# Every Sales Rep's Biggest Weakness and How To Turn it into a Strength



Tired of spending days and days and thousands of dollars recruiting and training sales reps that can really sell?

Tired of listening to stories about the next big fish that the sales rep never reels in?

Are your sales people wasting time, spending months doing the sales dance with prospects that don't buy?

Do your reps consistently over estimate their upcoming sales volume?

- You can establish a simple process that enables your sales reps to consistently meet their/your goals.

- You can create a selling system that makes it easy for all your reps and new recruits to follow this process day in and day out.

- You can focus your sales effort on prospects that close and stop wasting time on prospects that won't.

- You can forecast sales accurately.

- You can improve the efficiency of your sales staff and increase sales volume without spending additional money on advertising, marketing or sales hiring.

There are many clichés that apply to sales people. Here are a few new ones:

- Sales people spend most of their time on prospects that are not going to buy.
- Sales people waste time telling prospects too much about your products and services.
- Sales people spend too much time preparing and distributing emails, letters, proposals, presentations, samples, etc. that are not needed to progress the sales opportunity.

## *Every Sales Rep's Biggest Weakness*

How can sales people reduce the time they spend on unproductive activities and focus their efforts on prospects and activities that will lead to closed sales?

The single biggest weakness of most sales people and most selling systems is qualifying.

If your business relies on repeat business from the same large customers, sales reps spend time "bonding", building relationships and nurturing existing customers. They return to report anecdotes about the huge sales that these existing customers will generate in the near future. Your company spends time and money preparing proposals, specifications, even stocking inventory in anticipation of these sales. Unfortunately, we've all seen how many of these opportunities never materialize, take longer to develop than reported and turn out much smaller than expected.

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If your sales effort is focused on closing new clients, sales reps spend time explaining your company and your products and services, preparing presentations and proposals, traveling and chasing new “leads”. Then if you’re lucky, 1 or 2 out of 10 turn into clients.

In both cases, your sales reps are probably spending 50 to 80% of their time with prospects that won’t close in the near future.

What if you could reclaim that time and focus it on prospects and leads that will buy soon?

Obviously, your sales would increase. Best of all, you don’t need to spend additional money on marketing or hiring sales people to do it.

### *How to know which prospects can actually close in the near term*

How do you separate the winners from the losers?

Try this: The next time a sales rep tells you a story about a big fish they’re working on, ask them these simple questions:

What is the specific need or problem the prospect is trying to address?

Who is your main competitor? Why?

What is the decision making process that they’ve established to make a purchase and who’s involved?

When do they need to have your product or service in place? Why?

More often than not, you’ll get vague answers to these questions that sound as if your sales rep is trying to sell you on your products and services.

“Well, because it will save them money, time, etc.”
“They’re not using brand X so we’re in the driver’s seat”
“My contact has been given the responsibility of making this decision”
“They want to have it done this month because the prospect has another project starting next month”

## *Make it Easy to Disqualify Leads*

Most sales reps neglect to ask these questions of themselves and their prospects or they believe generic answers that are really put offs. In short, they believe what they want to hear and they tell you what you want to hear.

The answer is to take a skeptical attitude. If that seems counter-intuitive, it's because we're talking about sales! We all know how important motivation and attitude are in sales, right? Well doesn't having a positive attitude mean believing that every lead and prospect is a potential sale?

And on it goes… prospects tell sales reps what they want to hear and they continue to waste time on "suspects" that aren't going to buy anytime soon.

The fact is that your selling process should make it easy for your sales reps to DISQUALIFY leads as quickly and easily as possible. Keep leads on the "suspect" list until they've proven to you and your sales rep that they are worth all of the time and money you spend on prospects. Make it easy to separate prospects that are actually going to make a purchase decision in the near term from suspects that aren't.

Some good news – creating a sales process that disqualifies suspects early in the process and focuses your sales rep's time on prospects that will buy soon is not as difficult as you might think. The trick is come up with objective criteria that are simple to discover and compare from lead to lead.

The results will be obvious: more of the kind of clients you want, less of the clients that bought because they were pressured or succumbed to your latest sales promotion. Increased average order size. Fewer "big fish" that get away. Reduced costs for travel and preparing materials.

The biggest challenge you'll face is that your sales reps won't want to give up on their suspects. God love 'em, your sales reps really do want to believe that every one of those suspects will buy in the near future, if they just stay after them. After all, their good sales people right? Their powers of persuasion have to account for something, right?

That's why it's important to create a process that does not just discard disqualified prospects. The process has to have a method to nurture your suspects along until they become qualified prospects, without requiring your sales reps to spend time on them.

## *How to Disqualify Effectively*

So how do you make it easy for your reps to identify and disqualify the suspects and efficiently move prospects through the process to closing?

You have to identify the objective criteria that separate winners from losers. Some are obvious…

Things that indicate the size of the potential order – quantity, # of employees, annual sales volume, plant size, currently incumbent competitor, annual budget for your type of product or service, etc.

Others are more specific to your type of business and can be more difficult to identify. One way to identify them is to make a list of your biggest and best clients. Ask yourself where those leads came from, what business are they in, what role does your product or service play in making their business more profitable... What are the common themes?

Getting all these criteria identified exactly up front isn't crucial. What's important is building a qualification test. A set of questions your sales reps have to answer about each suspect, with specific and objective information, before you start treating them like a prospect.

Many businesses have a "lead sheet" or "contact form" that sales reps fill out on new leads. If you don't already have something like this, get one fast! If you do, you're on your way.

## *Comparing Leads Objectively*

The next step is to create a simple, efficient means of comparing suspects based on your criteria in order to identify prospects based on the facts, instead of relying on the anecdotal, emotional methods that are typical of most sales people.

That means creating a database of suspects, prospects and clients that enables the rep to enter in new leads and forces them to document the answers to your



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criteria. The answers should be selected from a list where ever possible. This makes comparison far more efficient.

Now establish procedures that require the reps to get all the answers and the suspect to have the right answers before your sales reps start doing proposals, presentations, traveling, etc.

**A bonus** – building your “lead sheet” into a system like this shortens the time required to train new sales reps tremendously. The process itself will lead to faster success for new sales reps by enabling them to learn the best practices of your top producers. Just as important, the process will easily identify sales reps that aren’t going to make it. You’ll see problems earlier and be able to adjust accordingly before too much time has gone by.

This process will evolve. You probably won’t get it exactly right the first time out. Storing this information in a database makes identifying where your process needs improvement easier. You’ll know which criteria your suspects most often fail to pass. You’ll know which criteria are most common in prospects that don’t end up buying.

Your sales reps will have more time to spend with real prospects, resulting in stronger relationships with the right people, better proposals and presentations, bigger orders and increased sales.

New sales reps will be up to speed and producing profits more quickly.

You’ll be able to predict upcoming sales volumes more accurately and efficiently by simply analyzing objective information that comes from your sales process. You’ll see opportunities and challenges earlier and more clearly.

## *Getting Started Creating a Sales Process You Can Really Manage*

Ready to find out how you can refocus 50 to 80% of your sales effort on productive activities and increase sales by creating an objective, repeatable sales process?

Worried that this will disrupt your sales effort and distract your team?

Worried that your sales reps won’t adopt a new process and new technology?

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Try this simple calculation to see what making this kind of change can be worth to your business:

____ monthly avg deals closed x $_______ avg deal size x 10% = $_______ minimum increase in monthly sales. If you stop wasting time on suspects and refocus more than 50% of your time on qualified prospects, a 10% increase in sales should be an easily achievable goal!

## *Action Plan*

Ready to add 10% or more to your sales volume? Here's a simple Action Plan to get you off to a good start:

1. Make a list of the emotional reasons that customers buy what you sell. What keeps them up at night?
2. Make a list of things your customers had in common when you first did business with them. Focus on specific, measurable things. Things that can't be misinterpreted or confused easily. Example – Don't ask "Do you have many plants?". Ask "Exactly how many plants do you have?".
3. Build a central repository for all sales leads and track these things. This can be a simple excel sheet. It will take a couple of months but, you'll be able to compare this information in conjunction with whether the deal closed. Now you know which factors are key indicators of future business.

You're probably not thrilled about reinventing the wheel in terms of a sales tracking database. You probably think getting access to a ready made solution that gets you off to a flying start is going to be expensive.

Not sure how to define the right criteria for your business?

Concerned about spending too much time trying to implement this process?

With the many online, hosted options available today, you will be pleasantly surprised at how quick and easy it can be. Especially if you choose a solution that offers affordable consulting services.

The time required of you and your staff should be minimal, and the payoff in increased sales, reduced training costs and retaining top producers is certainly worth it!


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## ***About the Author***

Craig Klein is Founder and CEO of SalesNexus, LLC. Klein graduated from Texas A & M University in 1989 with a B.S. in Electrical Engineering. With over 15 years of sales and marketing leadership experience, Klein served as VP of Sales and Marketing for Neuralog, Inc. and A2D Technologies, where he helped grow these energy technology startups into industry leaders.

In 2002, Klein founded SalesNexus to address the need for sales and marketing automation solutions that deliver management analytics which enable fast and effective decision making and provide useful automation to sales and marketing end users.

## *About SalesNexus*

SALESNEXUS provides sales and marketing automation solutions and services to small and medium sized businesses.

- SalesNexus is a hosted, online sales and marketing automation system designed to be familiar to users of ACT! and Goldmine with enhanced management analytics, sales process automation and marketing automation.
- SalesNexus also provides affordable services to assist clients in sales and marketing process definition, team member training, database customization and marketing campaign implementation.