

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Why your salespeople should have not one, not two, but three objectives every time they make a call

BY I. MARTIN JACKNIS

Most of us assume that failure is intrinsic to the sales process, and not without reason: it's estimated that only 4% of all sales calls end in a commitment to buy. But a lost sale doesn't have to be a wasted opportunity for your company. Have you ever noticed how the most successful salespeople—or businesspeople, in general, for that matter—seem to have a natural talent for getting the most out of every situation? It's not that they're necessarily smarter or more charismatic than the rest of us. But they intuitively use certain techniques that get results.

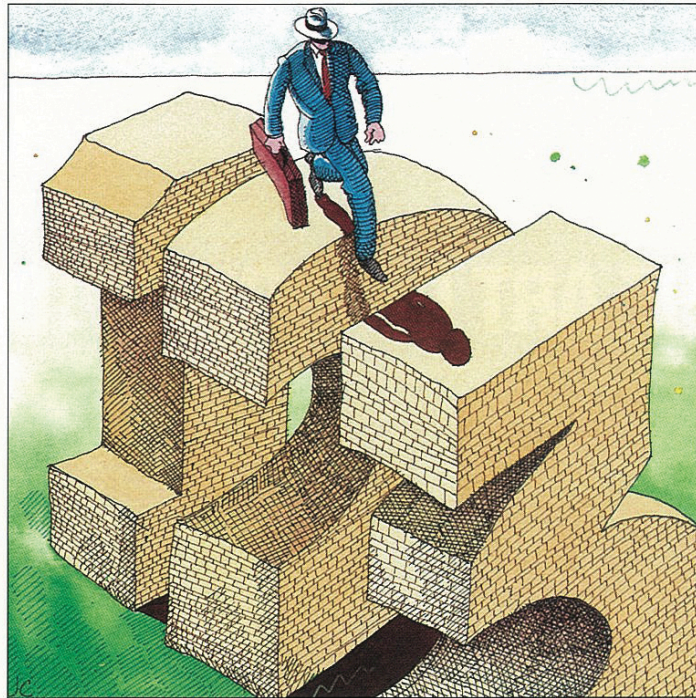
One of these techniques I call "multiple objective setting." I've used it throughout my 18-year career in sales and marketing, and I'm convinced that it

significantly helps boost the probability of success on every call I make. Luckily, multiple objective setting is an easy concept to understand and apply, and it can become second nature to any salesperson who practices it. Here's how it works.

Before I make a sales call, I set a primary objective. That's the most reasonable outcome I can expect from the meeting, given my knowledge of the client's needs and the client's knowledge of my service or product. For example, if the client I'm seeing for the third time has expressed an avid interest in what I have to sell, then it's not wholly unreasonable for me to expect that client to place an order.

Sometimes, though, I can do everything right on a call and still not make the sale or reach my primary objective. But that doesn't mean I just thank the client, turn on my heel, and head out the door. Considering the time and energy I've already invested, I want to try to get some return from the call. So besides my primary objective, I also set a minimum objective.

On a cold call, for example, my minimum objective could be to get to know the person I'm dealing with, to find out what his or her needs are, or merely to set a date for a



second meeting. Or if I'm calling on a client for the third time, and the order I'm expecting doesn't come through, then my minimum objective should be to find out what went wrong. Was there a problem with my product? My approach? My personality? Was there more I should have known about my competition? Even when I make a call that would otherwise be counted as a flop, there's always some information I can uncover that will help me eventually close the deal or improve my sales performance the next time around.

Finally, I also set a visionary objective for every sales call I make. This is the most optimistic assessment of what could happen, and I reach it only rarely—usually when the competition has somehow been neutralized, or my client suddenly realizes that much greater use could be made of my product or service than he originally thought. Salespeople often limit their potential by closing their minds to a wide range of possibilities. Thinking about visionary objectives forces a person to speculate, to reach for the sky.

Until recently, I never stopped to analyze why an exercise as simple as multiple objective setting could produce such

powerful results. I realize now, however, that there's a solid logic behind the technique.

□ Multiple objective setting takes away the fear of failure that salespeople often feel when they're planning calls. It also encourages an ongoing sense of accomplishment. Anybody who's asked to set multiple objectives should at least be able to achieve the minimum one, and that helps to generate a feeling that some progress is being made toward the ultimate goal of closing the deal or meeting the quota.

□ Multiple objective setting is self-adjusting. If your salespeople are meeting their visionary objectives every time they go out on a call, they're obviously setting their sights too low, and they'll realize it's time

to recast their goals. On the other hand, if they're always struggling to meet even their minimum objectives, it's a sure sign that they're shooting for more than they can reasonably handle, and they'll adjust their goals accordingly.

□ Multiple objective setting helps eliminate a lot of Monday-morning quarterbacking. By having everyone talk about their minimum, primary, and visionary objectives, you can clarify assumptions and goals, understand how your employees and associates think, and create a common language of expectations.

There's no doubt in my mind that multiple objective setting will increase the success rate of your salespeople. At the minimum, it makes sure they look at an opportunity at least three times and from three different angles. And when you're shooting for success, three perspectives are always better than one. □

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