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By Leanne Hoagland-Smith, M.S.

**Did you know?**

- ① 42% in real estate inquiries want an instant response (Source: NAR)
- ① To connect with the buyer takes an average of 18 calls (Source: TOPO Blog)
- ① Only 23.9% of sales emails are opened (Source: TOPO Blog)
- ① 61% of salespeople consider selling harder or much harder than five years ago (Source: Mark Wayshak)
- ① Only 24.3% of salespeople exceeded their quota last year (Source: Mark Wayshak)

Even though some may state these facts are new, my sense is, they are not. Customers have always been demanding. Sales leads have always been difficult to reach. People have always been busy. Salespeople have always thought selling today is harder than yesterday. And yes, not meeting sales goals or other goals is quite common.

The question then is: If these facts are not new, then why are people doing the same thing over and over again while expecting different results? What is going on?

Maybe it is time to just answer the phone. I cannot say how many times a sales lead has said the following:

*"I wasn't expecting you to answer the phone." or "What a surprise, you actually called me back."*

With 20 years of just “inside” sales experience, the phone has always been my best friend. I was in sales before emails, texts, faxes and even computers. Imagine that, selling without a computer or a smart device?

My best friend, the phone, provided me with incredible insight to people and how to react to those same individuals. Having four different inbound lines with people holding and each wanting 100 percent of my attention was a great business and sales training experience. Over the years I recognized the following and to this day, 40 years later, still adhere to them.

**P**resent – Each person wants to know you are present during the call. This is not the time to be multitasking. You must be present during each call and the sender must know you are present.

By the way, contrary to all the hype about multitasking, the human brain is not designed to multitask. The more we multitask, our quality of work diminishes. In fair disclosure, I do admit I did engage in multitasking when I was on hold.

I know some will disagree and insist they can multitask. However, according to research by Bergman in 2010, multitasking leads to as much as a 40 percent drop in productivity, increased stressed and a 10 percent drop in IQ.

Research by Sousa in 2001 revealed the brain can only hold 5-9 pieces of information at a time in short-term memory. Moving that information into long-term memory requires a deliberate effort. When speaking to someone on the phone, you do not need any additional distractions because those distractions (thinking multitasking thoughts or activities) may cost you the sale.

What you can do to be present is to take notes, actively listen and clarify what you just heard. This reveals you are present to the sender on the other end. He or she will appreciate your repeating what you just heard as long as you do it intermittently or when the conversation provides for such an opportunity.

## COMMUNICATION BY THE NUMBERS

To connect  
with the buyer  
takes an average of



Only  
**23.9%**  
of sales emails  
are opened

**42%**  
in real estate  
inquiries want  
an instant response



Of course with all the emphasis on being paperless, some insist pen and paper are no longer needed. I totally disagree. Who wants to hear you pecking away at the keyboard when you are speaking with someone? Again, that is another example of how multitasking can be harmful.

**H**uman – People buy from people. The human touch in each conversation is essential.

Years ago I read Socrates understood human nature when he defined a dialogue as the building of a relationship between two or more people. The word dialogue has Greek origins and comes from two words: “dia” meaning “two” and “logos” meaning “the word.”

By reading the works of Socrates and Plato, one can better understand how through artful questions, these philosophers were able to build a relationship between all participants. Today there are several books that focus on the use of Socratic questions within the sales conversation.

For many in sales and business, the human touch has been destroyed because the focus is on a certain questioning process or a specific sales process. Follow this process, step by step, and you will get the order. Zig Ziglar years ago defined “sales as the transference of feelings.” At this point in time, robots do not have feelings, though some scientists are working on artificial intelligence (AI) to program robots with feelings.

**O**bjective – Over time, some salespeople believe they know what the customer wants even before the customer speaks. This may be true. However, during every phone call, being objective is important.

Having your biases surface, based upon your beliefs and experiences, may harm the phone call. Even though you are tempted to rush the conversation to move the sale forward, this may not be the best action to take.

**N**imble – Answering the phone or responding to a web-generated sales lead is the first part of being nimble. People want to be connected immediately, or they will go somewhere else. Can you afford to lose a potential sale?

Research by InsideSales.com suggests responding to a web-generated sales lead within five minutes provides a 900 percent increase in contact rates. By waiting 30 minutes, contacting that sales lead drops 100 times.

Nimble also extends into the phone conversation. Here again, is where

being present and active listening come into play.

The goal of active communication is to have a **CLEAR** grasp of what the other person is experiencing as well as thinking. These five tips may assist you:

**Clarity** – Listen for clarity so you can separate the tangibles from the intangibles.

**Legitimize** – Listen to legitimize the real issues as perceived problems are really symptoms in disguise.

**Emotion** – Listen to the actual words being spoken, the speed, the pitch, the volume and emphasis.

**Agreement** – Listen for agreement to find common ground from which to build ongoing trust.

**Retention** – Listen for information that others may not have heard because they simply failed to listen.

**Empathy** – The ability to recognize the emotions of others to help strengthen the human factor is the essence of empathy. People do not want to hear a robotic voice sharing a memorized script. They have enough of that with all the pre-recorded phone call messages, especially this one, “our options have changed, please listen carefully.”

When empathy is authentically combined with the other factors of emotional intelligence, it is even more powerful today than 40 years ago. Over the years I have strengthened my own skills respective to empathy and, thus have increased my emotional intelligence.

Jeb Blount in his book, *Sales EQ*, explained the importance of emotional intelligence. He wrote “*In our hyper-competitive global economy, where buyers have an information advantage, it is the buyer’s emotional experience as they progress through the sales process that has the most impact on their propensity to purchase.*” Blount is 100% correct. Differentiating you and your business from your competitors begins by when and how you answer the phone.

I believe President Teddy Roosevelt said it best, “*No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care.*” Having empathy shows you do care.

In 2018, there are only three

months to make a difference to your sales and your bottom line. Are you ready to do what you need to do, or will you continue doing what you have done hoping for different results?

Imagine the possibilities if you just answered the phone. The business and sales research continue to demonstrate answering the phone or responding to web-generated sales leads

can make a dramatic difference to your sales results. What are you waiting for? Just answer the damn phone! **N**

*Leanne Hoagland-Smith is the Clarity Strategist, solving people and process problems. As a thought leader who challenges the status quo, she turns tomorrow’s goals into today’s results. Follow her on Twitter @CoachLee.*