

By Tom Hopkins

**Our expert shares the most common mistakes salespeople make--so you don't get caught making them!**

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Any veteran in business can tell you a story about the one that got away. Veterans who are successful in business today learned valuable lessons from those situations and, hopefully, never repeated them. As challenging as the business of selling might be for some, losing sales is unbelievably easy. Learn from the mistakes of others so you won't have many of the sad stories to tell.

**Sales Killer #1: Lack of professional appearance.** If you want people to listen to you and heed your advice regarding your product or service, you have to come across--both in appearance and demeanor--as a professional expert. This means that you're appropriately groomed. You walk with confidence. People will buy from you based more on your conviction and enthusiasm for your product than they will your product knowledge.

**Sales Killer #2: Talking too much.** When you're talking, you're telling. When you ask questions to get clients talking about their needs, you're selling; you're finding out what they want to own. Only then can you guide them to the right product or service.

**Sales Killer #3: Your vocabulary.** Words create pictures in our minds. Certain words that are inherent to selling turn people off. For example, I caution people in business to avoid using the word "contract" when handling the details of a large-ticket sale. We all know that contracts are legally binding documents and require legal efforts to get out of. If appropriate, call your contract an "agreement," "form" or "paperwork." The mental image is less threatening. Think about the words you use and replace any negative word-picture images with gentler, more positive ones.

**Sales Killer #4: Not investing time in building rapport.** Good rapport builds trust. No one will want to make a purchase from someone they don't like and trust. Don't just jump right into a presentation on your product. Get to know your client a bit.

**Sales Killer #5: Lack of a qualification system.** A certain percentage of the people you talk with won't be good candidates for your product or service. If they don't have the need or the money for your product or service, there's no sale. Your challenge is to figure this out as early in your communication with them as possible. Come up with at least three or four questions, the answers to which will tell you if they're qualified to own your offering.

**Sales Killer #6: Not knowing when to stop presenting and close the sale.** Too many salespeople think they have to tell potential clients everything they know about the product. Even after a client has indicated that the product is right for them, the salesperson keeps talking. Doing so could easily turn the client off about working with you and cost you the sale.

**Sales Killer #7: Ego.** Selling is a service business. You must set aside your wants and needs to serve the wants and needs of others. Get the dollar signs out of your eyes when you're with clients. If they suspect you're pushing the sale because of what's in it for you instead of what's in their best interests, they'll find another company to do business with.

**Sales Killer #8: Not knowing how to close.** In many cases, all you have to do is ask a direct question in order to close a sale:

- "If I have the red one you mentioned, do you want to take it with you today or shall I ship it to you?"
- "Will you be making your purchase today by cash, check or credit card?"

**Sales Killer #9: Not paying attention to details.** If you skim over details or shortcut your presentation because you've done it so many times that you're bored with it, you'll lose sales. Remember: Every presentation is new to your client. So give it with enthusiasm and without shortcuts, unless your client indicates that certain details you would normally cover aren't of interest to them. This carries over to your paperwork and ability to handle a computer (if your orders are entered that way). Any missing information can cause clients to quickly lose faith in their decision and walk away.

**Sales Killer #10: Poor fulfillment.** This ties into paying attention to details. If you or your company don't have the practices and policies in place to properly fulfill the expectations of your clients, you'll find yourself working harder and harder to get new business. Invest some time and effort in laying out procedures that can be standardized and followed by everyone who works with you. Salespeople shouldn't promise anything above or beyond the company standard. Everyone should be expected to meet or exceed it.