

How to Increase Your Selling Horsepower

By Larry Lewis



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Your sales force is the engine that powers your business. Engines are measured in terms of horsepower and your salespeople are the horses that pull your business to new heights. Like a train engine charging up a mountainside, just how high and how fast your sales force will take your business depends on seven important factors.

The first factor is one over which you have little or no control. This is the economic or competitive landscape you are trying to navigate.

The next two factors are your destination and the condition of the track your sales engine is expected to run on. These factors are established by the sales leadership and they involve goals along with selling strategy and processes. Before your salespeople leave the station they must have a clear destination in mind. They must know what is expected of them and who they are targeting.

The speed and efficiency by which your sales engine will reach the desired destination is determined by the strategies and systems your company has in place. Like train tracks in need of repair, an ineffective sale process will cause your salespeople to waste time and get sidetracked. An effective sales process will save time, shorten the selling cycle and prevent your sales engine from stalling or breaking down.

The remaining four factors relate to the people on your sales team. The first of these factors is the size of the engine needed to pull the train up the mountain. Engine size is determined by the knowledge, skills, insight and experience of the people in the sales force. The bigger the engine, the faster they will reach the goal and push on to the next level.

The next factor is the fuel (desire, commitment, outlook and accountability) needed to power that engine. If these crucial elements are missing, your salespeople will not engage, regardless of the compensation plan.

The sixth factor is whether members of the sales force will push on the throttle in terms of prospecting behavior. This is typically the most challenging aspect of selling and the area that creates the biggest bottleneck in terms of growing sales. If a company's sales pipeline isn't filled with qualified opportunities, from either through the salespeople's own efforts or the company's marketing efforts, the salespeople won't be able to sell. Some companies struggle so much with this factor, that they outsource it altogether.

The seventh and final factor is the freight being dragged up the mountainside. Every salesperson carries a certain amount of baggage that slows him or her down. This baggage or freight hides in the form of five weaknesses that are invisible to most sales managers. The severity of these weaknesses determine whether a salesperson can charge up the mountainside unfettered by a heavy load, or whether the added freight will slow a salesperson down or pull them backwards.

Let's look at each of these factors in greater detail.

1. The Landscape: These are the market conditions over which you have little or no control. This includes the state of the economy and your competition. In a bad economy your salespeople have a steeper slope to climb. The same holds true for strong competitors. Tough competitors in a marketplace can make it more difficult for your salespeople to win business. It will take more horsepower for your salespeople to

succeed in a slow economy or a highly competitive market. While the sales leadership in a company should recognize and respond to these challenges, they should not allow their salespeople to use these factors as an excuse for poor performance.

Good salespeople learn to ignore these issues. What good does it do a salesperson to worry about these things? They are what they are. They can't change these factors. All they can do is put on the blinders and work harder. Anything less is excuse-making.

2. Destination: These are the goals you have set for the sales force along with the target market you want them to focus on. It is the responsibility of sales leadership to establish goals and choose the strategy they want the sales force to follow. That's what leadership is all about.

It is the sales manager's responsibility to tie these goals back to the personal goals of each of the salespeople and align their personal goals with the goals of the company. Remember, salespeople sell in order to achieve their own goals ahead of the company's goals. A good sales manager shows his salespeople how they can achieve their personal goals by helping the company achieve its goals. In addition, it is the sales manager's responsibility to reward their salespeople for accomplishing these goals and encourage them to celebrate their achievement.

3. Condition of the Track: The track your salespeople run on are the systems you have in place for prospecting and selling and the guidance you provide on how to use these systems. Effective systems for prospecting and selling enable salespeople to shorten their selling cycle, increase their closing ration and operate more efficiently. A sales force without a selling system is like a rudderless ship being buffeted by the waves. It is like a race car bouncing back and forth against the barriers while the driver tries to bring it under control. It is the sales leadership's responsibility

to lay the track and support it. It is the sales manager's responsibility to coach and reinforce these systems. It is the salespeople's responsibility to follow it. Our system is the Client Builder Selling process.

4. Engine Size: The size of your sales engine is the collective experience and skills of the members of your sales team. Obviously, the more skills they possess, the more powerful their engine is. Like a freight train with multiple engines, the combined power of the sales force is greatly enhanced by improving the selling skills of the individual members.

This is accomplished through training. It is the sales leadership's responsibility to provide this training and the salespeople's responsibility to apply it. The entire sales force should receive training on the sales process, selling strategy, skills and sales techniques while the sales managers should receive additional training on how to recruit, coach, motivate, manage and lead their sales team.

5. Fuel: The fuel that propels a salesperson is their desire, commitment, willingness to be held accountable and positive outlook. A big engine can't run without fuel. Without fuel, your salespeople won't push on the throttle or engage their engines. The interesting thing about salespeople is that they must supply their own fuel. You can't provide it for them. The only thing you can do as a business owner or sales manager is make sure that the salespeople you hire have a full tank and help to unblock a clogged fuel line.

6. Pushing on the Throttle: The throttle on an engine is what feeds fuel to the engine and makes it run. The more fuel you feed it, the faster it runs. The throttle on a salesperson is the prospecting activity they are willing to do to feed their pipeline with sales opportunities. This is where it all starts for a salesperson and the most important thing a salesperson is called on to do. It's also the

toughest part of their job. Without prospecting activity, a salesperson is doomed to failure. It is the sales manager's responsibility to hold the salesperson accountable for this behavior.

The following chart summarizes these factors and who holds the responsibility for maximizing or minimizing their impact.

Factor:	Responsibility of Sales Leadership	Responsibility of Salespeople
1. Landscape (Market Conditions)	Recognize and Respond	Ignore
2. Destination (Target Market, Goals and Strategy)	Identify, Establish and Reward	Celebrate the Arrival
3. Condition of the Track (Systems and Direction)	Provide	Follow
4. Engine Size (Knowledge, Skills, Insight & Experience)	Train	Apply
5. Fuel (Desire, Commitment, Accountability and Outlook)	Seek those who have it.	Bring
6. Pushing the Throttle (Prospecting Activity and Behavior)	Hold accountable	Do it.
7. Freight (Hidden Weaknesses)	Uncover	Unload

The Five Hidden Weaknesses that Derail Sales Careers

Five hidden weaknesses separate those who can sell from those that will. They have the unfortunate potential to neutralize all of a salesperson's strengths and skills. Identifying these weaknesses in sales candidates and potential new hires will significantly reduce your chances of making a bad hire. Identifying these weaknesses in your existing salespeople can dramatically improve their sales results as well as the results of any sales training you provide.

These are the five hidden weaknesses that undermine a salesperson's ability to sell:

1. High Need for Approval
2. A Non-Supportive Buy Cycle
3. Money Issues
4. The Tendency to Get Emotionally Involved
5. Self-Limiting Record Collection

High Need for Approval: Many salespeople crave acceptance. They know how to get people to like them, and they go into sales to make friends. "High Need for Approval" is when a salesperson's need or desire to be liked, even loved, is greater than their desire to win or close business. A salesperson with "high need for approval" thrives on hearing customers say, *"We really like you."* Unfortunately, they often accept praise in lieu of getting their customer's business.

When salespeople seek approval from their prospects, they are unable to close effectively. They focus on comments like, *"we really appreciate what you did for us"* instead of getting a commitment to buy. They usually find it difficult to ask tough questions because they're afraid that a prospect may get upset with them. They tend to be non-confrontational and they are more likely to waste their time selling to prospects that lie to them instead of asking why they are being misled. They are more likely to accept "maybes" and

"think-it-overs" instead of "no's" because to them a "no" means that they the prospect didn't like them or they didn't win their prospect's approval. The end result of this weakness is a bloated pipeline whereby too many prospects remain in the pipeline with relatively few of them getting closed or disqualified. A salesperson that is able to overcome their need for approval will typically close 35% more business.

Non-Supportive Buy Cycle: Understanding this weakness requires a tremendous degree of open-mindedness on the part of you and your salespeople. It is an extremely powerful weakness, but very difficult to accept. While everyone will agree with the reporting of "how" they buy, it often takes some time before they understand and accept the impact that a "non-supportive" buy cycle has on the way they sell.

A salesperson's buy cycle refers to the process by which they make purchases for themselves. When a salesperson has a "non-supportive" buy cycle it indicates that the manner in which they go about the process of buying does not support the selling process. For example, when your salespeople make major purchases personally, do they shop on price? Do they comparison shop? Do they take time to think things over?

A non-supportive buy cycle makes a salesperson more vulnerable to stalls, put-offs, lies, excuses, sob stories and other forms of "think-it-overs" from prospects. Procrastinators, price shoppers, comparison shoppers, researchers and price objectors are able to have their way with salespeople that harbor this weakness. There is a 100% correlation between how a salesperson makes their own purchases and the behavior they will tolerate from a prospect. The buyer's stalls actually make sense to these salespeople and they accept these stalls instead of uncovering the fears and concerns underlying these obstacles. In other words, salespeople will tolerate dysfunctional

buying behavior from their prospects when these behaviors are similar to their own.

A non-supportive buy cycle is often the culprit as to why certain salespeople consistently fail to gain commitments from prospects and close sales. If your expectation is to have your salespeople close in a short period of time and they are wired the wrong way, you will be expecting too much. Despite a sales manager's attempts to tell them what they should do in these situations, salespeople with a "non-supportive" buy cycle will continue to say or do things that don't achieve the desired outcomes. Salespeople that overcome this weakness will typically close 50% more business.

Money Issues: When a salesperson has money issues it indicates that they are uncomfortable talking about money. Salespeople who are uncomfortable talking about money can't ask prospects how much money they have, where it might be coming from or how they intend to come up with more. They usually fail to accurately learn how much money a prospect will spend. This becomes even more difficult when the prospect is equally uncomfortable talking about money.

80% of sales people have some element of this weakness. Salespeople with this weakness will often inappropriately propose either too high or too low because of a lack of awareness over how much money the prospect will actually spend. This can also happen when the salesperson isn't comfortable with the amount of money being talked about. For example, some salespeople panic under the weight of large deals.

In addition, some salespeople will make the same amount of money year after year regardless of the economic climate, even though they may be worth far more. Some salespeople can't get their pricing and fees out on the table at all. Others make value and budget decisions for their customers before giving a customer the opportunity to share their budget or comment on what they are willing to

spend. Overcoming this hang-up can translate into as much as 30% more business for the salesperson.

The Tendency to Get Emotionally Involved:

Salespeople that have a tendency to get emotionally involved tend to be worriers. They often strategize on the fly and they are excitable, overly creative, or too analytical. After a sales call you might hear them say, *"Oh jeez! I should have said..."*

They weren't able to execute during the call because they were caught off guard and panicked. The prospect asked a question or raised an objection that they weren't expecting. This, in turn, causes them to think too much about how to handle the objection. Thinking is actually the process of talking to oneself. When a salesperson talks to themselves they can't effectively listen to their prospects. This causes them to lose objectivity and control of the call. When this happens it usually leads to an unfavorable outcome. Overcoming this lack of objectivity could mean as much as 20% more business.

Self-Limiting Record Collection: This weakness underscores the "cause" in the cause and effect of selling. A salesperson's self-limiting records

predetermine their actions and outcomes. When a salesperson has a self-limiting record collection it means that too many of their beliefs sabotage rather than support the outcomes they desire. A salesperson's self-limiting record collection includes their erroneous beliefs, excuses for failure, negative mindsets, and other forms of what we call "head trash."

Salespeople with self-limiting record collections will predestine failure more often than success because of their negative beliefs. They will often make excuses and will not take personal responsibility for their failures. Instead, they blame outside forces. For example, the salesperson that hums to himself, *"I have to sell to purchasing agents"* or *"the economy is down and nobody is buying"* or *"my town is a conservative marketplace"* or *"there are no immediate opportunities in my own backyard"* will not be very successful until they change their tune. Salespeople will often generate 25% more business once they learn how to turn down the volume on the self-limiting records playing in their heads. Before you can effectively change a salesperson's results you must change the beliefs they hold that led to these results. This is also one of the most important areas to begin working on when improving the sales organization at large.

About Larry Lewis and Client Builder Sales & Marketing

Larry Lewis is the founder and president of Client Builder Sales & Marketing LLC, a sales development firm that helps companies and professional service firms achieve EPIC improvement in sales performance. Larry's practical, street-smart approach to prospecting and selling has helped hundreds of sales executives, business owners, and independent professionals increase their sales with more control, greater confidence and less effort. To learn more about Client Builder Sales & Marketing and their process for achieving EPIC improvement in sales performance visit their website at www.ClientBuilderSelling.com.



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