

# Sales and Service Excellence

Volume 11 Number 7

The Magazine of Team Leadership

July 2011

SALES/DEBRIEFING

## Replicate Success

Improve post-decision debriefs.



by Richard M. Schroder

**T**HERE'S NOTHING QUITE like the feeling of closing a sale. Salespeople tend to celebrate first and then try to understand why they won so they can replicate their success. There is more to be learned from losing, yet most salespeople don't know how to gather accurate and meaningful information from prospects to learn from losses.

Salespeople often ask prospects why they lost a deal, but rarely get a straight answer. Salespeople learn the complete truth about 40 percent of the time; hence, in 60 percent of situations, salespeople lack an accurate understanding of why they lost. Prospects are seldom candid because they don't want to hurt the salesperson's feelings; they fear confrontation or criticism from sales reps; and they often have issues with the sales rep or sales process that hinders their candor.

Salespeople inhibit feedback when they are caught off guard by a bad news call, are unprepared for conducting a debrief, or don't know the right after-sale questions to ask (and how to ask them).

Improve your post-sales etiquette and get more candid feedback from prospects' post-decision in seven ways:

**1. Give early notice that you'll conduct a debrief (regardless of outcome).** To make prospects comfortable and elicit honest, actionable feedback, let the prospect know early in the sales process that regardless of the outcome, you'll conduct a post-decision debrief.



**2. Schedule a separate debrief call.** Don't debrief on the same call as when you hear about a loss. Prospects then have one goal in mind: to get you off the phone quickly. Instead, schedule a separate debrief call after you accept the loss, and let the prospect know that you won't try to change their decision.

**3. Use a debrief guide.** Using a questionnaire maximizes feedback and keeps the conversation focused. Salespeople who use a debrief questionnaire have a 15 percent higher close rate than those who do not.

**4. Take responsibility.** If you don't want candid feedback, prospects can tell. Don't get defensive or angry, don't debate or try to resell them.

**5. Take notes.** Tell prospects that you'll take notes. This makes them feel important and compelled to talk. A debrief should last 10 to 15 minutes.

**6. Probe for specifics.** Ask: *How do you mean?* or *Say more.* Or ask, *How can I improve on this?*, *How can I make it better?*

**7. Consider having someone else conduct your debriefs.** You might ask an insider or someone outside of your company. Consider hiring an outside third party to conduct Win/Loss interviews on behalf of your sales team.

By conducting better debrief calls, you can greatly increase your sales close rate.

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**ACTION: Improve your post-decision debriefs.**

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