

Spotting the 20% Who Sell the 80%

By Jim Sirbasku

Who would have predicted that Vilfredo Pareto's famous 80-20 rule, formulated more than 100 years ago, would still apply to sales organizations today?

Research consistently demonstrates that more than half of those in professional sales lack the basic attributes required for success in this difficult profession – attributes that world-class salespeople possess naturally, or develop through training or single-minded focus. Of the remaining half, 50 percent have the potential for success in some form of sales but are currently selling the wrong products or services. That leaves about 25 percent to sell about 80 percent of the world's products and services.

Enlightening, isn't it? Measure your salespeople by this list of the 10 attributes shared by world-class salespeople:

1 They Possess an Irrepressibly Positive Attitude.

All of their glasses are half full, and every cloud they encounter has a silver lining. Knock them down nine times and they stand up the tenth. Without this iron optimism, a life in sales is a stressful and daunting existence.

▶ *Do your sales heroes live in a partly cloudy or partly sunny world?*

2 They Understand that Sales is a Numbers Game.

They don't lose their cool when a call goes badly, a deal goes south, or a first contact ends in refusal – they simply focus more clearly on the next call. They know their hit rate from past experience. They know how often they'll have to take No! before they get one Yes!

▶ *Do your salespeople know the value of their calls?*

3 They Live to Prospect

World-class salespeople are prospecting all the time, especially when things are going well. They know that sales success depends directly upon

continually filling their pipelines with well-qualified prospects. Prospecting is their obsession. They never stop.

▶ *Is prospecting 24/7/365 in your organization?*

4 They are Totally Sales-Driven

These people live for the chase that results in a closed deal; they are internally motivated to go to whatever lengths they must to win. They seem to have unceasing energy. Once they decide to act, nothing slows or stops them until they have succeeded.

▶ *Are your salespeople in top gear?*

5 They are Competitive

They don't like second place, and they're not good losers. Sure, they know they must act like good losers from time to time for social reasons. But deep down they need to win, and losses just strengthen their resolve. They can't be kept in second place for long.

▶ *Is your team too good at losing?*

6 They are Obsessed with the Next Step

Everything they do is aimed at getting to the next step – the next level of commitment that will gradually instill in the customer the trust and confidence needed for a Yes! World-class salespeople think solely in terms of specifics such as where, when, how, and how much. Concepts like sometime, in the future, later, and whenever, are simply not in their vocabularies. The most successful salespeople know that their success is inevitable, but they still drive to "accelerate the inevitable."

▶ *Are your salespeople driving their cases forward at least one step with every customer or prospect contact?*

7 They Know that They – and Their Products – are World-Class

Top salespeople exude quiet confidence, and unbridled enthusiasm for the company – and its products and services – gushes from them at every meeting. No one is left untouched by the passion

they exhibit when they talk about themselves, their companies, or their products and services. They evangelize.

▶ *Have your people been to the top of the mountain?*

8 They Qualify Hard Before Investing Time and Energy

World-class salespeople know that their time is too precious to waste on people who don't need what they provide. They understand their products and services inside and out, understand the needs they address, understand why their offerings are so much better than those of their competitors, and know enough about their prospective customers to rarely find themselves in front of someone who's not a genuine prospect.

▶ *Do your salespeople look before they leap?*

9 They Expect to Hear No!

Once they know they're in front of the right people, these champions are confident that they've considered every possible No! situation that might arise, and they understand how to address these objections in a way that builds the confidence and trust of their prospective customers.

▶ *Are your front people always ready to handle key objections?*

10 They Sell Through Customer Knowledge

Ask customers of world-class salespeople what sets them apart and they'll tell you, "They understand us." These people never stop trying to find out more information about their customers and their customers' needs. They know that the only way they can deliver sales is through partnership and problem-solving.

▶ *How much do your salespeople know about their customers and prospects? N*

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