

## **There's a lot more to managing your time than what you may think**

A key element to time management is the size and complexity of your customer base. Obviously, a sales professional with a limited customer base will have much different time management demands from one with a broad and widely diverse and geographically divergent face. The point is that time management for salespeople is complex and radically different from the common concept of time management.

Are your customers large corporations with significantly complex purchasing procedures? Or do you sell to consumers who pay you by personal check? Do you have a collection problem, or is that not an issue at all? Each of these situations mandates different skills in terms of organizational know-how, paperwork moxie, and follow-up procedures.

Are your products or services distributed across a wide geographical base or just locally? The wider the base, the more complex your thinking must be in terms of the impact that simple clerical or organizational errors can have, for example.

How much administrative work is required to make, support, and service the sale? Tangible products of a technical nature require a lot more support than simpler, less-complex products.

By the same token, a personal service type product may mandate a huge time commitment to sell, support, and constantly provide ongoing feedback to the client or customer. Some products are simply sold, delivered, and never require the presence of the sales professional ever again.

I was recently consulting with a firm that requires its sales force to not only prospect, sell, and deliver its services, but to also get involved extensively in the creative design, operational planning, and customer contact from creative design to complete delivery of their products.

This company clearly expects a great deal from its sales force. Their number one salesperson was an expert at all of these. But there was a problem. The problem - the market share from his territory had leveled off completely. But more importantly to the salesperson, his blood pressure wasn't doing the same. This guy was about ready to explode and so was his marriage, his relationship with his sales manager, and even with his customers. He was working fourteen, fifteen hours a day simply servicing accounts. Prospecting was a word that existed only in his dictionary. In meeting with both the salesperson and his manager it became very clear to me that this guy needed an assistant, someone to whom he could delegate routine paperwork, details, and coordination work. The result? He doubled sales in his territory. Yes, doubled his sales. His blood pressure is under control and he has managed to quell the problems on the home front.

The company has now developed a policy that allows a salesperson to qualify for an assistant once they've sold a certain amount of business over a given period of time. As a consequence, the salespeople have something to shoot for. The company can afford the additional person,

existing customers are served better, more sales are made through the freeing up of the salesperson's time, and everyone ends up being happier and more profitable.

But what does that mean to you? The management of your time is a function of a multitude of factors, certainly not the least important of which is the ongoing support function required of you in order to maintain customers on your active list.

The management style of your organization is another key element that will dictate how you manage your time. How much paperwork is required in terms of planning documents, sales call reports, expense reports and the like. How many meetings must you attend, must you travel to them, how much latitude are you allowed, how often do priorities change. Are you judged on sales or are you judged on service. Do you operate out of an office or do you operate out of an office in your home? A regional office, a central office? The specific time management skills required in each of these scenarios is amazingly different, yet similar.

The point is that you cannot manage your time alone, nor can you manage it in a vacuum. The way that you manage your time as a sales professional is a function of you, of your personal style and your circumstances, your product, your customers, your selling culture, and your customer's and management's expectations of you.

The availability of support systems is also a key element in how your time is to be managed. For example, do you have sophisticated computer support systems that can provide you data on a timely basis, voice mail, fax machines, dictation equipment, sophisticated telephone systems, a cellular telephone, laptop computers, telephone credit cards and the like. Or do you rely on stale, old data, messages delivered through answering services, pink slips, handwriting all of your letters, memos, and orders, traveling extensively while being out of communication with everyone for long periods of time?

How much time do you invest prospecting for new business? Is prospecting even more important to your business now than it has been in the past, yet you're not investing time in it.

Do you have to spend so much time servicing accounts that you can't prospect? Again, are you paid to service, or are you paid to sell? How much prospecting do you really have to do? Is that prospecting by telephone or is it through face-to-face contact? Do you have to orchestrate, manage, and monitor extensive and expensive direct mail programs?

For some sales positions the name of the game is prospecting, and that's where the bulk of your time, effort, and energy should and must go.

The truth, however, is that many so-called sales professionals are, in fact, paid to service more than they are paid to sell. If that's your case, are you investing your time where you should? Are your priorities clear? This is also an important ingredient in the role that time management will play for you as a winning sales professional.