

# **SALES AUTOPSY: 50 Postmortems Reveal what Killed the Sale (and what might have saved it) by Dan Seidman**

## **INTRODUCTION**

It was a dreadful day's end for Mark. His best customer called, out of courtesy, to say he was switching vendors. There went 25% of his revenue. Then another major prospect phoned about 15 minutes after five (hoping he'd get Mark's voicemail?) to say they were going with someone else. The future was fizzling fast for this good friend sitting next to me.



And Mark wasn't just a friend because his wife packed extra sushi in his lunch to share with me. He was a smart sales pro, a plodder who just kept pounding the phones whether times were good or wretched. His day was now ending with pats on the back and condolences. You'd have thought we were at a funeral.

I came to work early the next day, 5:30am early – the time when I normally pulled practical jokes on my peers (I'd never been caught. My college days were paying off in the workplace). I knelt down next to Mark's desk, dug out my big white piece of sidewalk chalk and began to draw an outline of a body.

I was gone long before anyone arrived and coincidentally met him in the parking lot as we both came to work.

People were already gathering around his desk and laughing when we arrived.

They didn't know it then, but they were there for the birth of my Sales Autopsy logo.

While sales disasters (other people's of course!) provide needed often humor, they can also provide much more. First, laughter is refreshing. It has a healing effect on the soul and body. This is why I collect sales horror stories. We're in a tough business and could use some relief. In fact, when I speak, my audiences would rather hear their peers' sales blunders (during the "confession session"), than absorb selling wisdom or strategies from the rest of my program.

Next, and most importantly, your ability to recover quickly from irritating, even disastrous experiences in your sales life is a measure of your mental health. You must move forward quickly, perhaps taking time to learn a quick lesson from the experience, in order to keep focused on your goal to build your business.

Have you ever had the crushing feeling that there's somehow a gap between you and greatness? Throughout this book you will discover, through laughter and the hard-earned experience of those who've gone before you, ways to close that gap.

The ideas, strategies and concepts inside these pages have been compiled from over 600 sales horror stories and ensuing interviews with your peers.

Through these stories and my training and coaching practice, I've discovered three larger commonalities among world class sales professionals. They all:

- 1) Qualify and disqualify prospects quickly
- 2) Move beyond traditional 20<sup>th</sup> Century selling techniques and employ newer strategies that savvy prospects can't counter
- 3) Invest in themselves three different ways

How can you quickly attain *elite* status in selling? Share what you discover here with someone else who sells. When you become the teacher you learn most quickly. And the faster you put your most useful learning moments from this book into play, the more quickly you become the master.

My hope is that you are not just impacted, but *inspired to improve* from the ideas you're about to absorb.

I trust this book becomes a blessing to your income, career and mostly, your family.

Dan Seidman, SalesAutopsy.com

Barrington, IL

## **CHAPTER ONE: THANK GOD THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN TO ME!**

How to get started?. With some of the most dramatic experiences from my collection of selling blunders. This was a tough call to make. How'd you like to plow through 600 sales tales, looking for the best of the worst?

More than just amazing encounters that provide some laughs at the expense of our sales colleagues who've crashed and burned before us, these horror stories also each come with a brief postmortem or lesson learned - to show what (if anything) could be learned from the experience, and what just might have turned the moment around.

We've all been there, and I trust you'll want to share these stories with your sales colleagues. You know they could use a lift - after a rough day with tough prospects.

## **#5 BUYER WITH BIG EARS ENDS A SALE**

Nicole was managing a sales rep who had a serious aversion to asking for referrals. He was deathly afraid to use this strategy - the easiest way to gather new business. Even after a successful sale he would actually start to sweat if he just thought about asking.

Since a great deal of coaching is actually counseling, they dug into his past to find out what was going on here. One day something triggered a memory of this story and he revealed a tormented sales childhood that was at the root of his problem...

In Tom's rookie days as a life insurance salesperson with a large firm, he had to be accompanied by his boss on all sales calls.

The very first client meeting Tom and his manager went to was with a successful female attorney. Tom watched as his boss smoothly convinced her of the need for not only personal coverage but buy/sell policies for the law firm as well. On their way out Tom's manager asked the female attorney for some referrals and was rewarded with several highly qualified names.

The two agents didn't realize how well sound carried as they waited for the elevator in the historic, stone and marble office building. Tom's manager turned to his new agent and said, "You see Tommy, this business is so easy, it's like shootin' fish in a barrel."

Moments later the words "I heard that" echoed down the hall from the female attorney.

"Get back here!" She barked.

Tom and his manager walked into a cold room to a very heated client. The angry attorney waved their literature at them and asked for her life insurance applications and the list of referrals.

She slowly tore everything in half, then tore it again and dramatically walked to the shredder and fed their paperwork into the machine.

POSTMORTEM: What a plot: Drama with great dialogue on a sales call! And revenge to top it off! Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the ocean, new clients are reversing course and killing sales. There are lots of lessons here. Let's focus on one. And it's not asking for referrals. How many more times are we going to have the phrase "ask for referrals" pounded into us? This lesson is about handling adversity. How well do you maintain your professional demeanor, even when the weather turns nasty? You'll see this addressed in detail later in the book.

#### **#4 BAAAD LUCK AT THE FARM**

It suddenly didn't even matter that this financial services rep had to spend another \$5 to wash his dust-covered car after leaving this prospect's property.

John and his partner had finished a tough series of sales calls on a large corporate farm. The owner was taking on a complete insurance package – their company was covering everything. The men were looking at almost \$50,000 staring them in the, well - their bank accounts.

It didn't even matter that he had to thoroughly scrape the bottom of his shoes before soiling the carpet of his car again. A Chicago city boy like John could make good

money in the country - even with minimal selling skills and zero knowledge about the farming life.

So there sat four of them; the owner with hands folded on his desk and his accountant with hands folded atop a large leather book - the company check book. John and his partner beamed at each other and pulled out one last form.

"In order for us to see that you're completely covered, we need your livestock totals." John began to call out the animal names and receive the numbers of each herd, with babies listed separately - Beef cattle, milk cows, horses and pigs, then...

"Sheep?" 120 was the reply

"E-wees?"

"Huh?" grunted the owner.

"E-wees." John said, clearly mispronouncing the word again. "How many e-wees you got?"

"Let me see that form." The farmer said.

John pointed and he yelled. "That's ewes, you idiot! Have you ever been on a farm? How are you supposed to help me with my business if you know nothing about farming? You know what? Don't even answer that, just get out, get out of my office!"

They walked quickly to the car, not even stopping to clean their shoes, hopped in and drove away, \$50,000 poorer.

POSTMORTEM: John will be counting sheep, instead of money, in his sleep tonight.

Okay, so John was a bit short in his product knowledge training, but let's focus on another not-so-obvious lesson. What to do you do when you blow it on a call? Do you collapse and write it off? One suggestion I offer in situations like this is to be very, very

remorseful. Apologize for you misstate, then say something like, "Oh Lord. You must think I'm my company's village idiot. I'm so sorry. If you don't want to do business with me, I completely understand." Don't be surprised if the prospect says "Hey, that's okay. I've done some dumb things, too. Let's keep going." If you feel bad, you'll make most people want to help you to not be so hard on yourself - and you could save a sale.

### **#3 COLD WIND, COPS & A CAR**

Welcome to winter John thought as he stood inside the Quebec airport terminal. Outside the snow was sideways from a furious wind.

John and his partner had flown in for a sales call - from the sunny south - Alabama, USA. The French gal at the Hertz counter pegged them immediately and began speaking in beautifully accented English.

John gestured over his shoulder to the weather. "Do we have to walk to the shuttle, walk to the Hertz lot, then walk outside again to our car?"

She smiled and shook her head. "Sir, we will deliver your auto right outside that door. It's a blue Ford Crown Victoria."

Five minutes later, a big blue Ford pulled up and a man jumped out and ran into the terminal. The two men looked at him and the guy nodded as he walked by. John glanced at his partner who said "let's go!" and they dashed into the snow.

Thank goodness the car was running and warm. They drove out of the airport and John told his colleague to pull the map out of the glove compartment where the counter woman had said it awaited them.

The door was popped open. Paper trash and other garbage spilled onto his lap.

"This car is a dump!" John couldn't believe Hertz would give them a vehicle without cleaning it first. And then that little light went off overhead. They looked at each other and said together, "It's not our car."

A glance into the rear view mirror and the men realized that someone else had come to the same conclusion. Another light was going off, a flashing light from a Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) vehicle.

Well, of course they had taken that poor guy's car who nodded to them, thinking he was giving the "go ahead and get in" signal while he rushed in from the cold.

The RCMP were very professional throughout, doing their best to suppress their grins at their stupid mistake. And Hertz apologized for the confusion, telling the two of them that they wouldn't be charged for driving the car that Hertz intended they use - once they finally got it.

John said his lesson was that impatience can have lots of unexpected consequences.

POSTMORTEM: John, a wanted man north of the border! He's right, though. Life is getting too fast. We're always in a hurry. We cram cell phone conversations into our down time during the day. We can't even relax and enjoy television commercials anymore. Our clients and prospects want us to get quickly to the point as well. We rush to sell and this is when mistakes happen. BUT, if you learn to slow down and calm down - it will increase your energy when you need it most. Be wise about managing your time, take time for yourself. You body, your mind and most importantly, your family will love you for those times you choose to slow down.



## **#2 THREE-RING-CIRCUS SELLING**

It was a hot August day and they were about forty-five minutes early to demonstrate their data technology services. Scott and his partner decided to get a cold drink at the closest convenience store. He bought a super-large frozen cherry drink, and his partner got a lime-flavored one.

They drove back to the prospect's building and sat in the visitor's spot, mentally preparing while they finished their frozen drinks. When they were ready to go, Scott looked over, and his partner's mouth, lips, teeth, and tongue were bright green - really bright, like a clown's.

He grabbed the rearview mirror and flipped it toward his face. Scott's features were glowing red.

They couldn't wipe it off. An oily rag under my seat was equally useless and our corporate brochures refused to absorb the dramatic colors. It was time for the appointment so the two guys walked to the entrance. People in the lobby actually burst out laughing at these two sales bozos. They sat down with the president, but were so rattled about how silly they looked; they gave the most uninspiring presentation one could imagine. They were asked never to come back.

POSTMORTEM: Obviously, thinking more carefully about one's actions just before a sales call is important. However, the psychological reason a call like this fails is that you can't gain rapport with a prospect if he or she is uncomfortable being sold to by circus clowns. That is unless you happen to be calling on another circus clown, or the Ringmaster, or minimally, the guy with the shovel who follows behind the elephant. There's no hope for a rep who makes an unprofessional first impression on a prospect. I

told this tale while speaking to the worldwide conference of the Sales & Marketing Executives International, and received a smart suggestion for Scott: Bring some frozen drinks for the prospect, too - it might just save the sale.

**And my personal #1, SalesAutopsy.com fan's favorite and most requested sales horror story of all time...**

### **#1 FOOT IN MOUTH KILLS SALESMAN**

Rick sells printing services, and he's probably not as good as he is persistent. It took six months of phone calls and mailed literature to finally get into the president's office of a company that the rep wanted to sell very badly. It took less than thirty seconds to undo half a year of time and effort.

Rick had finally nailed this guy down to an appointment and wanted to make a very good first impression. He figured that this president would look at him as either a strong, persistent salesman or a pest. He would dispose of a pest as quickly as he could, so as Rick walked into the executive's office, he looked for something on the wall or on his desk to use for a little opening small talk.

There it was! "John Madden!" he cried, pointing at an 8 × 10 photograph on the prospect's credenza. Every sports fan knows the 300-plus-pound commentator. He's probably the best announcer around, in spite of a face that could stop a bus. "That's a fantastic photo! How did you get a picture of yourself with your arm around John Madden?"

Rick's rapport-building efforts crashed in flames as the shocked company president slowly answered, "That's not John Madden, that's... my... wife."

POSTMORTEM Our poor salesman, Rick, used an approach that was popular early in the evolution of selling. Are you like this at the initial contact with a prospect? Do you look for that fish on the wall, the trophy on the shelf, the picture on the desk? We're often taught to comment on these items to "break the ice." Can you distinguish yourself by being so ordinary? Don't sound like everyone else who sells. This small talk is wasteful and disrespectful of a buyer's time. Here's a suggestion for that initial contact that many top-performing sales pros use today: Recognize that your prospects don't have the time to chat like they used to. Simply respect the prospect's time, and review what you agreed upon when you got the appointment. Rick should have said, "Mr. Prospect, I want to respect your commitment to the time we have. When we talked on the phone you said we'd have forty-five minutes to talk. Is that right? Good. What is the most serious reason you felt it was important to invite me in today?" As a sales pro, you've now honored someone's busy schedule and gotten right to business. Best of all, the prospect is about to do most of the talking.

### **GOT A CONFESSION YOU'D LIKE TO MAKE?**

WANT TO SEE YOUR STORY IN MY NEXT BOOK?

Send me an email at [warstory@salesautopsy.com](mailto:warstory@salesautopsy.com) and share your most embarrassing moment selling. Don't forget to tell me your lesson learned.

