

# THE POWER OF FOLLOW-UP

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***“If you don’t follow up you risk losing the sale to a competitor who will.”***

Kelley Robertson

It never ceases to amaze me how few salespeople make the time to follow up after they have made initial contact with a prospect or customer. In the last few months, I can think of at least eight different situations in my own life (business and personal) when a salesperson did not bother taking this initiative. These included a landscaper who designed plans for our property, two different people who spoke to me about creating a promotional piece of literature for my business, a sales rep for a pool company, and a salesman who worked in a men’s fashion store who was asked to send information. In each of these situations I was very interested in the product or service offered by the vendor.

This got me wondering...why don’t people follow up? Here are several reasons.

**They don't want to appear pushy.** It may be true that following up too frequently will come across as being pushy. However, very few salespeople ever come close to crossing this line. In fact, one of the few times I left a salesperson who was pushy, it was more because of his tone than the fact he actually followed up. As a sales professional, I believe it is our responsibility to keep following up with our prospects until we know for certain if they want to do business with us. However, I also strongly believe that we can cross that line by making too many calls in a short period of time.

So where's the happy balance? It depends on your business. A weekly call is more than enough to keep in touch providing you make sure your call is short and to the point. Don't waste your prospect's time by droning on and on. Also, provide some additional value during your follow-up call whenever possible. This may give your prospect a reason to choose you instead of a competitor.

**They forget.** It's easy to forget, considering how busy we are. We may have every intention of calling our prospect but we get caught up in our business. Unexpected problems crop up, we find ourselves spending more time in meetings and stuck in traffic, and because we didn't schedule the follow-up it doesn't get done. This is a common dilemma but one that can be avoided by considering the follow-up as a scheduled appointment.

**They make false assumptions.** I once submitted a proposal to a company and told them I would follow up on a certain day and time. Unfortunately, I was extremely sick that particular day and it was several days before I recuperated. I then wrestled with whether or not

I should call my prospective client. I was concerned he would question why I didn't call as scheduled. In the end, a simple apology was enough to rectify the situation and move the sales process forward.

When someone doesn't immediately return our phone call or e-mail message, we usually assume the worst—even if this assumption is not verified. I have learned from experience that a lack of response can often be attributed to the fact that the other person is just too busy to respond or does not have an answer for you.

**They think the customer or prospect will contact them.** I think this is one of the most common myths salespeople fall prey to. They think that if they do a good job the customer will automatically call them back—they don't need to follow up. Unfortunately, they cannot rely on this if they want to achieve their sales goals. People get busy, they forget or procrastinate, and the more time slips by, the less important your product or service may be to that prospective customer. I recall a situation when I expressed interest in buying a particular product from a store and told the sales associate I wanted to wait a little while. A few months later he called to inform me that the item had dropped in price and suggested that it would be an ideal time to buy. His follow-up reminded me of my interest in the product and motivated me to buy.

**They have never been taught.** Many salespeople have never received formal sales training and have not learned why they should follow up and how to make the follow-up happen. This is relatively easy to remedy. Start by asking or telling your prospect that you will

follow up on a specific day or time. Tell him how you will follow up (telephone, e-mail, face-to-face) and record this in your day planner or time-management system so you don't forget.

**They are afraid of rejection.** Too many people who sell for a living would rather let a potential lead fall through the cracks than face the rejection that might occur. Instead of receiving a direct rejection, they decide it is easier to *not* follow through. However, this approach will not help you maximize your sales. Many people will end up doing business with the person who consistently follows up a proposal or request for information.

When did you last follow up with a customer to ensure she was satisfied with your product or service? If you are like most salespeople you probably have not followed up as consistently as you should. Unfortunately, most salespeople do not check in with their customers after the sale has been made.

The most common reason is that they fear customers will have a problem or concern. So, rather than dealing with this concern head-on, they choose not to call the customers. Yet they are missing a golden opportunity. If the customers are satisfied (and they should be, right?) the call will confirm to both customers and salesperson the value of the product and/or service. If the customers *do* have a concern or problem then the salesperson is given the opportunity to correct the situation. Properly resolving a complaint will increase your sales and improve your brand in your customers' minds. There are several ways to follow up:

- By e-mail. Certainly e-mail is efficient, but it doesn't always deliver the proper tone and manner for effective follow-up. Plus, most executives already have too many e-mails awaiting a response.
- By card or letter. This style of follow-up is one of the least-used methods. Yet it is very effective. I recommend sending a handwritten card within a few days of the purchase. Thank the customer for the purchase and remind her to contact you if she has any questions or requires any assistance.
- By telephone. This is the most effective approach, particularly if you send a thank-you card beforehand. If you receive voice mail leave a short message: "Hi Pat, it's Rick calling. I'm following up to make sure you are seeing results from the new software system we recently implemented. If you are not experiencing positive increases in productivity yet, please call me so we can discuss how to improve your results."

Here's the bottom line. You can easily differentiate yourself from your competition by making the effort to follow up with your prospects and customers. Don't take it for granted that they will call you. Be proactive and contact them.

**SALES TIP**

When someone expresses interest in your product or service but is not prepared to make a buying decision immediately, make a note in your time management system and contact the person later to see if he or she is ready to move forward.