

Every Little Bit Helps

I'd like to offer you a choice. You can either have a salesperson with exceptional closing skills and terrible organizational skills, or the other way around. Which would you choose?

I posted that question on my Facebook page this morning. Limiting the data to those I'm pretty sure are printshop or signshop owners, respondents chose closing skills over organizational skills by a 3-1 margin. The general consensus seems to be that outstanding sales performance excuses a multitude of sins. As one printer put it: "Organization doesn't pay the bills. We can manage for poor organization. We all can't go out and close."

I'm not sure I agree. It's been my experience that the lack of organization usually catches up with you, and the "you" in question might be the salesperson and/or the company he or she works for. At the very least, a poorly organized salesperson will encounter fewer opportunities than a highly organized person. The other problem is that poorly organized people tend to *cause* problems. Here's a classic situation: the salesperson closes the sale but mishandles the details, and the end result is added stress and/or reduced profit. Yes, outstanding sales performance—i.e. "closing the sale"—may excuse a lot of sins, but let's not pretend that the sins don't occur!

Over Organized

Another printer noted that "it's easy spending extra time being exceptionally organized." Let me make this clear, I'm not talking about being over-organized, which can be just as great a failing as the opposite. I know salespeople who spend most of their time making lists and plans, and very little time actually selling.

I also know salespeople with solid organizational skills, though, and they seem to flow through their days efficiently and effectively. *That's* what I'm talking about here, not "paralysis by analysis."

Every Little Bit

I think we'd all agree that the "ultimate sales professional" would have both exceptional closing skills and exceptional organizational skills. Good luck finding that person! The reality in the marketplace is that most (sales)people are flawed. So the question is, do you manage around their flaws, or by working to improve on whatever skills are deficient? Sadly, in my experience, most printers don't do either. They tolerate the salesperson's performance and behavior. They put out the fires that the salesperson causes. They may call that "managing for poor organization," but I disagree. Real management is *proactive*. Cleaning up a salesperson's messes is *reactive*. It's not at all the same thing!

So, do you have a salesperson who needs improvement in his or her closing skills and/or organizational skills? If you do, do something about it! There's a wide range of resources available to you, ranging from books and blogs to seminars and webinars and even industry-specific sales coaching. Obviously I hope you'll consider me as a resource, but there are many other options available to you.

Here's the most important thing to consider. No book, seminar or coaching program will "turn a salesperson around" overnight. But that's not a reasonable goal in the first place. I would be happy enough to see modest improvement over a period of time.

Think of it this way. If you have a salesperson who's an 8 on a scale of 10 in terms of closing skills, and a 3 on a scale of 10 in terms of organizational skills, your business would probably benefit substantially from just getting him/her to 5 or 6 in terms of organization. Flip that around and consider the benefit of improving a well-organized salesperson's closing skills by the same factor over the next few months.

The moral of this story: *Every little bit helps.*