

The 10 Biggest Mistakes New Sales Reps Make And How To Avoid Making Them

by Jim Meisenheimer

1. Not knowing what your new BOSS expects from you.

Okay, first the good news – you get the dream sales position you always wanted. Now what? Well you got the job and now you have to perform. That's right, now it's all about getting results and making your numbers.

So you're thinking what's the big deal? Well the big deal is you'd better know what you're expected to do.

Make no mistake about it you're on probation during the first three to six months. Everybody is going to be looking at you to see how well you perform.

You're bound to make mistakes and even trip over your necktie from time to time. That's to be expected. You can limit these missteps if you plan ahead and work smart from the day you're hired.

There are race horses and work horses and one of the biggest differences between them is how fast they leave the gate. I've always been a work horse – someone who starts slowly and improves on a daily basis.

Don't worry about trying to change from one to another. It has little or no bearing on your long-term results.

Pay attention to everything and take notes. In fact I suggest you keep a journal to keep track of your experiences and the new people you meet.

Keep a record of the complete contact information whenever you meet someone for the first time.

There is one thing however you gotta do.

Failing to do this can cause you to tumble with missteps.

I know from my own personal bittersweet experiences and observations that most new salespeople don't do it.

It's simple and easy to do.

Don't make the colossal mistake of not knowing what your BOSS expects from you.

Don't assume you know – you must make sure you know what your BOSS expects from you during the first 90 days in your new sales position.

To avoid making this mistake do this:

You should asked this question and be prepared to listen carefully to his/her response. You should also take notes to make sure – you fully understand what his expectations are.

Simply ask, "What are your expectations of me during the first 90 days."

2. Telling everybody who will listen that you're NEW!

New salespeople always do this intuitively and instinctively. I made the same mistake when I eagerly joined the Scientific Products Division of American Hospital Supply Corporation.

So, why do all new salespeople get excited and volunteer the fact that they are the new sales representatives – with the responsibilities of calling on your account?

The fact is you are indeed new – no question about that. It seems like the most natural, polite, and courteous thing to do when you're introducing yourself to someone for the first time.

Just because it seems normal and logical – it doesn't make it right.

The reason you shouldn't be blabbering that you're new is plain and simple.

It doesn't position you favorably in the minds of your customers and prospects.

In fact it has the opposite effect – it positions you unfavorably.

Let me illustrate the point with an example.

As I'm writing this, I'm seated in First Class – 2F, on American Airlines Flight # 244 from LAX to Orlando, Florida.

The plane is a new 757.

Imagine what my reaction would be if the pilot introduced himself to the

passengers, before takeoff, in this way.

“Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen. This Captain Bob Richardson on Flight #244 from LAX to Orlando.

You know I’ve been flying for American Airlines now for 23 years. I have to admit though, I’m kind of new at flying 757’s. In fact, this is my first time flying real passengers – so go ahead everybody and buckle up!”

What would you be thinking if you heard a pilot confess that to you before takeoff? I’d be thinking - get me off this plane.

There’s absolutely zilch that is calming and comforting about flying with a NEW pilot.

Or being a new heart surgeon’s first patient.

Trust me when I say, your prospects and customers seldom look forward to working with new sales reps because inevitably it means more work for them.

To avoid making this mistake do this:

To avoid making this humongous mistake, prepare in writing and practice how you will introduce yourself to NEW prospects and customers.

Run it by your sales manager to get her reaction to what you’re planning to say.

Whatever you decide on – say it with confidence.

3. Before you can “Seize control” you have to “Size up the potential.”

Every company is different.

Every sales manager has his own set of rules and expectations.

What you are given as a new sales representative is as varied as the temperature around the globe.

Imagine being told - your predecessor doesn't have any files. He kept everything in his head!

Imagine being given boxes and boxes of files from a predecessor who was extremely (Over-the-top) analytical.

Either way - you need to "Size up" the sales potential in your new sales territory. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

Don't commit to a rigid/set call schedule until you get the lay of the land.

Ask questions and take good notes.

Send thank you notes to everyone you meet – everyone!

If you're a pharmaceutical sales rep or a dental sales rep you might only have 100 doctors to see.

On the other hand if you're selling products to the industrial market you might be given 1000+ accounts.

Where do you start? How do you begin?

First things first! See if your company has sales reports for the prior year.

You'll use this to identify your largest (existing) accounts.

Compare this list to the sales for these accounts on a current year-to-date basis.

Check to see if you're 10 biggest accounts last year are your 10 biggest accounts this year. If the two lists do not match you'll have to do some homework to find out why.

Next you'll want to greet and meet your existing customer base and your potential customer base.

As you're doing this, here are a few more things to keep in mind:

1. Be slow to commit and quick to deliver. Most salespeople do just the opposite when trying to impress their new customers.
2. Focus on identifying your top 10 customers and your top 10 prospects.
3. After several sales calls you want to prepare a written game plan for your top 10 customers and prospects.

How you think is everything. So always expect the best outcomes.

If you do - you won't be disappointed!

4. Thinking you've got the right stuff from the get go! Once you think you've got it, you've had it!

Don't be too quick to be full of yourself. And remember - you probably don't know what you don't know.

That's a scary proposition!

It's been said, "Once you're done changing, you're done!"

I encourage you to become a student of selling. Don't let a day go by without learning something new about your new profession - sales.

Create file folders with these labels:

- ⇒ Goal setting
- ⇒ Time management
- ⇒ Account management
- ⇒ Territory management
- ⇒ Telephone skills
- ⇒ Prospecting
- ⇒ Asking questions
- ⇒ Sales proposals
- ⇒ Negotiating
- ⇒ Value added selling
- ⇒ Communicating skills
- ⇒ Sales force automation

You will become what you read!

The more you **learn** - the more you'll **earn!** There's a direct connection between them.

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http://meisenheimer.com/aboutjim_salestraining/sales_read.shtml

Made To Stick – Heath brothers

Irresistible Offer – Mark Joyner

How To Win Friends And Influence People – Dale Carnegie

The 12 Best Questions To Ask Customers – Jim Meisenheimer

57 Ways To Take Control Of Your Time And Your Life – Jim Meisenheimer

Here are five magazines you should consider subscribing to if you want to be well informed:

Business 2.0

Fast Company

Inc.

Entrepreneur Magazine

Fortune

If you're well read, you'll be well informed!

And - well informed people make good conversationalists.

And good conversationalists make great salespeople.

5. Doing “Seal talk” and “Sales Babble.”

Nothing spells AMATEUR more than the language you use when talking with your prospects and customers.

When you're not prepared you inadvertently pepper your language with "Ahs" and "Ums." These "Ahs" and "Ums" sound like seal talk. That's right it sounds like a bunch of barking seals. It really turns out to be a pathetic use of the English language and has no place during a sales call.

Good first impressions are hard to come by and that's why it's important to prepare them. First impressions are often lasting impressions which is another reason to make your first impression a solid one.

One of the best sales tips I can share with you is to avoid doing and saying the things that mediocre salespeople rely on.

For example, mediocre salespeople usually begin the sales call by saying something like, "I know you're busy, so I won't take up much of your time." First, if everybody else begins a sales call with this terminology - you shouldn't.

Second, your time is as valuable as your customers time so there's no need to promise that you won't take up much of it.

When you're new to the sales arena and you're anxious to make appointments to see high potential prospects and customers, you'll often, in your excitement say something like this as you talk to somebody on the telephone. "What time would be good for you?"

What makes this pathetic is as soon as ask you this question you're giving your prospects/customers your calendar to pick and choose times and dates that are most convenient for them.

Always start with your calendar and give them dates that work best for you.

6. Believing the more you talk the more impressive you'll be . . . actually the less you say, the smarter you'll sound.

Most salespeople just don't get this. Most of you are hired because of your ability to communicate - your ability to talk. So when you're seated across a desk with a live customer is it no wonder you begin chattering away?

Please don't think I'm picking on you. I used to do the same things myself. I could talk fast, I could complete other peoples sentences for them, I could get mugged by my own mouth, which sad to think about happened more than I care to remember.

Selling really isn't about talking. Selling is really more about listening. You don't start with what you have - your product/service. You start with your customer's need to solve a particular problem.

If this isn't bad enough - talking too much - most salespeople are lousy listeners. It's no wonder why so many salespeople are just plain mediocre. They're all making the same mistakes.

If you want to increase your sales and make a ton of money you should learn how to employ your ears before you engage your mouth. Another way of saying this is you should make asking open-ended questions a very high priority every day.

Wisdom has never been associated with excessive talking and babble. Wisdom comes from learning and listening. Wisdom is seldom loud but rather quiet. Some of the best salespeople I've ever interviewed have been quiet and soft-spoken as they go about their business of solving customer problems.

Here's a choice many salespeople fail to consider. The choice is, you can chase customers or you can attract them. What makes people attracted to you? Is it nonstop talking? Is it knowing the answers even before you ask the questions? Not really!

If you're new to sales you should recognize that you don't know a lot about anything during these early stages of your sales career. You should also know, given the situation, the more you talk the dumber you'll sound.

As you might imagine, when you meet people for the first time you're being judged on your first impression. Two things influence first impressions - how you look and how you sound.

You can look really good and blow it by sounding really bad. You can remedy this by paying attention to your appearance and paying equal attention to what you say during the sales call.

This gives new meaning to the old saying "Less is more."

Now - to sum it all up - if you're new to sales you must say less to sell more.

7. Failing to employ your ears before you engage your mouth.

As you can tell from the title this section is related to the previous one. The major difference is I will attempt to be more specific in section 7.

As you know, listening doesn't come easy to people who enjoy talking. As a matter of fact, the more you enjoy talking the poorer your listening skills are likely to be. I guess that's only natural.

If you're not careful it can ruin any chances you have of becoming a sales superstar. In sales, getting a prospect/customer to talk should be your highest priority. And that is much easier to say than it is to do.

I believe professional salespeople don't "Pitch" products and services, they present tailored solutions for very specific customer issues, challenges, and problems. Like a good doctor the diagnosis should come before the prescription.

In sales you must ask questions to uncover the pain your prospects/customers are experiencing. Here are four things you can do to become a better listener:

1. Ask open-ended questions. There is no better way on the planet to find out what a customer needs than to ask a really good question. And you should know that a really good question can be like a burning ember, it can linger on long after the sales call.

2. Take good written notes. Nothing frightens me more when going out to dinner with a group of six people than a server who attempts to take our orders and special requests without writing anything down. Invariably mistakes are made and that's when disappointment sets in.

Just as a good server in a good restaurant will write down the specific requests you have for your order, a good sales person will write down the key points of a prospect/customer response to questions.

Take out your dictionary and look up the word note worthy. Whenever you take notes when you're with a prospect/customer it shows genuine interest. Actually people are flattered when you make note of what someone just said to you.

3. Take time to respond. Forget about thinking what you're going to say as soon as there's a break in the conversation and focus on what the customer is telling you. Sometimes when a customer asks you a question you shouldn't be too quick to respond to it.

Instead - pause for a moment and put your hand under your chin in a moment of thoughtful reflection and guess what, your customer is more likely to appreciate your response.

4. Put quotes in your notes. Just as no two people have the same fingerprints you can go to the bank on this. No two people will respond to the same question using exactly the same words. Pay attention and take good written notes.

For example, let's assume you ask this question "What qualities are you looking for in a new supplier?" Now that's a good question. Listen carefully to the answers you get. Sometimes your prospect will respond using general terms. He could say things like "On time delivery, responsiveness, excellent customer service etc."

This gives you the opportunity to ask a follow-up question like, "How do you define excellent customer service?" If you're smart you'll write down his answer word for word. In essence your customer is telling you exactly, his definition, what he wants. You can forget about paraphrasing - you want to record exactly what he tells you.

The reason is quite basic. You'll be able to use his language in your presentation of your products and services as a solution to his problems. When you do it this way - it becomes a perfect fit.

When it comes to asking questions most people have settled on two types - open and closed. You'll get no argument from me on these labels. But I'd like to share with you a couple of characteristics superior questions.

When it comes to asking good questions, less is more. Be brief. Some of the best questions have between four and 10 words. The only way you'll notice is to count the words in your questions. The only way you can do this is to prepare your questions in writing.

I'm going to guesstimate, based on my observations and experience as a sales trainer, that 97.5% of all salespeople do not have any questions in writing. What a scary thought that is. Sure it's a scary thought for me. Pity the poor customer who talks to hundreds of salespeople year who show up and throw up without an ounce of preparation.

Another characteristic of good question is necessity - which means every word is a keeper. Every word must add value. Which means eliminating all nonessential words.

A third characteristic of good question is they should be personalized. You can do this easily by adding "You" and "Your" into your questions. If you put your customers into your questions they'll probably put you into their responses.

Finally a good question should be open ended. And that just means you a question cannot be answered in one word. For example, if you ask someone "What is your budget for XYZ products," they could respond, "\$1500." You get a different and better response if you ask, "Tell me about your budget for XYZ products."

Here are three examples of good open-ended questions. These questions are designed to get your prospects and customers talking - talking a lot.

1. Tell me about your business . . .
2. What are your responsibilities . . .
3. Describe the people in your organization/department . . .

If you like these questions you love the other nine questions you find in my best selling book, "[The 12 Best Questions To Ask Customers.](#)"

Cut and paste this link for more information:

<http://12bestquestions.com>

8. Blending in, instead of standing out.

You have a choice. You can stand out or blend in with your competitive landscape. Differentiation doesn't come naturally, as a matter of fact blending in does. You see, we all want to fit in with the crowd, we want to be like everybody else, and we've been that way since we were kids. Growing up as kids, being different came with the stigma of being weird. And none of us wanted to be weird.

In sales, our images are created by the things we do and what we say. For example:

1. Most salespeople don't have written sales call objectives for every call.
2. When calling for an appointment, salespeople are likely to say something like "I'm going to be in your area next week and I wanted to come by and introduce myself."
3. When salespeople remember to ask questions the typical preamble to those questions is usually, "I was wondering."
4. Most salespeople start talking about the product as soon as they introduce themselves to the prospect/customer.
5. Most salespeople neglect any discussion of advantages and benefits.
6. Most salespeople are so intimidated by the "price objection" they usually bring up the subject of pricing first.

7. When sending a proposal to a potential customer for a large order - most salespeople follow-up via telephone within three to five days and ask these silly questions: Did you to get my proposal? Did you have a chance to look at? So, what da ya think?

Are you beginning to get the picture? **Pity the poor customers.** They observe the same selling and behaviors and literally the same sales babble on a daily basis. But for some incredible reason - salespeople genuinely believe they're different by virtue of their personalities.

There are three principle things you can differentiate when selling: **You, your products, and your company.** My observation is that most sales representatives do an adequate job of differentiating their products and their company. They neglect, however, to develop their personal trademarks or personal brands.

Here are four ways you can differentiate you from your competition:

1. Your appearance matters. Look the part because your appearance influences your image. You are a walking billboard and how you look is what your customers and prospects see first. Belts and shoes should be the same color. Shoes and shoe heels should be shined - every day.

2. Prepare an effective e-mail signature. Your e-mail signature of course should include your name, a keyword or short phrase - describing your expertise, a telephone number, and your web site. Also periodically include a **P.S.** and a **P.P.S.** to emphasize new product introductions, special sales, or even special events. In this way, every email provides a branding and promotional opportunity for you.

3. Business cards - don't give them out sparingly. Sprinkle them all over the place. Just because you give someone your business card doesn't mean you can't give him another one. Include your cards with all notes, correspondence, and literature that you leave with your customers and prospects. When they get an extra one, they're likely to give it to a colleague.

4. Visibility is more important than ability. Every contact counts. Develop a (one-two-three) follow-up system to be used when every you meet and/or talk to a new prospect. Here's my recommendation - within 24 hours send an e-mail, within 72 hours send a handwritten note, within 10 days send a handwritten note with an article that may be of interest to your prospect.

Within two weeks you have a total of four exposures with your new prospect. Now that's impressive.

OK - these are four practical ideas you can use to differentiate you from your competition. If being different from your competition is a priority for you, you may want to invest a couple bucks and get my CD titled, "[35 Ways To Differentiate You In A Very Competitive Market.](#)"

Cut and paste this link into your browser:

<http://www.kickstartcart.com/app/netcart.asp?MerchantID=39581&ProductID=1554978>

Being **boring**, **bland**, and **benign** won't cut it in today's very competitive marketplace. If you want to make a difference you have to be different. The art of being boring doesn't cut it in sales today.

9. Neglecting the essence of time management.

The one major roadblock to achieving success in sales and in life is how you manage your time. Don't be too quick to pooh-pooh this idea.

Let me give you a real quick example. I remember when my first wife Louise was battling cancer. She never gave up, but after four years she succumbed to the disease.

As you can imagine, she and I were under a great deal of stress. Obviously - her stress was greater than mine.

Back then, let me describe all the things that were nonexistent and obviously not adding to my already high level of stress:

- ⇒ No cell phones
- ⇒ No e-mail
- ⇒ No voicemail
- ⇒ No laptops
- ⇒ No computers
- ⇒ No blackberries
- ⇒ No Palm Treos
- ⇒ No Internet
- ⇒ No digital cameras

It's hard to imagine a life in sales today without using these tools. As good as these tools are - they have a way of adding significant stress throughout the business day.

The funny thing about time management is you can't manage it. Nobody has enough time yet everybody has all that there is. You begin every day with an account of 86,400 seconds. You can use it or you can't lose it.

You see, you can't manage time. You can't make it go faster. You can't make it go slower. You literally have no control over time. Ah hah - but you do have control over yourself.

You have two choices when it comes to time. In control or out of control - pure and simple. You can exist in a state of discombobulation or focus on self-management.

You can learn how to deal with paperwork. You can learn how to manage your calendar. You can learn how to systemize everything that's routine in your life. You can be reactive or choose to become proactive.

You can control your calendar or give it up to anyone who demands your time. It's your choice. You can say yes to every request or you can learn how to say no - of course in a nice way.

You can live your life as a procrastinator or discover the real secret to finishing anything is starting. That's right, the key to finishing is starting. Your motions and your actions will propel you to achievement.

You can do whatever you want or always choose to do what is most important first - that's called prioritizing. When you think about it, prioritizing is an amazing concept. It's unfortunate that so many salespeople and entrepreneurs ignore it.

Time management is an enormous topic. So much so I decided to write a book on the subject. It's loaded with practical time tips, 57 to be exact, you can use to make everyday a more productive day.

When it comes to time management or really self-management most people live lives of "Quiet desperation." Most salespeople and entrepreneurs have given up and are content to feel helpless and hopeless.

If you're not like this and want to become more efficient and effective every day take a look at my book titled, "57 Ways To Take Control Of Your Time And Your Life." If every idea in the book was worth \$19.95 - the total value of the book would be \$1137.15.

The point is you only need to adapt and adopt one idea from the book to have it pay for itself.

[Here's the link you can use to get your copy.](#)

You can also cut and paste this link into your browser:

<http://www.kickstartcart.com/app/javanof.asp?MerchantID=39581&ProductID=1406492>

10. Being a day-dreamer instead of a goal-setter.

There is nothing more powerful in life than the pursuit of a goal.

Goals get you energized and have a way of keeping you focused on the task at hand.

Before I tell you more about the essence and the importance of goal setting I'd like to tell you a story.

During the past 19 years I've been a professional speaker and sales trainer. Naturally I've been influenced by some of the best speakers and best authors on a variety of subjects.

Each month I read at least a dozen magazines, six newsletters plus whatever else comes in over the transom. I remember reading an article about a study that was conducted at Yale University, more than a generation ago.

The people doing the study asked the entire Yale graduating class whether or not they had their personal/life goals in writing. Shockingly - only 3% of the surveyed graduating class had written goals for their lives.

Fast forward 20 years. The survivors of this same Yale graduating class were surveyed again. Without getting into all the details, it was discovered that the 3% of the class who had written goals for their lives when they graduated had accumulated 90% of the class wealth 20 years later.

Now you have to admit it's a compelling story about the power of goal setting. I've seen this story in books written by Zig Zigler and Tony Robbins. I heard other professional speakers tell the same story.

So of course it had to be true. Well it wasn't. About 10 years ago during a corporate sales training program I told this story as a part of my Goal Setting Module.

During the break, one of the salespeople gave me a copy of an article debunking this story. Apparently a journalist went to Yale University and did extensive research and could find no evidence of this before and after survey - it was pure fiction.

To this day others continue to tell the story - obviously I don't.

It's an amusing story and I'm not sure how far from the truth it actually is.

Here's what I think:

People who set goals in writing generally achieve more than people who don't.

People who stay focused on goals don't suffer from the interruptions and distractions that people who don't have goals have to deal with.

People who have goals get more done in less time.

People who have goals tend to be more successful than people who don't.

People who have goals tend to reach beyond their grasp.

People who have goals tend to have more consistent selling results.

People who have goals bubble with creativity in their attempt to achieve them.

People who have goals seldom feel overwhelmed and discombobulated.

People who have goals always know where they are relative to the goals they have established.

People who have goals achieve more than people who don't.

People who have goals sell more products/services than people who don't.

People who have goals will never be unemployed.

If goal setting was so easy everybody on the planet would be doing it. It's not complicated, but there are certain prerequisites necessary to set goals.

Much has been written about goal setting and I'm sure you can find lots of resources using Google and Amazon.

On the other hand, if you'd like to turn your car into a classroom, you can listen to my newest CD titled, "**How To Establish Goals That Stick - A System For Getting Exactly What You Want.**"

[Use this link to order your copy now.](#)

Or you can cut and paste this link into your browser:

<http://www.kickstartcart.com/app/javanof.asp?MerchantID=39581&ProductID=3479387>

Life is filled with choices. If you're reading this you probably involved in sales.

You probably chose sales as a career - either temporary or for the long-term.

One of the most disappointing aspects of the work I do is seeing how many salespeople who don't have written goals for the business and for their lives.

You have to choose to become successful.

You have to choose to become wealthy.

You have to choose to provide for your children's education.

You have to choose to provide for a substantial retirement income.

You can achieve all of these things if you choose to have written goals for your business and for your life.

That wraps it up!

The 10 biggest mistakes new sales reps make and how you can avoid them.

Selling is easy only if you work hard at it.

Never underestimate the power of a **smile**.

Never underestimate the power of **enthusiasm**.

Never underestimate the power of a **positive attitude**.

Never underestimate the power of **expecting the best outcomes**.

Never underestimate the power and importance of **self-management**.

Never underestimate the power of **continuous learning and improvement**.

Never underestimate the power of **making mistakes and learning from them**.

And for Pete's sake, never underestimate your ability to become the person you're capable of becoming!

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