

Biggest Time Wasters for Salespeople

Here are the four most common time-wasters, regularly occurring patterns that develop, and- tendencies on the part of salespeople to do things that detract from their effective

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Good time management for salespeople has been an obsession of mine for more than 30 years. In the last decade, I've been involved in helping tens of thousands of sales people improve their results through more effective use of their time. Over the years, I've seen some regularly occurring patterns develop - tendencies on the part of sales people to do things that detract from their effective use of time. Here are the four most common time-wasters I've observed. See if any apply to you or your salespeople.

1) Allure of the urgent/trivial. Salespeople love to be busy and active. We have visions of ourselves as people who can get things done. No idol dreamers, we're out there making things happen! A big portion of our sense of worth and our personal identity is dependent on being busy. At some level in our self-image of ourselves, being busy means that we really are important. One of the worst things that can happen to us is to have nothing to do, nowhere to go, and nothing going on. So, we latch onto every task that comes our way, regardless of the importance. For example, one of our customers calls with a back-order problem. "Oh good!" we think, "Something to do! We are needed! We can fix it!" So, we drop everything and spend two hours expediting the backorder. In retrospect, couldn't someone in purchasing or customer service have done that? And couldn't they have done it better than you? And didn't you just allow something that was a little urgent but trivial prevent you from making some sales calls? And wouldn't those potential sales calls be a whole lot better use of your time? Or, one of our customers hands us a very involved "Request for Quote." "Better schedule a half-day at the office," we think. "Need to look up specifications, calculate prices, compile literature, etc." We become immediately involved with this task, working on this project for our customer. In retrospect, couldn't we have given the project to an inside salesperson or customer service rep to do the leg work? Couldn't we have just communicated the guidelines to someone and then reviewed the finished proposal? Once again, we succumbed to the lure of the present task. That prevented us from making sales calls and siphoned our energy away from the important to the seemingly urgent. I could go on for pages with examples, but you have the idea. We are so enamored with being busy and feeling needed that we often grab at any task that comes our way, regardless of how unimportant. And each time we do that, we compromise our ability to invest our sales times more effectively.

2) The comfort of the status quo. A lot of salespeople have evolved to the point where they have a comfortable routine. They make enough money and they have established routines and habits that are comfortable. They really don't want to expend the energy it takes to do things in a better way, or to become more successful or effective. This can be good. Some of the habits and routines that we follow work well for us. However, our

rapidly changing world constantly demands new methods, techniques, habits and routines. Just because something has been effective for a few years doesn't mean that it continues to be so. This problem develops when salespeople are so content with the way things are, they have not changed anything in years. If you haven't changed or challenged some habit or routine in the last few years, chances are you are not as effective as you could be. For example, you could still be writing phone messages down on little slips of paper when entering them into your contact manager would be more effective. This is a simple example of a principle that can extend towards the most important things that we do. Are we using the same routines for organizing our work week, for determining who to call on, for understanding our customers, for collecting information, etc.? There is no practical end to the list. Contentment with the status quo almost always means salespeople who are not as effective as they could be. My book, *10 Secrets of Time Management for Salespeople*, discusses the use of the "more" mindset as an alternative to the status quo.

3) Lack of trust in other people in the organization. Salespeople have a natural tendency to work alone. After all, we spend most of the day by ourselves. We decide where to go by ourselves, we decide what to do by ourselves, and we are pretty much on our own all-day long. It's no wonder then, we just naturally want to do everything by ourselves. That's generally a positive personality trait for a salesperson. Unfortunately, when it extends to those tasks that could be done better by other people in our organization it turns into a real negative. Instead of soliciting aid from others in the organization, and thereby making much better use of our time, many salespeople insist on doing it themselves, no matter how redundant and time-consuming the task is. The world is full of salespeople who don't trust their own colleagues to write an order, to source a product, to enter an order in the system, to follow up on a back order, to deliver some sample or literature, to research a quote, to deliver a proposal, etc. Again, the list could go on and on. The point is that many of these tasks can be done better or cheaper by someone else in the organization. The salespeople don't release the tasks to them because they, the salespeople, don't trust them to do it. Too bad. It's a tremendous waste of good selling time and talent. Chapter 10 of my book "10 Secrets" describes a system to nurture helpful relationships.

4) Lack of tough-minded thoughtfulness. Ultimately, time management begins with thoughtfulness. That means a sufficient quantity of good quality thought-energy invested in the process. I like to say that good time management is a result of "thinking about it before you do it." Good time managers invest sufficiently in this process. They set aside time each year to create annual goals, they invest planning time every quarter and every month to create plans for those times, they plan every week and every sales call. Poor sales time managers don't dedicate sufficient time to the "thinking about it" phase of their job. Not only do good sales time managers invest a sufficient quantity of time, but they also are disciplined and tough-minded about how they think. They ask themselves good questions, and answer them with as much objectivity as they can muster. * "What do I really want to accomplish in this account?" * "Why aren't they buying from me?" * "Who is the key decision maker in this account?" * "Am I spending too much time in this account, or not enough in that one?" * "How can I change what I am doing in order to become more effective?" These are just a few of the tough

questions that good sales time managers consider on a regular basis. They don't let allow their emotions or personal comfort zones to dictate the plans. They go where it is smart to go, do what it is smart to do. They do these things because they have spent the quantity and quality of thought-time necessary. Of course, there are hundreds of other time-wasting habits. These four, however, are the most common. Correct them, and you'll be well on your way to dramatically improved results.