



Rethinking the Sales Role

Reframing perspectives and cultivating values-based selling skills

BY STEVE HASENMUELLER

I RECENTLY HAD A FLASHBACK TO WHEN I started my sales career in the pool and spa industry in the early '80s, and I noticed how much the industry has evolved. Back then, people would walk up to a spa and ask, "What is it?" That certainly doesn't happen these days.

As the industry has flourished with increased demand, so has manufacturing and accessories. However, one important aspect that hasn't evolved is the sales role.

A sales career takes a lot of work and effort. It is delusional to think there is some easy hack or slogan that can magically transform it. Over the last 30 years, I have seen formalized service, installation, marketing and design training programs (with varying degrees of effectiveness), training new generations in the latest and most professional aspects of these categories. Conversely, there are seemingly little to no resources for industry-wide sales development. There are far more resources applied to water testing than the selling of pools and spas that have price tags of \$5,000-\$100,000+ and are the lifeblood of current and future business opportunities.

Sales development is skill development. The sales career needs a higher level of expectation and opportunity.

As a trainer, my efforts were never as successful or as impactful

YOU ARE NOT A SALESPERSON; YOU ARE A PERSON DEVELOPING SALES SKILLS. A BETTER WORD IS SALES DELEGATE. A DELEGATE IS SOMEONE AUTHORIZED AND ENTRUSTED TO REPRESENT. IT'S A DESIGNATION TO BE EARNED.

as I would have hoped or even expected them to be. Three questions always perplexed and dogged me:

1. Why do so many struggle to effectively sell pools and spas, resulting in constant turnover, lower sales, higher costs and poor customer experience?
2. Why do some achieve basic sales skills and never develop further, either flatlining or flaming out?
3. What can companies do to attract, develop and retain top talent in a \$23 billion global industry?

Let's take a look at the first question and rethink the sales role.

WHY DO SO MANY STRUGGLE TO EFFECTIVELY SELL POOLS AND SPAS?

We get off to a bad start (even with ourselves) simply with the word salesperson. In

Daniel Pink's book "To Sell is Human," he quotes data from research asking what people thought of when they heard the word "salesperson" and the answer was a word cloud of "pushy, slimy, difficult, hard, annoying, dishonest and sleazy." Ouch!

Not only do prospects have this underlying bias, but I'm confident many salespeople also possess it. We think being a salesperson is some stand-alone role that has us employing tactics that create these types of feelings. We somehow leave home and put on our salesperson persona and then wonder about our lack of effectiveness. One of the biggest stumbling blocks to our effectiveness is we think of ourselves as a salesperson instead of a person developing sales skills.

You are a work in progress, both personally and professionally, and until you embrace that, you will struggle.

The person you bring to work every day is important and needs to be healthy, happy and stable. Then the sales skills we need to develop to do the work are:

- Product knowledge
- Listening skills
- Goals
- Strategy
- Energy
- Positive attitude
- Values
- Principles
- Trust
- Work ethic
- Punctuality
- Caring
- Effort

If any of these are weak or missing, our chance at effectiveness plummets. It's common to hear we need to "close more sales," and while this is always true, it is just a slogan if it's not addressing any of the reasons we aren't closing sales.

I Googled the top 20 films depicting salespeople and watched them, wondering if any presented us in a favorable light. Some did — most didn't — but what became apparent to me was that the favorable characters all exhibited personal values. It was the absence of values in the others that made them the unwelcome cliché.

Values must be the base of everything we do in our sales career and personal life to develop appropriately. I'm sure almost everyone would say they have values; I'm talking about articulated and exhibited values that are at the forefront of every decision and action. Values are personal, and here are five I consider for everything I do personally or professionally.

- Perseverance: a continued effort to achieve something
- Accountability: a willingness to accept responsibility for one's actions
- Diligence: a persistent effort
- Discipline: a system of rules of conduct
- Integrity: being honest and having strong moral principles

Now think about the negative word cloud mentioned earlier — what values were apparent or acknowledged?

RETHINK

You are not a salesperson; you are a person developing sales skills. A better word than salesperson that I try to use is sales delegate. A delegate is someone authorized and entrusted to represent. It's a designation to be earned.

Is changing a word going to change the bias? No, but it's a start, and the words we use are important and hopefully can help us reset our perspective.

A values-based nonnegotiable aspect of our personal and professional lives is a critical piece

to effectiveness in a sales career.

So, a values-based person developing sales delegate skills is the beginning of any sustainable sales role and will bring us to question No. 2 in a future article. ■

✉ Questions or comments on this article? Email us! editorial@kendrickcontent.com



STEVE HASENMUELLER writes and speaks about what it takes for businesses and employees to thrive in the demanding and ever-changing marketplace. With over 35 years of experience in front-line selling, he has conducted seminars and keynotes in nine countries, delivering challenging and uplifting messages along with real-life solutions for improvement. After 30 years on the road in sales, Hasenmueller retired and devotes his full-time efforts to speaking, training, writing and philanthropy. He currently resides in Belize with his wife Jane.

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