



Overcoming Call Reluctance A Sales Manager's View

A common problem for sales managers is to encourage sales reps to get out and spend more time face-to-face, and also to encourage new sales representatives to get out to meet customers, particularly if they've had a few bad experiences.

This is commonly called 'Overcoming Call Reluctance' and the ways to handle it include:

Personality

First of all, examine the personality of your call reluctant salesperson. Are they outgoing, are they friendly, are they able to portray confidence in the first 30 seconds, and if not, should they really be a sales member of your team? Personality is very important in the first 30 seconds of the sale, and it helps to build relationships and win over customers. Call reluctant salespeople with no personality are never going to make it.

Have a careful think about the type of salesperson you want – are they the hunter, the farmer, the relationship builder, the prospector, the major accounts representative? What is best for your kind of industry will be determined by your stages of growth. A new company starting up will probably want a prospector or a new account hunting type representative, while an existing company will need a mix of relationship building to retain existing customers, plus also the odd hunter or prospector to chase for new business.

Selling Style

Review the style of selling that your sales team and your reluctant salesperson are actually using – how well planned are they; are they selling by objectives; are they following up on previous visit objectives; are they disciplined, well organised and good time managers?

Rep visits

When was the last time you went out and visited your sales rep in front of customers, to actually see the application and use of their skills?

A good sales manager spends at least half a day per month with each one of their sales reps just doing normal everyday calls to see how they handle themselves and represent the company.

During this sales interview, the sales manager is there to assist the sales rep and not to take over the sale or to rescue it if it looks like they're going to lose it. This last activity is very hard for most sales managers who are very good salespeople, but you have to lose the sale to be able to teach the sales rep how to improve.

When you're out reviewing and training with a sales rep, make sure that you ask for the objective of the call prior to going into the customer, and then review the objective at completion.

During the call you should watch for:

- Use of skill
- Use of planning
- The application of the listening technique
- Product knowledge and service knowledge.

If any of these are needing improvement, that's where you work with your sales rep.

It is often said that there are many types of sales representative, however I could classify them into 2 camps:

- Those that can sell and close the sale, and are weak on administration.
- Those that are very good on administration, and very weak on closing the sale.

The ideal sales representative is probably the former, where you can tidy up the administration, or people who lean towards more sales skills when closing the sale.

Call reluctance is something that can be trained to overcome. If you have a representative who is call reluctant review the above list and see how you can be successful in fixing the problem.

A good sales manager watches the sales team for signs of too much time being spent in the office or on preparation or on administration, and not enough time being spent face-to-face with customers.