

10 Tips to Sales Success in Education

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There are many books and articles that offer "sales tips to make you successful." I've seen and read many of them during my sales career. Some of the tips are very similar and are simply tweaked to fit a certain industry. I've always been open to hearing tips, tricks, and ideas on how to be better at my job and a better salesperson or solutions provider. Below are some tips that I put together to spark a conversation with your sales teams on how to be better Education Sales Reps.

1. Sell Solutions to Challenges:

Most salespeople sell features "My product has 10x more features than the competition at half the price." Or, "I follow this detailed process to evaluate your business. Step 1...."

Many sales reps sell benefits, "Our X step process will uncover the X that lead to operational efficiencies." Or, "Our product will save you days of time sifting through information to find the best result."

Educators can find many of the products you're selling from someone else. What solutions are you providing that make them want to buy from you? How are you providing a solution to them?

What do you sell? It is important to understand the pain points of an educator. A pain point for one teacher, principal or bookkeeper may not be a pain point for another. You already know all the resources that you have to offer. Now, you just need to explain the resources you can offer the educator and provide the right solution to make their job easier.

2. Have Your Answers Ready:

According to Sales For Life, 70% of Executive-Level Buyers say that salespeople are not prepared for the questions they ask. More than 3 out of 4 executives say that salespeople don't have any relevant examples. It is OK to not have an immediate answer and it is also OK to say "I'm not sure, but I'll find out for you." However, make sure to do your research on the district and schools before calling on them. It is important to know if they have any initiatives that they're promoting, or if they won any recent awards, or if they have any large projects that they're working on. More than likely they do and they may ask questions about how you can help with these.

If you don't have your answers ready or know anything about them, then why are you there?

3. Start With The End Result in Mind:

The best athletes and salespeople in the world have one thing in common: They are always thinking four or five steps ahead. Whether you're prospecting, growing key accounts or simply closing a deal, always think about where you want to take that account within the next 12-24 months. Most schools plan ahead for their purchasing needs. They may be looking this year for the things that they will need next year. They may also be preparing for a grant they're about to receive or leftover money they need to spend. Build the relationship with

the key decision makers and work closely with them, while keeping the end result in mind. If you do this, then you will continue to grow your education sales.

4. Always have a Next Step:

Never leave a meeting or a conversation without a solid next step that's been agreed upon. Better yet, always schedule the next step when you have the educator on the line or in front of you. Too often you'll hear objections such as "just email me a few times that will work and we'll put it on the schedule." What ends up happening is the educator suddenly disappears, never getting back to you or returning your calls or emails.

Instead, schedule the next step with the educator right then and there. If the next step is to send a proposal, let them know you'll put a proposal together but you need to schedule a time during which you can walk them through it. When the customer/educator/decision maker makes a commitment on the spot (putting the next meeting on their calendar), they are much more likely to follow through.

Lastly, recap the meeting notes that you took to ensure you're both on the same page. You can't have successful next steps or follow up meeting, if you misunderstood what they really needed.

5. Understand your Buyers/Decision Makers:

It's critical to understand what's important to each individual buyer and their decision-making process. I discussed in a previous newsletter about how many decision makers there are in a single school. Each one of these decision makers has a different need, pain point, budget, deadline, etc. When you know this, then you can more easily match your selling process to their buying process/needs. Again, this goes back to offering a solution.

6. Manage your Selling Time:

I might be showing my age here, but when I first started in educational sales we didn't have GPS. I can recall many times that I mapped out my sales calls/routes with a large map on the hood of my car. It's very important to manage your time when calling on schools. It is quite possible that you will drive by several schools on your way to one meeting or cold call. Take the time to find the Schools and Head Starts in your area. If you're traveling to a meeting and you know that there are two other schools along the way, then take a little extra time to stop in and introduce yourself.

I spoke about mapping sales calls in a previous newsletter article. Google Maps has a free and easy way to do this. You can quickly import your addresses; select who you want to see, and the order of your stops. Easily save these maps for future sales calls and routing.

Another thing to remember when managing your selling time is this: It can take just as much time to sell a \$1,000 deal as it does to sell a \$10,000 deal. Small deals can definitely add up and you need these on a daily basis. But, why not ask for the big opportunity?

7. Stay Active on Social Media:

Teachers are one of the "sharingest" online populations. Keep communicating through all of your social channels throughout the year so that you're maintaining a constant presence.

Social attention is precious, and you don't want to lose it by going radio silent. This applies to both outbound posting on all the channels you normally use, as well as to responding to audience posts. Unanswered posts—whether they are good, bad, or indifferent in tone—tell your audience that your brand doesn't care and are a fast way to lose interest and followers. A response is imperative and creates opportunities to convert mild interest into brand advocacy. 50% of teachers use social media in some way.

8. Ask for Referrals:

I'll say it again – Teachers are one of the “sharingest”.... It is OK to ask for a referral. I would end every sales call with “Is there anyone else in the school or another school that you feel would benefit from what we have to offer?” Or, “If you're happy with the product and service that I'm providing, then would you mind introducing or referring me to someone over at X school?” A referral in the education category is like gold. Educators trust each other and often look to their peers for advice and recommendations. Educators like to help, so just ask.

9. Customer Service:

There are several companies selling into the education industry, so what sets you apart from them? In this day and age of online shopping and dare I say the word, Amazon, there is sometimes something missing from the sale. That one thing missing is Customer Service. Speaking from experience selling in education for over 15 years, it's not always about the price. Granted, being price competitive is important, however it's not always what they base their final decision on. I was successful as a dealer not always on price, but on my Customer Service. My customers (educators) knew that I was local and that I was there to support them. They knew that if there was an issue with an order or return, then I was there to quickly resolve it. If they needed someone to measure or discuss a project, then someone from my company was there quickly.

Keep in mind that Customer Service goes a long way and many times it's the deciding factor in what helps you close the deal.

10. Everything but the Teacher

There are companies out there that use the sales pitch “If you were to tip the school upside down and shake it – We offer everything that falls out, except for the teacher.” I'm not saying that you have to use this sales pitch, but they need to know what you have to offer. They need to know that you can service their needs (one stop shop) from the front office to the custodian's office. I meet with dealers all the time that tell me they make daily deliveries of paper, ink & toner etc. But, the school doesn't know they offer classroom furniture, classroom rugs, books, arts & crafts, etc. It is very important to let the decision makers at the school know that you offer “Everything but the Teacher.”

Again, the Education Team at S.P. Richards is always available and eager to help. Please let us know what we can do to assist in your efforts to grow sales in the education category!

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