

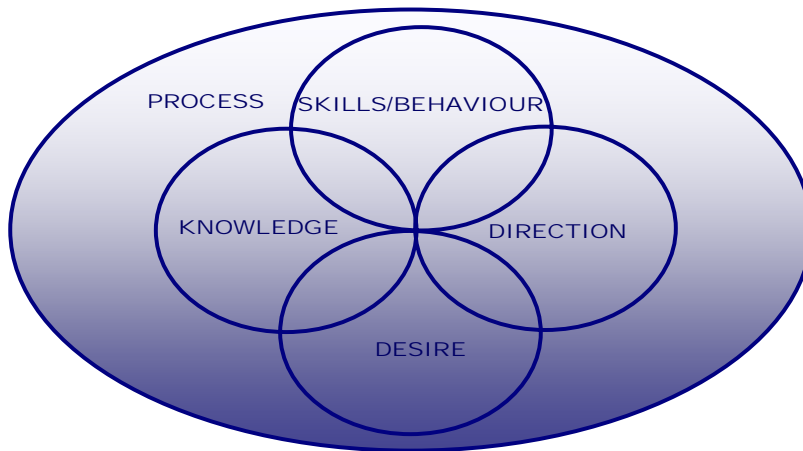
A Balanced Approach to Business Development

When it comes to looking at the factors affecting sales success, Jacqueline Harris finds that 'common sense not rocket science' is the order of the day.

Whether you call it 'selling' or, more grandly, 'business development', every business from global corporate to sole trader needs to bring in new customers or sell more to existing customers. For non-commercial organisations, the goal might be to attract more service users and for internal support functions of large organisations, it might be to attract more internal service users.

Moving from banking, which has seen the rapid rise of a more customer service and sales oriented culture, I started working with professional service firms and corporates to train them in the skills that are vital for winning business.

I soon discovered that there were factors other than receiving professional training that contributed to – or impeded - participants' success. In a search for a more effective solution for my clients, and based on close monitoring of those going through my training programmes, I devised the following model. It shows the key contributors to effective selling.



Key contributors for effective selling

Direction

This has to be the very starting point. How do you know what route to take unless you know where you are heading?

Organisations and individuals that are successful at selling have agreed and established a framework of:

- Strategy
- Tactics
- Targets
- Goals
- Milestones

They have a clearly defined target market and route to market and everyone understands their role and contribution in the selling process.

I have encountered many businesses who have simply said to their sales people (or fee-earners in the case of professional service firms), “Go out and get selling more of our products and services”.

Where do they start? As always, with a good plan.

You need not only to know your destination but also to measure and monitor your progress. Good sales management involves regular reviews of progress against plan, as well as learning from successes (and failure) and coaching for improvement.

Desire

Next, consider who you choose for the job: the candidate with good sales and business development skills but no desire or enthusiasm to sell, or the enthusiast with few skills? I would always select the latter.

Why? Experience shows that it is far easier to develop skills than change attitudes.

A successful salesperson needs to be hungry for work. Don't worry; I am not suggesting that we should all become 'pushy' sales people, rather that we should:

- Have a genuine desire to help our clients and customers to find a solution to their needs.
- Help our customers to buy the best solution for them.
- Believe in our products and services and how they help our clients.
- Be proactive in seeking out buyers of our services.

Knowledge

Confidence in our abilities is often based on having a solid body of knowledge. Sadly, many of us spend too little time acquiring that knowledge. Some professionals whom I work with are reluctant to explore their clients' needs, because they lack detailed knowledge of their services portfolio and cannot match these to requirements. They are afraid of exposing their ignorance.

Look for ways to acquire as much knowledge as you can. Here are some subject areas for starters:

- The business, company or firm
- Its products and services
- Clients
- The marketplace
- Competitors

Skills & Behaviour

We all have the ability to be good sales people and we can learn and develop the necessary skills. Many are those we use in our non-working lives and we draw on them unconsciously.

Here are a few of the skills and behaviours that spring to mind:

- Building rapport
- Questioning
- Listening
- Personal impact
- Assertiveness
- Influencing
- Time management
- Presentation skills
- Presenting benefits
- Identifying customer needs
- Negotiating
- Telephone techniques
- Writing proposals and quotations
- Networking

Process

Finally, whether you are a sole trader or a multinational company, you need processes in place to support your sales and business development activities. Challenge whether existing processes help or hinder the development of business within your organisation.

There are many IT systems on the market to help with the management of sales, databases and client relationships. But these processes must be integrated with the people side of the business. For example, over the last decade many businesses have invested in CRM (customer/client relationship management) systems as a means of increasing sales. Yet such systems are not a panacea for falling sales. They depend inherently on the quality of information that is input and then how the information is used. The old adage 'garbage in, garbage out' holds good here.

A CRM system will not manage the relationship – that's the job of the sales person, relationship manager or account manager. The value of the system is that it enables the relationship manager to have purposeful conversations with the client or customer based on meaningful, accurate and up-to-date data about the historical and current relationship.

Communication processes are as important as IT systems. How well are you communicating within your business? Do you hold sales meetings? What is the focus of these meetings and how productive are they? Are they merely a company jolly or do they genuinely share and celebrate best practice?

Successful selling is more common sense than rocket science. It is like a top chef creating a delicious dish. The ingredients are simple and fresh and it is the combination of ingredients, their preparation and the attention to detail right down to the final seasoning that make it special.

Are you investing your efforts to best effect and greatest return? Keep it simple; combine all the ingredients (direction, desire, knowledge, skills and behaviour and process); pay attention to the details; and you will have your own recipe for success.

To find out how Auric Results can help you to find your recipe for success, please contact Jacqueline at j.harris@auricresults.co.uk.

