10 Minute Sales Discussion™

From: The Canterbury Sales ™

Question: What will you do differently, after reading this essay?

Creative Selling, Kmart and the Dog Who Didn't Bark

By Andy Gole

"Is there any point to which you would wish to draw my attention?" asked inspector Gregory of Scotland Yard.

"To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time," said Sherlock Holmes.

"The dog did nothing in the night-time."

"That was the curious incident," remarked Sherlock Holmes.

"Silver Blaze" – By Arthur Conan Doyle

A business owner once learned the hard way the "curious incident of the dog in the night-time."

More than 15 years ago this business owner developed a new consumer product and began presenting it to retailers. Finally he attracted Kmart's attention. The Kmart buyer liked the product, but preferred to buy it from an existing supplier of related product. So the Kmart buyer "shopped the concept", showing it to vendors like Hasbro.

Fortunately, the larger competitors didn't want to produce this niche product. So Kmart bought the new product and sales "took off." The entrepreneur "flew in under the radar."

The product did well for a number of years. After the initial innovation, the owner developed modest improvements in the product to give consumers new reasons to buy. But then, sales-per-square-foot started dropping. (Retail sales are metric driven; there's no place to hide.) Eventually, Kmart dropped the product.

The owner realized he hadn't been innovative enough, and started developing many "out of the box" products. In the next year, he developed more new products than in the previous five years combined. But it was too late; he had closed the barn door after the horse had left. Kmart never carried the product again.

This owner was guilty of the "curious incident of the dog in the night-time."

In effect, from the market's perspective, he did nothing.

"Losing Kmart" became a metric for this business owner, a way to visualize and prevent his death. He realized that we are only as good as our last project, our last shipment, our last job. So he always strived to excel.

When his business was very busy, colleagues would ask him: “why are you so driven?” He would tell the Kmart story. He didn’t want it to happen again.

One of the central lessons of this story is not merely: “don’t rest on your laurels.” By contrast, you should strive even harder for excellence at the height of your success. You never know when a “Kmart experience” is around the corner.

What does this mean for selling?

The selling process is never over. The first sale is often a single transaction – a trial. This could open the door to a business relationship based on trust. Or a consultative relationship, where clients share their compelling needs and work with the salesperson to solve business problems.

Salespeople need to earn the right to this type of relationship, this flow of decision-making information. We earn the right by committing ourselves to a non-stop process of discovering and selling material difference. This is our only protection. We need to up-sell to material difference.

Certainly, we must delight the customer; perform our current offering with excellence.

But to protect our long-term position, we must offer non-stop innovation.

It’s the salesperson’s job to help discover what will be a material difference to the client. This requires keen selling and questioning skills, building on success to earn the right to a strong relationship of trust – a consultative relationship. We can measure selling success by whether the salesperson is receiving future-oriented information – about the client’s future needs. In effect, is the salesperson having a “talk with the future”?

Learning and responding to future-oriented needs prevents the “Kmart phenomena,” prevents the “curious incident of the dog in the night.”

And the pain associated with the loss. I should know. I was the business owner who lost Kmart.

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If you want additional copies of this essay, or would like to have them mailed to your sales team, call Andy Gole at 201 415 3447.

Andy Gole has taught selling skills for 13 years. He started three businesses and has made approximately 4,000 sales calls, selling both B2B and B2C. He invented a selling process, Urgency Based Selling™, with which he can typically help companies double their closing or conversion ratio. Learn more about Andy's method at www.bombadillc.com or by calling him at 201.415.3447.

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