

## SKILLS

# Easy as ABC

*Three little letters to remind you of what it takes to win*

**W**HEN YOU'RE IN HOT PURSUIT of prospects and profits, it's easy to forget the little rules that help close big sales. Just remember your ABCs, though, and you can make a mental checklist to remind you. By forming associations between the basics of selling (i.e., attitude, buying signals, cold calling) and the letters A, B and C, you'll

be able to remember what it takes to cultivate new customers and sell effectively. Learn these ABCs of selling (and add more of your own) for an easy way to remember what's on your to-do list for success.

*Aa*

**Be attentive** Your customers want to know they're not just a source of revenue to you. Give them the attention they deserve and show them you want to help them, and you'll probably enjoy their business for a long time to come. Listen to what they tell you about themselves and their businesses – before and after the sale. Make an occasional phone call just to ask how things are going. Send unexpected thank-you notes to show your appreciation. Shower your customers with attention, and they'll likely shower you with sales.

**Ask questions** To help your customers, you need to know their problems and goals, their preferences and their pet peeves. When you do, you'll know what products and services they need and how to be a valuable resource to them. Make a list of questions to ask all of your prospects, then customize or add questions to suit each individual. Design a questionnaire to find out what your customers think of you, your products and service. Consult managers or other salespeople for help with problems. Remember, asking questions doesn't make you ignorant – not asking them does.

**Improve your attitude** Once you have the tools to win, success depends on your will to win. Make motivation a daily habit – not an occasional event. Surround yourself with

positive messages in all places and at all times. Browse books of quotations, pick out 10 that inspire you most and post them where you'll see them often. Use a variety of formats to keep things interesting – books, audio and videotapes and/or the occasional live speaking engagement. Sample different books and tapes to find an expert who truly inspires you. Shake off rejection by simply making the next call. Eventually, the nos you hear will lead to a yes.

*Bb*

**Do everything better** Instead of settling on a selling plateau, make a commitment to ongoing improvement. Ensure your progress with goals that allow you to measure your growth and degree of improvement over past performance. When you reach one goal, set another one. Research your competitors' products and services and find out what makes yours better. Create a file of your competitors' product literature and catalogs to find out what they offer and how they present it; then use that information to improve your own presentations.

**Offer a bargain** You can improve your closing odds by making prospects an offer they can't refuse. While it's always better to sell benefits rather than price, buyers still



appreciate getting a good deal. Establish your product's value by outlining all its advantages and the benefits of doing business with your company. Explain how your product or service will help your prospects make or save money or improve their lives. Add value to your product by throwing in plenty of extras. If your prospect still insists that your product's price is too high, be prepared with several effective answers to that objection.

**Stay busy** Many different factors help ensure sales success (a good territory, solid skills), but constant activity may be the most important. Make more calls and more presentations, and you're almost certain to close more sales. Figure out how much time you spend making calls each day and how you spend the rest of your time. Does it take you 15 minutes to send a fax because you stop by the water cooler to chat? In a month's time those wasted minutes can add up. Plan your workday a day in advance so you move quickly from one task to the next. If you stay busy doing the right things, sooner or later you'll see the results.



**Perfect your closing** If presentations tell prospects why they should buy your product or service, the close helps them make up their minds. You can make a compelling case for your product, but if you don't end with a strong close, it may cost you the sale. Learn a variety of closes and how to match them to different prospects. Look and listen for buying signals and use your prospects' body language to tell you when to close. Rehearse your technique with other salespeople and ask for their constructive criticism. To make sure your prospects say "I'll take it" instead of "No, thank you," keep your closing skills sharp.

**Be competitive** Competition helps ensure ongoing improvement. Although your true measure of success is how much you improve on your own past performance, competing with other salespeople can help you do that. Plan a contest that rewards salespeople for exceeding their quotas and for helping other salespeople do the same. Ask other salespeople to contribute \$10 each month for a prize awarded to the leading salesperson of that month. Every month, have your manager post the top three salespeople's sales so you know how much you have to sell to be among them.

**Communicate effectively** Solid communication skills help you make a great impression on prospects, conduct persuasive presentations, build rapport with customers, work effectively with managers and associates and more. In short, they empower you to capitalize on all of your other abilities and knowledge. Clear communication starts with good listening. When people talk to you, focus on what they say and how they say it. Read between the lines. Ask questions or make clarifying statements to make sure you understand. When you speak, listen to your pronunciation, enunciation and tone of voice. Think of how the person you're speaking with might interpret your message and how you can make it clearer.

When you get caught up in the details of getting an audience with an important prospect or assembling a presentation to open an important account, it can be easy to forget selling's most elementary – and important – rules. Anything that helps remind you can also help boost your sales success. Now that you know your selling ABCs, put them into action to help you realize your full potential. • ALAN TEST