

Reeling 'Em In (vs Shooting 'Em Dead!)

In the sales community, we talk about hunters and farmers. Hunters find new customers. Farmers maintain and service existing customers. It's generally assumed that one salesperson can't be great at both things.

And that's often true, because hunting and farming do require different skillsets and attitudes. Of course, it's also true that "hunting" is really more like fishing, but let me come back to that in a moment.

Birth, Health and Growth

I have a problem with the hunter/farmer analogy in the first place, starting with the idea that hunters kill and farmers grow. What would be a better analogy? How about obstetricians and pediatricians? One is responsible for the birth of a relationship, the other is responsible for its continued health. Growth is really another story. In my experience, most of the salespeople who are categorized as farmers don't do much growing. Sure, sometimes the accounts grow because the salesperson does a good job of nurturing the relationship (see "maintain and service" above), but I don't see enough cross-selling or account penetration. I see very few salespeople selling a wide range of products to their current customers, or getting to all of the right people in the customer's organization. In other words, there's order-taking and customer service going on, but not real selling.

In agriculture, farmers plant seeds and cultivate them. That's what we want them to do in selling too. So let's reset the terminology and hopefully agree that hunting is about developing new customers, farming is about maximizing those customers, and the whole service-and-maintenance thing is really not a sales activity.

Fishing vs. Hunting

As noted, "hunting" is really more like fishing. It's all about reeling 'em in, not shooting 'em dead. Think about that. Sure, I get the part about the thrill of the hunt. In fact, that's the part I like best about selling. I love the process of identifying a target and pursuing it, overcoming all of the obstacles and objections and eventually winning — although to be perfectly accurate, I think of it more as a game than a hunt.

The fact remains, though, that most buying decisions are made on the buyer's timetable, not the seller's. A new business developer is better served by the patience of a fisherman than the aggression of a hunter. And remember, new business development is not limited to gaining new customers. It also includes gaining new business from established customers. So maybe we should be talking about fishermen to reel 'em in and farmers to maximize 'em, and leave hunting as its own sport.

Missionaries

It turns out there's another kind of salesperson, and this kind is especially important to today's printing industry. I call this one the missionary, and the job definition of a missionary is to convince customers and prospects to come along with us on the transition from Print Provider to Marketing Services Provider.

The skillset requirement for a missionary is very similar to that of a fisherman or farmer — questioning, listening and negotiating skills. But the missionary skillset also includes an intellectual component that not all salespeople have. To put it bluntly, a missionary has to be smart enough to understand both the technical aspects and the communications potential of what he/she is selling. And then, a missionary must have both the patience and the creativity to develop and sell a *program*, not just a relationship or a product.

The attitude requirement for a missionary includes that patience, and also a commitment to the concept of return on investment. A true printing missionary is almost always selling something that costs more than the status quo. That means his/her negotiation position will almost always be: *"Yes it costs more, but it'll work better and therefore be a better investment."*

Bottom Line

The bottom line for today is that all salespeople are not created equal. Some are better suited to a particular kind of selling than others. If you need a fisherman, you aren't going to get the results you need with a hunter or a farmer. If you need a real farmer, you're not going to get the results you're looking for with a service/maintenance type. And if you need a missionary...