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Slow economy helps salesperson become 'farmer' by cultivating his clients

We all know the economy is taking a beating. Every day we read about companies declaring bankruptcy and stores closing their doors for good.

Perhaps that's why every "no" a salesperson hears right now has a particularly discouraging ring. With every newscast emphasizing how bad things are, it's difficult not to assign special importance to each rejection.

You, like many salespeople, might blame the economy for your dip in sales, but assigning blame doesn't get you any further ahead. You could think of today's selling situation this way: It's always easier to find new business than it is to find a new job.

Yet it's not all bad news. Despite the environment, people are still buying goods and services, so opportunities do exist.

Because companies tend to become more conservative and lay off employees during tough times, your competitors may stop doing what made them successful. Oddly enough, then, it turns out that now is a great time to gain market share.

You must adjust strategies, though. By learning to work more efficiently and diligently, and to become proactive, you can make the most of your current situation and even flourish, no matter what the economic indicators say.

Here are some strategies that might help turn your sales around:

KEEP CULTIVATING CURRENT CLIENTELE.

Some businesses have a hunter mentality, but in a down economy, it may be better, or at least more effective, to be a farmer who carefully attends to the crops than a hunter who goes only for the big game.

After you land an account, always keep in touch with clients. Show that your job isn't just about selling, but also about offering the best service and industry insight your



SALES TALK

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company can provide on an ongoing basis. Customers will keep coming back, add to their existing purchases, and spread the word to prospects about your company.

LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES, not challenges.

In the sales industry where you're regularly rejected, a healthy sense of self-esteem is critical. Build that self-esteem not through winning lengthy wrestling matches with prospects but through narrowing down your list of calls. Establish definite criteria for prospects so that you know your product or service is useful to them before you ever pick up the phone. You'll make more efficient use of your time by disqualifying contacts and going with surer bets.

Even with a better list of prospects, though, you still face rejection. But if you look at the numbers, you may find that by using this strategy, your ratios now are about the same as they were in better economic times.

EMULATE THE BEHAVIORS OF THOSE

who are currently making sales. Look around your workplace to see who is doing well, then observe their activities. What are they doing that you're not doing?

Usually, successful salespeople do the things that others don't like to do, such as cold calling. Of course, more calls equals more sales. Picking up the phone is a salesperson's single most dreaded task, but if you simply force yourself to do it even if you'd rather be doing reports and poring over your numbers, eventually you'll become comfortable with calls.

Mimic the way you see successful coworkers handle other tasks that cause you apprehension, too, such as discussing budgets with prospects, building contacts at social and business functions, or speaking at public events. Perform these activities with confidence, even if you don't feel confident. Over time the confidence will be real and repetition will strengthen your successful new habits.

BE PROACTIVE BY PLANNING YOUR TIME

wisely and sticking with your plan. Too many salespeople come in at 8 a.m., pour a cup of coffee, sit down and ask themselves what they're going to do that day. All too often the morning becomes a time to dwell on difficult tasks and an invitation to procrastinate.

Instead, start your day the day before. Take a half-hour or so at the end of your day to plan the next day's calls and other tasks so you can come in and get started first thing.

The next step is to keep focused on those activities and hold yourself accountable for what you've planned. If you expect to make 30 cold calls the next day, or to get in front of six new prospects, take steps to assure that you actually do that.

Maybe you'll have to spend less time at the water cooler or take greater initiative with contacting qualified prospects. Maybe it's just a matter of increasing your self-discipline. Whatever the case, simply put, do what it takes to reach the goals you set for yourself on a daily basis.

Thankfully, the times aren't as bad as they were in the Great Depression. Interestingly, it's often been said that more people became millionaires in the 1930s than during any other period. While that may be an exaggeration, it's no exaggeration to say that it is possible to do well when the economy isn't doing well. Start today to cultivate successful strategies, and by the second or third quarter of this year, you'll have a bumper crop of sales to harvest.

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