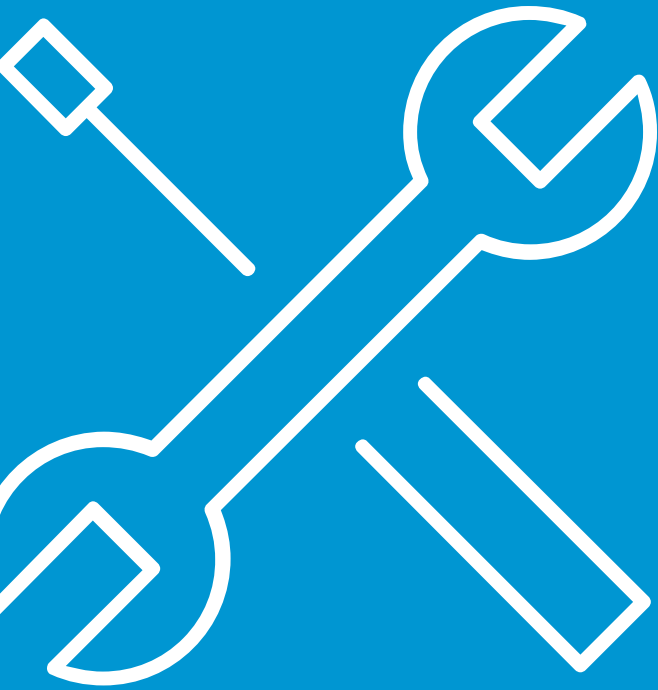


SIX CRITICAL SELLING SKILLS



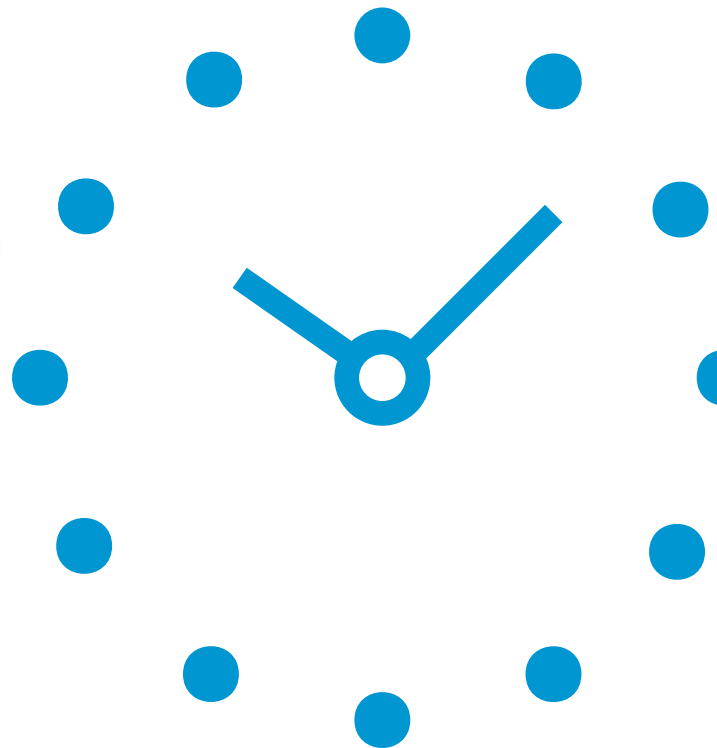
Working in sales is highly competitive and clinching a deal requires a great deal of skill. In North America, **only 10% of sales professionals will deliver ROI and 40% will miss quota.** There are, however, several key selling skills that, when properly refined, can give you the tools you need to sell effectively and meet your targets. Here are six critical selling skills that you need to hone now to be successful in sales in 2017.

1. PROSPECTING AND TIME MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Sales professionals are busy people who want to focus on generating revenue. It is understandable that you may sometimes feel tempted to bypass time-consuming prospecting and jump straight into calls. This is, however, a false economy since on average, it takes **eight calls** for a sales pro to reach a prospect and only 2% of cold calls result in an appointment. Prospecting skills are therefore key to effective time management in the long run.

Sort through leads to find those that are most promising. It's a good idea to use analytics to identify ideal leads based on industry, business size, etc. Importantly, learn when it's time to cut your losses; **don't waste too much time on a deal that isn't going to close.**

Done correctly, prospecting is always worth the time investment and will help you reap the rewards down the line.



“Sort through leads to find those that are most promising.”

2. PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE AND RESEARCH SKILLS



“It is vital that, as a sales rep, you truly are a bonafide expert.”


In today’s marketplace, consumers are more knowledgeable than ever. With access to your website (and those of your competitors), online reviews and social media questioning, it’s very possible that when you come into contact with a prospect, they may already have done some internet based research about your product or service.

It is vital that, as a sales rep, you truly are a bonafide expert. An expert not only about the product you are selling, but also about how your product or service stacks up against competitors and, importantly, an expert on how to advise a prospect how your product meets their needs.

Great research skills are imperative. Do your homework and be prepared in advance of calls. Create crib sheets with **value propositions** that demonstrate how your product is superior to your competitors. Set up **Google alerts** for other similar products on the market and update your these sheets regularly so you can be confident in your ability to answer any questions with a convincing and persuasive answer. Don’t neglect to check LinkedIn and other social selling tools to give you an understanding of them as a person and their business needs.

Even with the greatest amount of research, however, there will be times when a prospect has a question for which you don’t have an answer. Be authentic and transparent. Acknowledge that they’ve asked a really interesting/important question that you need to get back to them on and importantly, follow up with an answer as soon as possible.

3. QUALIFIED QUESTIONING SKILLS

A blue line-art illustration of two speech bubbles. The larger bubble on the left contains a question mark, and the smaller bubble on the right contains an exclamation mark. The bubbles are connected by a horizontal line.

After you've done your prospecting and research, you're on to the call/meeting itself. Here is where **qualified questioning** skills come into their own. A great sales rep starts off any conversation with insightful discovery questions that help inform their next steps and tactics. Don't jump straight into the features and benefits of your product. Your interaction must be more of a conversation than a traditional pitch.

Even if, from your prior research, you have an idea of what benefits will appeal, it's important to let your prospect talk and hear their needs. Qualified questioning about their company, their products, their need, their business plan and the problems they have encountered will inform your needs analysis and give you a chance to delve deeper into their true business pain and how your product can solve it.

Ask about budget, timeline, competition and their organizational purchasing process to get the information you need to clinch the deal.

"It's important to let your prospect talk and hear their needs."

4. ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS

Part and parcel of qualified questioning is the ability to use **active listening skills**. It's one thing to ask a question; it's another to make use of the answer. As its name suggests, actively listening means just that: concentrating fully on what is being said.

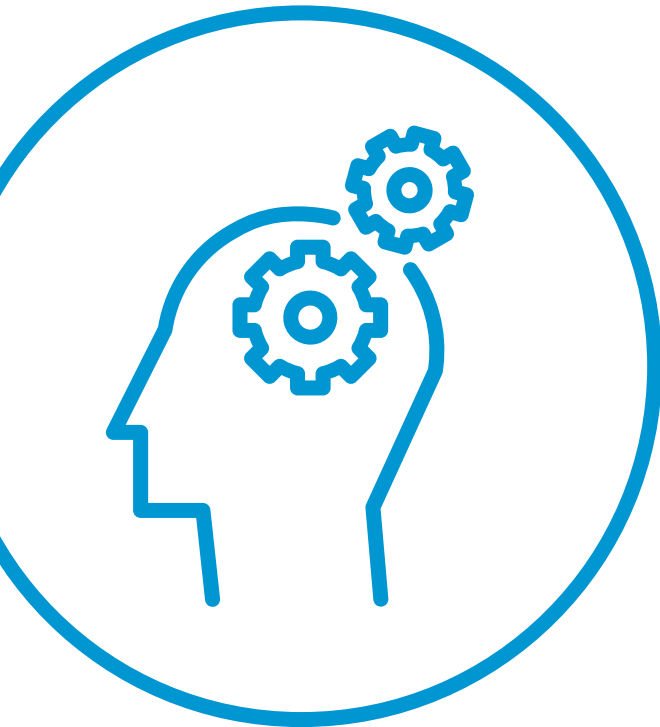
Not truly listening to a prospect is one of the most fundamental mistakes you can make in sales. Yes, you have done research but if you let that alone inform your tactics you will likely miss out on key information that could be integral to making a sale. For example, perhaps you have made an incorrect assumption about why a client did not like a competitor and, without active listening, your proposal will miss this key component and mean you fail to make the sale.

More than just helping shape your strategy, active listening is important because people can usually tell if you're really listening to them. It's a complete turn-off to a potential client if they feel ignored or that you aren't really paying attention. Active listening then is vital to forming a rapport with prospects, as well as learning the information you need to sell effectively.



“Active listening is important because people can usually tell if you're really listening to them.”

5. STRATEGIC THINKING AND OBJECTION HANDLING SKILLS



Before reaching out to a prospect, it's important to think strategically about the objections that might arise. Think "Objection Prevention" rather than just "**Objection Handling**".

As well as hypothesizing about potential objections, as you develop your sales pitch for a particular product, make a note of the actual objections that come up. Take these, find the ways to circumvent them, and add them to your arsenal. Crucially, you need to be proactive. Address common objections before the prospect brings them up and have your solution ready. Thus you'll preempt many objections before they even surface.

Naturally though, prospects will have some objections that you won't have been able to predict. Be prepared and ready to think on your feet. If you can call to mind actual data to back up your problem, even better. Whatever happens, use it as a learning experience, add the objection to your list and be ready for it next time.

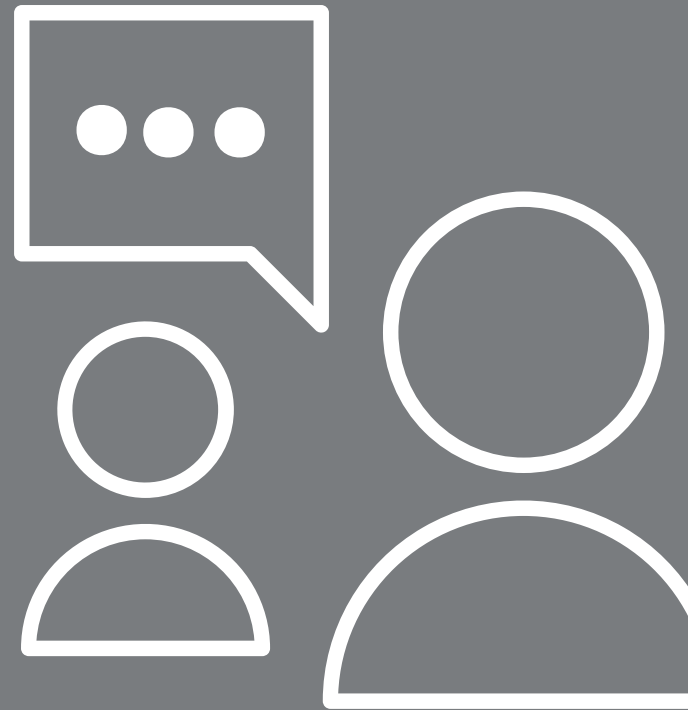
"Address common objections before the prospect brings them up and have your solution ready."

6. COMMUNICATION AND EMPATHY SKILLS

Honing your communications skills is absolutely vital in making a sale. Obviously, your use of language, in both written and oral communications, should be grammatically correct and persuasive in nature. But effective communication skills are comprised of far more than simply the words that you use. In fact, according to **Sandler Sales Training**, 58% of communication effectiveness is down to body language and other non-verbals, 38% is down to tonality, and a mere 7% is down to what we actually say.

Therefore, to communicate effectively in a sales conversation you need to subtly match your prospect, and this is where empathy skills come into their own. Put yourself into their shoes and imagine their response to what you are saying, pay attention to body language (in face-to-face meetings) and speech closely to check your assumptions about how they will react. Always try to mirror a prospect's tone and style in terms of physical body language and way of talking. Match their level of formality and aim to build up a rapport.

You may or may not be already be using these six critical selling skills in your day to day sales interactions but, to truly master all of them will take time and practise. Start honing these skills today and you will no doubt see a significant improvement in your sales success as you grow in your career.



“To communicate effectively in a sales conversation you need to subtly match your prospect”

ABOUT THE CANADIAN PROFESSIONAL SALES ASSOCIATION

Since 1874, we've been developing and serving sales professionals by providing programs, benefits, and resources that help you sell more, and sell smarter.



Contact us today at **MemberServices@cpsa.com** or **1-888-267-2772** to see how we can help you and your team reach new heights in sales success.

Copyright ©2017 by The Canadian Professional Sales Association
For permissions, contact **editor@cpsa.com**.

