



SELLING SMART

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Is 'Winging It' Enough?

WHAT WE LEARNED FROM 100,000 SALES CALL EVALUATIONS

Back in 2014, I authored an article titled, "Are Your Tire/Auto Service Salespeople 'Winging It' on the Phone?" At the time the article was published, my Pinnacle Performance Training team and I had evaluated approximately 25,000 sales calls between tire/auto service sales staff and prospective customers. In May of this year, we reached a milestone mark with 100,000 sales call evaluations completed – mostly for multi-location, market-leading tire/auto service businesses across the country.

In short, my conviction that most tire/auto service salespeople are indeed "winging it" on their sales calls, at the expense of the business, has only strengthened over the years.

This article is a quick refresher on what I wrote then and how you can apply sales call best practices in your business today.

Professionals Follow a Sales Process, Amateurs 'Wing It'

Salespeople that "wing it" are not managing their sales calls – the caller is – routinely breaking one of my top rules of engagement: If you're not in control, you're out of control. Without an effective sales process, sales associates default to mere order takers with tire recommendations based on size/inventory, and most sales are made by being in the right place at the right time.

To improve customers' shopping/buying experience and results for the business, all world-class companies train their sales associates in a selling process. Of course, mastering a sales process takes time and change, especially for those veterans that have been "winging it" for years. It's not easy. But, once

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"Without a doubt, working with Steve and his Pinnacle Performance Training is THE BEST DECISION we made to improve our sales and customer service. A master facilitator, Steve's training helped us to institutionalize world class customer service best practices into the very culture of our company. I only wish we had decided to work with Steve much sooner."

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Tate Boys Tire & Service
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How do they do it? You might wonder where many of the winners and finalists of the Tire Review Top Shop program achieved such high levels of industry excellence. Many have taken advantage of territory-exclusive sales and leadership training provided by Pinnacle Performance, produced and hosted by **Tire Review's** "Selling Smart" editor, Steve Ferrante.

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institutionalized, the performance gains are well worth the effort with service advisors being far more efficient and effective in managing their sales calls.

If You're Not Measuring, You Cannot Manage

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to train a team of 52 tire/auto service businesses located in the southern U.S. Unlike my other independent tire dealer clients, this was a regional program for a nationally-known chain on behalf of their major tire manufacturer. When we initially discussed evaluating sales calls, their response was "we're already recording our calls." This is not an unusual reply as about a third of my clients are recording their incoming calls before we begin training. I came to find out that tire manufacturer had made a major investment in a popular recording software platform, and they had been using it for years. Given our pending program, they gave me access to the software so I could, as standard practice, review their sales calls before I trained them to do anything differently.

About two months later, I met with their leadership team in person—a group of district managers who each managed six to eight stores. Sitting around a conference room table, I informed them that I had been reviewing their calls and asked, "What

are you guys doing with the software?" Seemingly confused by my inquiry, there was dead silence at first. Then one manager responded, "We're listening to the calls." I didn't debate, but I knew that wasn't exactly accurate since my team's job is to screen all incoming calls just to find the suitable ones, and that takes considerable time – time I knew he and the other managers did not have. Regardless, I went along and replied "Great, what are you listening for?" Again, dead silence, and then one manager offered, "They don't ask for the business."

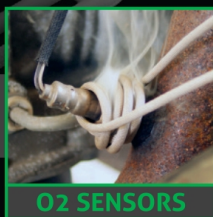
"Wonderful," I replied. "How many times do they ask for the business?" No idea. In fact, they had no idea how any sales associate was actually performing on their sales calls. That's because all their software did was record calls. It did not have the ability to measure anything. Consequently, all managers (these and the 50-plus individual store managers) had no way to measure how sales associates were really performing and/or what needed to be addressed to improve performance.

The Most Important Half

So, while recording incoming customer calls is essential, it is only half of the solution. The other half – the more important half – is having a successful sales process and then monitoring and evaluating those sales calls on how effectively your sales

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associates are executing that established selling system.

In the case of my tire/auto service clients, we use call recording software with tailored scorecards to evaluate every element of my “Pinnacle Sales Process.” Armed with the evaluation data, we can then pinpoint precisely where a sales associate is weak or missing key elements and provide the coaching to improve their performance on future sales calls.

As renowned management consultant Peter Drucker said, “If you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it.” That is certainly true of sales/customer service training, and there’s no better way than evaluating a sales associate’s performance at the point-of-sale on actual customer calls.

Consistent Inconsistency

Another major lesson learned along the way to 100,000 sales call evaluations is that of consistent inconsistency. No doubt some of your sales associates are pretty good on the phone. On the other hand, I’m sure you’d agree, some are pretty awful, and therein lies the problem.

As I wrote about in another 2014 article, “The Case For Consistency,” the lack of consistency is one of the biggest problems facing multi-location tire and service businesses. In this case, customers view each store location as an extension of the

same company. They do not place less importance on consistency because there may be a less experienced manager or novice employee at a particular location. If they see your corporate brand displayed, they call or visit and expect the same quality of service every time.

Except that’s not what typically happens. When a customer calls and speaks with one associate, let’s call him Joe, they have a wonderful experience. That’s because Joe is personable, customer-focused, and cares about doing the right things the right way for customers. However, the next time that same customer calls, they connect with another associate, let’s call him Larry, and their experience is miserable. That’s because Larry does it “Larry’s Way” and is not concerned with any customer’s experience. Larry is just trying to get the call behind him. From the customer’s perspective, their experience with the business is now dependent on interacting with Joe.

This problem is solved by having a strong sales process that associates believe in and are committed to, executed consistently by all associates at all locations on each customer call. Now, much like the consistently excellent folks at Chick-Fil-A, the customer can trust that no matter who they interact with – or what location they visit – they’ll receive a quality experience. **TR**

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