10 Minute Sales Discussion™

From: The Canterbury Sales ™

Question: How do you defeat the "parole officer scam"?

Relationship Selling and the Parole Officer Scam

"I'm a relationship salesperson!"

You've probably heard this from many salespeople. This statement can be a well-earned badge of distinction or an evasion by a salesperson who won't challenge prospects.

Here's a clue to interpreting the statement: "there is no relationship if the prospect isn't buying from us".

One reason we need to challenge prospects is: to avoid the "parole officer scam". You probably know this story. I first heard it….

Over 30 years ago, in Berkeley, Ca. I helped manage a pizza parlor. My responsibilities included hiring drivers, to deliver orders. One day, I interviewed a "walk in" applicant, who wasn't a fit for the job. He had no hard feelings, and told me he recently was released from prison; would I like to learn how to con a "parole officer."?

I could see where this would be useful information, so I invited him to teach me.

When he was released from prison, he was assigned a parole officer, to monitor his behavior. They met periodically.

The first time he met the parole officer, he slouched in the chair, had a ripped shirt, long unkempt hair, a disheveled beard and talked somewhat incoherently.

He wanted the parole officer to write in his records the jargon equivalent of: "bum".

For the second visit, he sat straight in his chair, wore a new, clean shirt.

And the parole officer made notes.

By the 3rd visit, he had cut his hair and beard, and looked like a solid citizen.

And the parole officer made notes.

On the next visit, he had a job. The parole officer was writing something like: "re-integrating into society." Discharged.

Then, the ex-con looked me in the eye and said "now, I was ready to pull my next robbery."

We may be more familiar with this kind of behavior when our children – particularly teenagers – manifest it.

Sometimes, this can be amusing.

It is decidedly not amusing when prospects pull the "parole officer scam."

How does this happen?

Let's say a prospect wants you to quote, to "beat the incumbent into shape." All you are to this prospect is a "3rd price".

If the prospect says to you: "listen Andy, I will never give you a stick of business. But I want to beat the living heck out of my incumbent supplier, Joe. So would you mind taking 8-10 hours to visit, find out my needs and prepare a proposal?"

When this prospect first started buying, she may have said this to "3rd price" vendors; but she learned from experience that no one would quote. So your prospect became a bit wiser and now says:

"Andy, I realize I haven't given you any business in the years I have known you; because I relied on Joe, whose company always performed with excellence. Perhaps I relied excessively on this source. Something has changed in the last 6 months. We have had some quality problems with Joe's product; there have been some unexplained charges on invoices. Deliveries have been late. And Joe has been slow in getting back to me. I am very disappointed. I trusted Joe, I relied on him.

And I've been hearing good things about you, Andy, in the marketplace. I think this is your year. Could I invite to visit and prepare a proposal for me?"

Exactly what I want to hear.

So I visit, I prepare a proposal. Which the buyer uses to beat the living heck out of Joe, the incumbent supplier.

And I'm a victim of the parole officer scam. Again.

Maybe I fell victim – at one time - because I'm a "relationship" salesperson. I reasoned: She'll buy from me because we have a "good relationship."

There is no relationship, if the prospect doesn't buy. And you will typically have to challenge the prospect to give him/her a reason to buy, to change their behavior, to form a "real relationship."

Of course, we want prospects to like us. And this typically will happen when we do business.

But don't confuse cause and effect, when evaluating relationships. There is no business relationship, if they aren't doing business.

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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.bombadilllc.com or by calling him at 201.415.3447.

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