



The Overwhelmed Sales Rep

Seven Tips to getting more done in less time

If you're in sales, then I know for a fact that there is too much for you to do in the hours available in any given day. We just have too much to do and there's not enough time. We have cold calling, follow up activities, customer meetings, proposal and quote preparation, lead generation, and lots more. As a result, your desk may be filled with Post-It notes, files, lists and other paperwork needed to do your job. On top of that, you have the ever-present unwelcome visitors popping into your office, and that darn phone just won't stop ringing. It's enough to make you want to take a long walk off a short pier.

When I work with sales people who are overwhelmed with too much to do, I tell them not to fret because there are a number of tips they can deploy that will help organize their lives and minimize their activities. These tips will work for you as well. However, I must warn you that these tips can take an effort on your part to actually implement and use. However, if you don't take that proverbial one step backward, then you'll never be able to take the two steps forward to propel you into a successful sales career. So be patient and accept the fact that these tips will help only if you make a concerted effort to try them out. They work for many of my clients.

1. Use Technology. If you haven't purchased a contact manager, sales force automation (SFA) system, or Customer Relationship Manager (CRM) product by now, it's time. For under \$200 per user (for individuals as well as organizations and businesses), products such as GoldMine, Act, and even Outlook (although I wouldn't consider this falling into any one of these categories, but it's better than nothing) can organize your calendar, to-do's, appointments, activities, customer/prospect information, and lots more. You'll make a small investment for the purchase of these products, but you'll make an even larger one learning to use them effectively. Yet it will be well worth it when you think of the time it will save you (and your organization), as well as increase your ability to follow up with your clients.

Consider how much revenue you could lose from a lost sale by not following up with a prospect – you dropped the ball because the Post-It Note fell behind your desk and you didn't remember to call her when she asked you to, when she was ready to buy. Consider how much is at risk in future revenue when losing an existing customer to your competitor – you never followed up after the sale to continue your relationship and she went to your competitor when she was ready to upgrade. Now consider the cost to purchase and learn these tools and you will see that this is really a valuable investment

and not a cost at all. However, no automation tool will help you if you aren't organized to begin with. So pay heed to the following tips as well.

2. Prioritize Your Tasks. It's easy for people to work on whatever it is that's in front of them or to take the next task and start working on it without any thought as to how important it is relative to the other tasks staring them in the face. Get in the habit of prioritizing your tasks. There are always things we do that are either more or less important than other tasks. Recognize a tasks' relevance and understand how important it is. Is it due right away or can it wait a while? If you spend the time doing it now, will something else suffer that needs attention right away? Once you do this for all your tasks, they will be in a prioritized order. Then, for each task, work on the most important ones first. Alternatively, you can delegate it to someone else. Don't just irresponsibly drop it in someone else's lap. Assign it to someone who can handle it properly, perhaps has more time, or is in a position to work on less critical tasks while you focus on the more important ones (i.e., a junior staff member). Finally, if a task is on the bottom of your priority list, consider dumping it all together. Chances are, if it never gets done at all no one may even notice or care, which proves that it was not important to begin with. Remember: Do It, Delegate It, or Dump It!

3. Time Management. I see sales people floundering by trying to juggle everything at once. They physically cannot multi-task efficiently or effectively and do a good job of accomplishing anything with any sense of quality. They end up doing a lousy job on many things instead of a good job on a few things. They might as well not do anything at all – the results will be the same. What they need is a lesson in time management. Set aside specific times of the day or evening to perform specific tasks; such as returning phone calls, managing emails, handling your billing and accounting, marketing, reading, and more. Using your prioritized list from the previous step, do similar tasks during dedicated times to optimize your energies and resources. Need to learn more? Buy a book on time management (“The One Minute Manager” by Ken Blanchard) and set aside a couple hours one evening to read it.

4. Avoid Interruptions. Having an open door policy is an admirable goal. Always trying to be available to people (clients, colleagues, subordinates, etc) is an equally commendable trait. However, when these selfless acts affect your ability to get your job done, it's time to reconsider. Try turning off your phone (or the ringer) while you are working on a project. This will prevent you from stopping what you are doing to answer the phone all the time (Remember, using good time management, if you set aside a time period during the day to return calls, then you'll be able to efficiently handle all the messages you'll get while the ringer was off). Stop checking your email every five minutes. Again, set aside a specific time of day to handle emails. Close your door to keep people from “popping” in to chat about nonsense (save those discussions for the coffee room). Work off-site by telecommuting from home or even working from a clients' office after your meeting, if they have space for you and it won't be awkward (“Do you mind if I use your open conference room for a few moments before I leave to do some paperwork? I won't be in your way; I just need some quiet space.”)

5. Optimize Your Voice Message. Make sure you have a good voice mail system that not only takes accurate and clear messages, but also allows you to give a quick description of your services, even suggesting they check out your web site before leaving a message. This will help them use alternative means of finding out what you have to offer. Web sites are like stores, so give them a chance to shop around and read about your business. This way, when they do speak with you on the phone, they'll already know the basics of your business, products and services. Using a web site to provide preliminary information is a form of delegating some of what you do. Hence, you should advertise and promote your web site often and frequently. Most importantly, make sure you do return all phone calls in a timely manner.

6. Outsource Your Phone Service. Consider using an outside service to take your calls. These services act as your own "virtual" receptionist (without the benefits or sick days) and can even give a brief description of your company. This is another form of delegation, but it comes at a cost (or is it an investment?). To find companies who perform this service, Google "business answering service".

7. Don't Be Everything to Everyone. There is only so much you can do, so walk away from business and customers that are not profitable, take away from more important clients and projects, or just waste your time. Prioritize your customers (like your tasks) and you will get back some valuable free time by not wasting time on non-revenue generating prospects or customers who have no intention of ever buying from you again (or their purchases are not profitable anyway).

If you printed out this article and read it off-hours or during time that you dedicated to doing research or education, congratulations. However, if you stopped what you were doing to read this, then you need to use these tips to get more done in less time. I hope this helps.

Good luck and good selling!

Russ Lombardo
(702) 655-5652
russ@PeakSalesConsulting.com
www.PeakSalesConsulting.com

Russ Lombardo is President of **PEAK Sales Consulting, LLC** (www.peaksalesconsulting.com) and an experienced CRM and Sales specialist, consultant, trainer, writer, speaker and radio host. Russ works with businesses to help improve their customer acquisition and retention for increased revenue and success. Russ is author of the books, "CyberSelling", "CRM For The Common Man" and "Smart Marketing." He can be reached at **702-655-5652** and email at **russ@peaksalesconsulting.com**.