

Selling in the New Decade

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Let me begin with a question – what new sales initiative did you begin in 2010 that grew revenue or resulted in greater market share? If you are feeling a bit uncomfortable right now you are not alone. Most business owners and sales professionals did nothing different in the past year, preferring to “wait until the market turned”.

The world has changed completely over the past decade with more and more technology entering into our everyday lives, including 24/7 access to the Internet and social media phenomena such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter. Selling never really was about “telling”, but far too many salespeople made a living for years doing what I call “show up and throw up”. They spent all their time trying to convince prospects why they should do business with them without ever asking if they had a compelling reason to do so in the first place. Readily available information has obliterated traditional sales practices, yet very few companies have responded.

There are three fundamental areas business owners must address to be competitive in 2011: the systems and processes they use to track new business development activity; the effectiveness of *sales management*; and the *ability of their salespeople* to:

1. Prospect consistently
2. Ask questions to uncover fundamental buying motives
3. Manage the negative head trash they all struggle with

Business owners must also teach their sales people to follow a systematic approach to sales, of which “relationship building” is only the first step. If I ask 100 salespeople why they are (or were) successful, at least 90 will tell me it is because they build “great relationships”. When I then ask “What happens when you lose?” what I hear are a litany of excuses about low balling competition, dishonest buyers and product deficiencies, etc. (What happened to their relationship?!!) Ask yourself “What system do my salespeople follow?” If you cannot clearly articulate their process, chances are they do not have one - which eliminates your chance to debrief wins and losses, manage your pipeline, or effectively train new sales people.

This article is about challenging YOU to change your mind set about sales. In their 2010 book “Switch” (my number one reading recommendation from last year), Dan and Chip Heath outline two different mindsets found in humans – the rational mind (the Rider) and the emotional mind (the Elephant). Unless you can sell direct to your customers over the Internet, someone at some point will have to close the sale. Your ‘Rider’ is calling your ‘Elephant’ to wake up to the fact that the old days of “show up and throw up selling” are over. Stop pretending that doing nothing different will create better results “when the market turns.”



About the author: Mike Shannon serves as a board member of The Fellowship of Christian Athletes and is an active member in the Chester County Chamber of Business & Industry.

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