



ETHICAL SELLING

Building a Sales Culture Based Upon Social Responsibility



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Your telephone rings, you answer....

You: *Charles Johnson speaking....*

Salesperson: *"This is Bill from ABC Company and I'm calling to follow up on the material you requested."*

You: *"Excuse me, what material?"*

Salesperson: *"We sent a mailing and received a reply that you were interested?"*

You: *"Are you sure you are calling the right person? I didn't receive any information from you"*

Salesperson: *"Is this Charles Johnson...J o h n s o n...at 345 Carpenter Street, 84543?"*

You: *"Yes, but I didn't receive any material."*

Salesperson: *"That's strange; well nevertheless, the reason I wanted to speak to you was regarding our Wealth Security offering, right now we are..."*

You: *"Listen, I know what I receive and I know what I reply to, and none of what you are saying is true, so what's going on?"*

Salesperson: *"Hang up"*



Sound familiar? This isn't an isolated incident; it happens every day and every hour to executives, homemakers, senior citizens and thousands of other segments of society. Countless individuals receive calls from salespeople that mirror this example; as a result, the profession of selling suffers.

How many times have you received a call at your home at 9pm at night from a salesperson soliciting a newspaper subscription or their Internet services?

You find it beyond irritating. You may yell at them, you might ask to speak to their supervisor or simply say...take me off your list and slam the telephone down! No matter what your reply, the career of selling becomes the victim. Ask any young person who is graduating college and has decided on a career in sales what their peer group said to them when they announced that they were going into sales. The answer is always the same:

"Why do you want to go into a career where you have to lie?"

So, what kind of salesperson makes these calls and what kind of organization are they with? After interacting with salespeople over the past 30 years, I can tell you with certainty that it's every kind of company and nearly every category of sales. The birthplace of this selling strategy is the Fortune 500 to the Mom and Pop organizations and unfortunately, it's global. The good news is that most salespeople are ethical and every company isn't embracing this selling approach, the bad news is *some* within their sales team may be...but why?



True Story:

No more than a year ago, while facilitating SOAR Selling by a highly successful corporation in Newport Beach California, we were in the lounge the evening before discussing our strategy for the next day. As we shared ideas we began a discussion with a woman sitting next to us and discovered that she was in sales with a large organization and happened to be in the hotel for a meeting. She asked what brought us to California and we explained that we had just co-authored a new book called SOAR Selling and were here teaching the concepts in a seminar tomorrow. She asked what the book was about and we explained that it was focused on how to reach decision makers on the telephone.

She immediately said; *"wow, I could use that... I just lie to get through."*

Shocked, we asked why she believed she had to lie; she replied that it's the only way she knows how to get past the receptionist!

This woman was professionally dressed, in her 30's, articulate and at first blush one would say she was a pro. We later discussed how shocked we were that she admitted to us, pure strangers that she lied to make contact on the telephone when prospecting. Knowing that she was with a very respectable and well-branded firm we wondered how shocked her employer would be to learn of her prospecting strategy. It was very disappointing.



6 Reasons Why Unethical Selling is Taking Plece

Reason #1: **Your Quota**

It's pouring down from the top. The pressure on sales managers to deliver sales quotas is often overwhelming. As a result, sales managers do what they have to do and that is, push and *push hard*. They respond to exceedingly high quotas given to them by demanding salespeople perform. Sales numbers are measured on a metric platform so if a salesperson isn't hitting quota they feel the heat quickly to ramp up results. When it comes to demand generation, I have seen salespeople required to make 100 new calls each day! If they report that they had minimal contact or minimal appointments set, the answer is often; "make more calls!"

Reason #2: **Threat**

If a salesperson isn't hitting quota or are not on track to hit quota they are often faced with dialogue stating that without quota success they may be released. The pressure is now transferred to the salesperson in the form of job loss! It's a frightening feeling to be threatened with termination knowing how it will impact their lives.

As a result, salespeople do what they have to do to hit quota and save their job. Unfortunately that may include lying. In my view, salespeople that lie aren't born liars; they are born survivors. I don't suggest its what they should do and I do not condone it, however I do understand how it can happen. Many salespeople are doing their best to perform day after day, however if they aren't getting the job done the thought of termination often creates 'a *whatever it takes*' selling strategy.



Reason #3: **Lack Of Training**

Salespeople are hired then traditionally sent 'somewhere' for training. Often that training takes place over a period of weeks or even months. It's a responsible approach that many organizations implement; unfortunately the training isn't always what the salesperson needs to avoid unethical selling.

Consider this; most organizations provide *product knowledge* training, *order fulfillment* training and sometimes, actual *sales training*. So you may say, 'well if salespeople are given sales training then why do they end up resorting to unethical selling?' Here's an example; the sales training organizations provide rarely, if ever include 'how to make contact on the telephone!' Once the salesperson arrives at their respective office following training, they are facing the challenge of making numerous telephone calls in order to drive business. The process they are encouraged to use is **BTN+L**....*By the numbers plus luck!* They are told that it's a numbers game, just make enough calls and eventually they will make contact.

It's a brutal methodology and unfortunately it's what many sales managers have learned on their way up so it's all they know to teach. In addition to this, they are provided with very little training on what to say once they do get someone on the phone or how to handle objections! In the end, salespeople emerge from corporate training only to enter the game unprepared. The problem is that they are held accountable as if they were prepared.



Reason #4: Minimal Post Training Support

Once a new salesperson is at their desk and now carrying a card that validates they are a salesperson, they are told to sell and expected to be competent to sell. In most cases they aren't even close to being prepared. The assumption that the salesperson is competent now that they are back from corporate training is a stretch at best.

Although this lack of 'how to' provides an opportunity for sales management to support the new salesperson, unfortunately sales management often is overloaded with paperwork and ends up delegating to a down-line manager who interacts with the salesperson on a day-to-day basis. The down-line manager may be completely unqualified to develop the new salesperson in areas they so desperately need to succeed.



Reason #5: **Assumption**

There is an assumption in most organizations that when a salesperson is hired with previous sales experience they know how to sell, better yet they know how to prospect. After all, if a salesperson is hired with 5+ years of selling background they should be capable of high performance right? As a matter of fact, the *experienced* salesperson may have come with a performance history demonstrating they were at the top ranking with their previous employer.

So, if a salesperson is hired who was in the top 10% with another firm and is now on board with a new employer isn't it a fair assumption that they will know how to hit budget? Not necessarily so. The new salesperson may have joined the new employer with an entirely different compensation platform from their original employer. The new compensation plan may require a significant amount of prospecting with a much smaller salary. In their previous firm they may have had a handful of major accounts and a world-class salary, as a result they didn't have to drive net new logos, they simply 'took care' of their existing clients.

Now the salesperson is required to make net new prospecting calls and much of that may be on the telephone. It's most likely a skill that the *experienced* salesperson doesn't have despite previously having been in the top percentile with another firm. The pressure to produce is big; after all, the salesperson has been used to a big salary and although the opportunity for greater annual income is present, they now have to *drive* quota. The personal pressure a heavily weighted commission plan produces can invite unethical selling to the dance.



Reason #6: **Association**

Most newly hired salespeople enter the career with intent to do well and be honest. They trust they have joined a professional sales team and *for the most part* their assumptions would be correct. Unfortunately, every salesperson in the organization may not be the best guidepost. Just because a senior salesperson is a top performer doesn't mean they are great trainers or ethical.

New hires enter the company with hope that they will learn real world experience. The problem is there are those who have powerful negative influence standing ready to tell the new salesperson how things *really are*. They explain how to cut corners, bend the rules, justify why they have to lie to get the sale and so on. The new salesperson has no idea who to trust, who is ethical or who is not. Because they want to fit in and tend to trust any salesperson that is doing well they become highly vulnerable.

As a result, due to association the new salesperson becomes the unintended victim of the virus.



6 Course Corrections Leadership Can Take

1. Review what your corporate training department is delivering, determine if the skills being instructed correspond to the challenges the salesperson will face once they are in the field.
2. Determine if your sales manager has the instructional skill base to teach how to deliver quota beyond a BTN+L formula. Further, examine if teaching is actually taking place and on what regularity.
3. Hire with consideration for the type of selling skills needed to best achieve results. If you have a compensation plan that is focused more on commission, then hire salespeople who are comfortable prospecting. Hiring farmers to drive net new business won't cut it, it never has.
4. Stop threatening and begin teaching. There isn't a salesperson on the planet that wants to fail, take advantage of the talent you have hired by teaching skills that are needed for success.
5. Be a stand for ethical selling, make sure it's in your *culture* and communicate the importance and responsibility your salespeople and sales leadership has to represent the career of professional selling.
6. Take time to define what ethical selling looks like for your organization, be exacting with your internal memo, conference Skype or whatever method of communication you feel is most effective.



Authors Note

This article is not intended to infer that all salespeople or selling organizations are unethical, quite the contrary. We have found that the majority of salespeople and organizations do in fact operate from a platform of ethical selling and promote a professional standard of selling conduct.

Dialexis, Inc. is a Sales Training and Leadership Coaching Organization with Offices in the United States and Canada.

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