


THE INVISIBLE *customer*


How to Combine Activity, Urgency,
and Strategy for Long-Term Sales Success

ROGER COHEN

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FOREWORD

I have been involved in the sales industry for over thirty years, selling and managing the sale of commodity grades of paper. I worked my way up from salesperson to vice president of sales by developing my own effective sales strategies. I also had the opportunity to observe and guide many struggling salespeople. This book evolved out of a sense of personal frustration from years of witnessing talented individuals either fail or fall short of their abilities. I wanted to help others be passionate about selling and achieve the success that I had. This guide offers a roadmap to sales success. Additionally, each chapter ends with a summary of the lesson and necessary steps for action. Whether you are a sales manager seeking to improve your team, or a salesperson taking the initiative to become a top-seller, this book makes it easy to attain maximum results.

I emphasize throughout these chapters that salespeople deliberately choose to act in ways that lead to success or failure. Ineffective salespeople avoid meeting basic requirements for sales success, while also evading personal responsibility. For example, depending on the type of sales industry, salespeople should be engaging in a set number of sales calls or customer interactions each day. This sounds easy enough, yet many individuals perceive this task as too difficult or unnecessary. By choosing a course of inaction that sidesteps performing requisite tasks, the salesperson is refusing to take responsibility for her sales career. Over a period of months or

years, the accumulation of such choices erodes her potential for success. The salesperson surrenders her livelihood to outside forces, including the economy and competition. Eventually, management must step in, with potentially fatal consequences to that person's career.

What steps can a salesperson take to avoid this? What guidance can management provide to the sales team to make each salesperson stellar? Answering these questions is the purpose of this book. In the following chapters, I will address easily implementable strategies for maximizing salespeople's potential.

I will discuss how salespeople must change their perceptions about accountability and take control of their sales trajectory. Even the brightest salespeople often fail to recognize that they are personally responsible for poor choices that led to the decline of their careers. They commonly perceive their sales strategies as successful, despite poor sales data to the contrary. Helping the sales team to "own" its choices and correctly perceive the long-term results of these decisions will empower it to achieve stunning success.

Additionally, salespeople must understand the role of sales urgency and planned and strategic activity in their career success. The extent to which salespeople must be proactive distinguishes sales from many other professions. Salespeople need to engage in continuous, planned activity during the workday to achieve maximum sales success. The more active a salesperson is, the greater his sense of urgency to perform more sales-related tasks. Notably, I have known many salespeople who overcame a lack of natural talent through hard work

and an active selling style. In fact, all salespeople—even the “naturals”—must continually foster urgency within themselves by assuming responsibility, taking the initiative, and increasing their levels of activity. A cycle of activity and urgency targeted to specific goals leads to unprecedented results.

This book’s title is inspired by one particular result of urgency and activity: “the invisible customer.” Clearly, an aggressive salesperson should pursue orders of all sizes; every so often she will close a large order, and many more times she will achieve smaller sales. From those mostly smaller sales, she will end up with a large pool of accounts that collectively equal or surpass the value of those rarer, very large orders. This collection of orders is what I refer to as the *invisible customer*. It is invisible because no one specific order or customer can define it. Its existence, and the cushion of financial stability it provides, is due completely to the extra effort and ongoing planning of the salesperson.

As I guide you through the process of making a long-term strategic sales plan, I will show you how to set realistic objectives that enable salespeople to focus their time and energy on profitable accounts and new business, while also maintaining valuable older customers. We will explore how to manage customer relationships, plan strategic entertainment events to reinforce relationships, recognize risky customers, and more.

Gaining control over one’s sales career can involve little more than making relatively minor adaptations in behavior and maintaining them over time. These adaptations can be as simple as increasing the frequency of certain tasks. Others are

more complex, but still readily achievable: analyzing previous activity data, comparing it to current information, and using this new information to prepare strategic plans to minimize risk. Whatever the tasks, salespeople must understand that strategy and planning are an ongoing part of sales success for the entirety of one's career.

Having said this, let's delve into some straightforward lessons and start reinvigorating sales.

