

SALES & MARKETING

EXECUTIVE REPORT

Help your team get the most from its 'two-minute drill'

By RON D'ANDREA

Sales managers everywhere know that the pace of business has accelerated over the past decade. In a number of industries — including pharmaceuticals and insurance — this has created a new sales management challenge: How to help sales professionals get more face-to-face “quality” selling time. The traditional “sit down” sales appointment, is often replaced with “two-minute drills.”

How good is your team's two-minute drill?

In football, the two-minute drill is at the end of the game, and fans hope it results in a winning score as time runs out. In sales, a “two-minute drill” happens throughout the sales process — in hallway conversations, in brief phone interactions and during longer sales interactions unexpectedly cut short. Helping your reps succeed in these situations is critical for three reasons:

1. In a world of competing sales reps, you only get one chance to make a first impression. Every interaction — even the shortest — affects your sales reps' ability to build profitable customer relationships.
2. Sales reps must often succeed in *short* calls.
3. In the absence of longer sales meetings, a busy customer's perception of the value of your product, service or relationship is shaped by the way your sales reps interact during short sales interactions.

Unfortunately, many salespeople are unable to leverage these critical situations to their advantage because they make a number of wrong turns, including:

- ♦ Failing to plan for shorter-than-expected meetings. For example, a physician greets the rep, then announces that she cannot keep the scheduled appointment.

- ♦ “Dumping” more information in brief customer encounters than they should.
- ♦ Alienating, rather than building, relationships with gatekeepers with whom they have short encounters.
- ♦ Failing to make the transition from social conversation to product discussion when they *do* get a brief audience with their customer.

These mistakes are costly. Customers don't perceive a difference between suppliers. Consequently, conclude the sale will be negotiated on price alone.

A 'game plan' for success

As managers discuss upcoming customer sales calls, they can coach their sales reps to:

1. **Expect the unexpected** and create backup plans so they are prepared to add value in both full-length and shorter sales interactions.
2. **Shape the value of short interactions**, “framing” the purpose of each encounter to establish value.
3. **Differentiate themselves**. Rather than “pitching” their products or services and “telling,” they build value by asking better questions that get the customer saying “Wow. That sales rep really got me thinking.”
4. **Accelerate closure**. Concluding each encounter by gaining some level of commitment from the customer for a next step, even a small one.

Coaching helps sales pros build and reinforce the perception of value. It ensures that they make quality contact in each meeting, no matter how brief. ■

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