

Sales & Marketing Easing an Uneasy Alliance

By Mickey Connolly, CEO, Conversant

Sales and marketing. The words flow easily, like they belong together. They seem naturally connected, like *horse and carriage* or *love and marriage*. However, many business people say the connection is less graceful and coordinated than it sounds. What follows are recommendations for making the sales and marketing relationship more effective and valuable for all concerned.

The respective accountabilities of sales and marketing are blame magnets. Marketing professionals identify profitable opportunities for selling. Sales professionals turn those opportunities into profitable revenue. When targets go unmet, whose fault is it? Is it bad leads or inept sales tactics? In our experience, it is neither. The fault lies somewhere else: the quality of sales and marketing conversations.

Do you ever have interactions between sales and marketing that you find frustrating or ineffective? The leverage point for upgrading those interactions is learning from our differences. Sales and marketing people have different roles, goals and skill sets, so differences will abound. We will not always see eye-to-eye. If we did, we would not need both roles. The natural differences can be a source of learning and innovation, or they can spur disagreement and disconnection. The key is to find common ground quickly.

The Intersection: Authentic Common Ground

Genuine common ground is formed where our interests overlap. To find the genuine overlap, think of an intersection formed by three roads. The names of the roads are "Your view", "Their view", and "Relevant Facts":



View = Purposes and Explanations

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A person's view includes purposes (things he or she is *for*) and worries (things he or she is *against*). If I can find where your purposes and worries, mine and the facts intersect we have a natural occasion for coordinated action. If I cannot locate an intersection, you will avoid engaging with me. If I do find an intersection, meeting with me will be magnetic and you will be drawn to the opportunity. To find intersections fast, pay attention to the axioms.

Axioms of the Intersection

In our work with over 200,000 people in 30 countries around the world we have come to trust the following simple truths:

- All humans have purposes and worries.

For example: A salesperson's purpose could be to offer something to customers that is so attractive and valuable that those customers buy eagerly and often. This same person's worries could include having flawed products or services to sell, or wasting time with unqualified leads.

A marketing person's purpose could be to identify customer and market needs our company is willing and able to meet, and they might worry about unskilled sales people who cannot take advantage of the market opportunity.

- If someone thinks that you are ignorant or disrespectful of his or her purposes and worries, they will avoid spending time with you. They will actively resist, and maybe even undermine you.

Consider that I am a salesperson who says, "Sorry, I don't have time to meet with you. I'm wading through so many unqualified leads that I'm far behind quota." You, as a marketer, respond, "Well, this meeting is crucial. If you won't come, I'll have to tell your boss you cannot manage your time well enough to be on the Marketing Council and ask for another representative."

How do you think I might react? If I come to the meeting I may be resentful and uncooperative. If I do not, I may try to undermine your credibility with my boss. I certainly will not be a willing and creative partner.

- If someone thinks that you are aware and respectful of his or her purposes and worries, they will consider you valuable and join you in conversation. They will share information, co-invent solutions, and get into action.

Revisit the above scenario. I give you the same excuse and you respond, "Please tell me what problems you are running into with the leads. The Marketing Council should definitely know about the breakdown in case there is something for us to do to help."

My reaction: I share information and your credibility increases in my eyes. If you listen to my dilemma and learn anything at all from me, I will be magnetically drawn to your Marketing Council Meeting.

When people ignore the axioms they spend much of their time in "convince and conquer" conversations. Differences devolve into disagreements and the parties try to convince each other to give up their view. Instead of conquering their view, we suggest that you learn from it. You will be startled at the change in the relationship. We have used these axioms successfully to coach high-stakes negotiators (treaty, hostage, and business) and senior executives. We recommend that you use them to prepare for your next sales and marketing meeting. If you do, we predict you will generate increased interest, greater receptivity, and you will get more achieved in less time. Prepare with the seven steps below and you will be well on your way.

The Steps to the Intersection

1. What are your most important purposes and worries re: the meeting?
2. For each other attendee, what are his or her most important purposes and worries?
 - a. If you lack direct knowledge, then ask yourself, "If I had their accountability, what would my purposes and worries be?"
3. Find themes. As you scan all the lists of purposes and worries, what repetition or patterns do you see? What words do you see repeatedly?
4. What unarguable facts or events are relevant to all of you?
5. Now, using the information from #4 and #5, compose a purpose statement for the meeting.
6. If you are in charge of the agenda, send out your purpose. Otherwise, use it to prepare and keep it in front of you during the meeting.
7. Listen to learn. During the meeting, have every difference be an occasion to learn something you do not already know. What brought them to this view? What have they seen that you have not? What do they know that you do not? What can you learn that helps achieve the purpose of the meeting? Combine your preparation with listening to learn and intersections will abound.

The source of teamwork is common interest and the seven steps will help you find common interests fast. You will be connected to the purposes and worries of the others. You will tend to raise issues with words, purposes and facts they recognize as important. You will not fall into the trap of just protecting your interests and driving them to do the same. Your meetings will be magnetically attractive and people will come interested and ready to work

FYI: many people tell us this is hard work the first time they do it. We can be so used to protecting our view that researching theirs feels uncomfortable and maybe even threatening. You do not have to agree with everything they say, you just need to find the sweet spot where your interests overlap. It may well be hard the first time, but gets easier. As Robert Grudin said in *Time and the Art of Living*, "Hard work crystallizes into pleasure as we grow in skill." Do the work and that next sales and marketing meeting will be more pleasurable than you might expect. We hope you enjoy the trip to the intersection.