walked into every client meeting armed with a lot of information, because they thought they *knew* what the customer would need in advance.

Even though in many cases they were right, this assumption about the customer's potential business needs led them to *present* those ideas and the related products. They would go on autopilot. Each call was the same, and product presentations were being made before fully identifying the client's business issues and needs.

It was *Ready, Fire, Aim*.

Challenges with this approach

So why doesn't this approach work? Because it focuses on what *you want to tell* the customer vs. getting the *customer to tell you* what *they want*. It makes the customer feel that you are focusing only on your needs, and that you are pressuring them to buy what you want sell vs. what they need.

As we all know, and as recent market surveys have confirmed, one of the biggest issues Buyers have with salespeople is their perception of feeling pushed into decisions.

Breaking this habit is not difficult. It's a matter of going back to the basics - Sales 101 - and making your primary focus identification of your customer's business issues, then working collaboratively with them to develop a solution.

It's as simple as taking the time to develop a pre-call plan, understanding *why* you are visiting the customer, and *why* the customer is spending their valuable time meeting with you. Then consciously changing your paradigm to an approach of Ready Aim, Fire.

Three Simple Steps:

Ready:

Pre-Call Planning and Call Objectives. Every client meeting should have a pre-call plan or specific call objective. The larger the value of the sale, the more planning that needs to be done to ensure that you are planning for the multiple sales calls required to close the deal.

It is critical that your objectives align with the customer's based on where they are in their Buying Cycle. This includes understanding what you need to do for them (vs. what you want them to do for you) in order to move to the next stage in their Buying Cycle.

Aim:

How can you hit a target if you don't aim first? The same things applies to selling. How can you close a sale if you don't first identify a customer need, and develop that to the point where you generate a desire for them to take action?

Before you start aiming your proof statements, you need to first ensure that you are aiming at the right target.

Focused questioning strategies are the foundation of Aiming. *Open questions* allow you to find the range of needs, and more targeted *Closed and Control questions* allow you to zero-in to identify and develop specific needs. If your aim is good enough, then your product presentation will have a strong chance for success.

Fire:

Ok, now you can shoot. Once the customer says OK, go ahead and bring out the fancy literature or PowerPoint presentation that Marketing gave you. However, remember that Fire means using your product/service as a proof that you and your company can help your customer meet their need or resolve their business issue.

Keep in mind that you should only fire enough to make your point. Too much and you'll hinder the customer from making a decision. Similar to the *kid in the candy store*, where when put in a situation with too many choices, reaching a decision becomes impossible.

You want them to see the bull's-eye, not have the entire target obliterated with holes. In addition, unless you are selling low value, single call close products, you also want to make sure you save some ammo for the future.

For example, years ago I was working with a new rep doing coaching sales calls. During a visit with a major potential customer, he went into presentation mode and brought out every piece of literature in his briefcase.

At the end of the call he said,"That was a great meeting. I told them about everything we have." My reply was, "Yes you did, but during the call since you did 90% of the talking, how much did you learn about what the customer really needed?"

I then proceeded to tell him that since he had unloaded his entire product portfolio on the customer, he left nothing to go back with on a future visit. As it turned out the customer refused future meeting requests.

Summary:

Taking the time to draft a pre-call plan and ask questions before presenting are very basic concepts that every sales person should know. They are the basic fundamentals of selling. That's why it is surprising to see so many veteran sales people forget these basic concepts.

In order to ensure that we are always working at the top of our game, it's important that we take the time to revisit what we know, and make sure that we continue to use only our best practices to make every sales call as effective as possible.

If you would like to explore more topics to expand your selling skills, or remind yourself about what you may have forgotten, then please visit the Selling Resources page on our website www.tritonconsult.com.

Today's buyers continue to evolve, and the approach to selling needs to adapt to those changes. The papers and content I write are based on the in-depth analysis of over 25,000 sales calls and client interactions, and were written to help sales teams develop and hone their skills.

Sales - it's in your DNA! Find it, develop it, and unleash your potential!