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Sales Suffering? Improve Customer Relationships **By Steve Zaffron & Dave Logan**

In the current economy, sales are suffering. Many salespeople feel that they're in a scramble, trying to find a way to sell to people who seem hesitant to invest in anything, who are struggling to figure out what they can afford and justify. People are coming to the sales process with fear and wariness.

Reversing the downward spiral is possible if companies change their conversations with customers and thus change their relationships with them. Often it is not the company's product or service that distinguishes it in the marketplace, but how a company interacts with its customers. As a salesperson, you have the power to turn the sales conversation around from trying to sell a product to delivering the solution critical to coming through tough times strong and healthy.

In *"The Three Laws of Performance"* we walk you through the exact steps on how to "rewrite the future" – which in this case, can mean going from no sales to breakthrough sales. Fundamental to that breakthrough, is knowing that people's actions are correlated to the way a situation "occurs" for them, not necessarily the way that it is. While there are facts involved in any circumstance, the way the circumstance occurs includes our interpretations of the fact, our hopes, fears, and past experience of these kinds of facts, and the future we imagine will come out of these facts.

We cannot change the facts; but we do have a choice and a say in how situations occur to us through interaction with others about finding empowering ways to view our current circumstances. Often this kind of authentic communication also requires saying what we normally are not saying. Let's start with the customer. When you walk into a company to make a sales call you can see, instantly, how the company occurs to its employees, and how the staff occur to each other. Like little cartoon bubbles floating over their heads, you can read what people are not saying but are communicating. It seems to spring from the essence of who people are, and comes through in every encounter. Just to make it through the day, we often turn our antennae off. But to do so robs you of valuable insight into your customer.

Key to elevating your performance – in this case, achieving sales goals – is addressing what people are communicating but not saying. Perhaps the issue isn't the purchase, but how they can justify it to others. Or it might be cash flow – and a simple modification of the terms might make all the difference. By standing in the other person's world – understanding how their world occurs to them – you have access to be effective in dealing with customer needs at an entirely new level.

Now let's move to you, the sales professional. The key to making the sales process work is to transform how the process of selling occurs to you. Just as the customer has a cartoon bubble over his or her head, so do you. What does yours say? If it says, "I can't sell," you won't. If it says, "they'll defer the decision," they probably will.

Recognizing the bubbles over your head is the first step in rewriting them. Even in a down market, sales people whose bubbles say “what I’m selling will turn things around for the customer” will do better. The key is to transform the unspoken but communicated way the world occurs – what the bubbles over our heads say. You can elevate your performance by elevating the conversations you are having – with yourself, your company, and with your customer.

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