

ON SALES

SET THE STAGE



It's up to owners and managers to get their sales teams to role-play and practice their sales skills, says Shane Decker

MARCH MADNESS — THAT'S what they call the playoffs in men's college basketball. But as crazy as the games can be, the players and coaches involved aren't nutty. They know that in order to achieve their goals, they have to practice against each other.

Hard. Every day.

By contrast, too many jewelry salespeople are waiting until game day to work on their skills. They're practicing on their customers, rather than their peers. No wonder so many customers leave, thinking, "I expected more."

Salespeople, I know you don't want to hear this, but your customers deserve it: You've got to start role-playing. The good news is, role-playing has gotten a bad rap. Why? Because people don't do it correctly.

Many stores have two people get up in front of the whole team and role-play a sale. Then, they sit down and everyone picks apart the presentation.

A root canal is more enjoyable. "Sales beatings" like this aren't fun — which is a big part of the reason why they don't work.

The proper way to role-play is to first hold your sales meeting on a topic — creating a sale from scratch, handling objections, team selling, etc. — and then break into small groups to role-

play what you've just learned.

Don't role-play with everyone watching.

Instead, practice what I call "situational role-playing." In groups of two to three people, everyone on staff role-plays at the same time. If you have two people, one plays the customer and the other is the salesperson (if you have three people, the third person observes). Generally, the observer learns the most during the role-play. Everyone should get a turn in each role.

During the role-play, the challenge of each salesperson is to come up with answers that handle objections and satisfy the customer.

For example, let's say this week's topic is "I can find it cheaper down the street."

The salesperson might answer, "Our company made a decision years ago that we didn't want to have to apologize later for selling you something that was low quality. Therefore, we don't have low quality."

If you try to say things like this on the sales floor without practicing first, it will sound rough and unprofessional. You've gotta hear yourself say it a few times or it won't come out right.

You'll also need to role-play situations that come up on the sales floor, like being stranded

without a person to T.O. to — or T.O.'ing the sale to the wrong person — or a rough T.O.

Practicing scenarios such as these gives you the sales tools and the confidence to back up the experience you want to offer.

Nobody's perfect. So when you fumble something on the sales floor, talk about it the next morning and role-play through it. Yes, be sure to role-play ... because listening doesn't make perfect, but practice does.

Be sure to partner a seasoned salesperson with a fresh one during your role-plays. You can take a brand-new salesperson, role-play what was said in a sales meeting, and put them on the floor with confidence.

Practice ingrains those truths into your presentation — which means that in the final analysis, role-playing is even more important than what is actually said during the meeting.

Owners and managers, it's up to you! I can come into your store and preach until I'm blue in the face, but your sales team has to practice what I (and you) preach or they won't improve. Ultimately, role-playing makes for happier selling, which makes for happier customers. It also increases closing ratios, add-on sales, and productivity, as well as making every store more profitable.

Hey, no one likes change — and no one's enthusiastic about role-playing, at first. But the more you do it, the easier it is ... and the better you get at it. Just like basketball! How crazy is that?

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