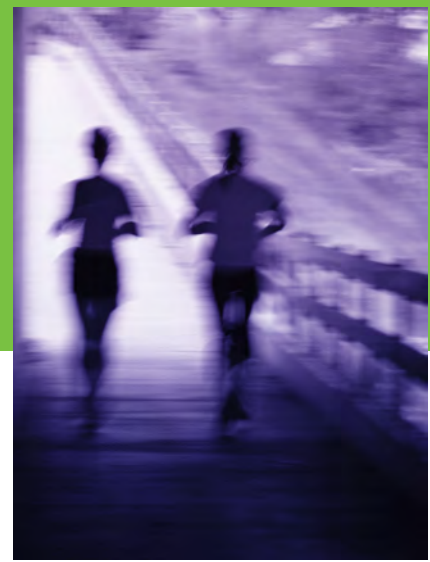


WINNING THE SALES MARATHON

BY AMY KEUPER, VICE PRESIDENT, SALES
INITIAL CALL



In business, as in life, we all can benefit from the experience and encouragement of others. However, fear of looking incompetent or concerns about the cost of bringing in an expert may keep us from reaching out. On top of this, independence is our most celebrated American virtue. But seeking assistance is key to making the paradigm shifts that move us forward. Expert advice does two very important things: it reinforces the importance of the basics and enables us to achieve better results than we could have on our own. Michael Nick and Bob Kantin, the authors of *Why Johnny Can't Sell*, have commented, ***“To reach a level of success selling, like a professional athlete, you must sacrifice a portion of your life to your craft.”*** The parallel between physical exertion and professional sales highlights what it really takes to win.

THE BASICS

First, let's consider “the basics.” We all know that achieving and maintaining physical fitness requires eating right, getting enough rest and exercising. While this is common knowledge, only a fraction of the population is physically fit. Why? Human nature creates a gap between good intentions and follow-through—a gulf separating well-laid plans and their execution. Almost everyone can relate to the false starts, distractions, problems and aversion to pain that cause New Year's resolutions to fizzle in short order. The problem isn't that we don't know. It's that we don't do. If only we could blame ignorance! The same is true of sales.

Regardless of where they're located, businesses conduct marketing and sales operations. A typical sales campaign, for example, involves working from target account lists, reaching and qualifying prospects, scheduling meetings, filling the pipeline, working the sales cycle and closing business. And no doubt, many employees sacrifice a portion of their lives for their companies. But if companies are all doing the same thing and employees are giving it their all, why are some doing so much better than others? Answering this simple question requires an eye to identifying areas for improvement and the ability to take the right course of action. Success requires more than hard work and sacrifice. It requires confronting problems and getting help to step up to the next level. For an athlete, it means hiring a personal trainer. For a sales operation, it means investing in additional infrastructure and bringing in consulting expertise.

FITNESS AND SUCCESS

The physical fitness analogy has clear parallels to sales success. Like a runner who wants to complete a marathon, a company may seek improved performance but be unsure of how to get there. And like a would-be marathoner, the sales VP may think: “I can probably do this on my own, but it will take far longer and be more painful than if I hire someone to take me through this process.” Both runner and sales executive benefit from step-by-step trusted guidance.

So, first things first—a personal trainer insists on a physical evaluation. Great advice, because jumping into a fitness program with an undiagnosed condition could prove fatal. An initial evaluation also determines how much help our marathoner needs. Everyone starts in a different place—which is why “one size fits all” plans do not work. The trainer then formulates a personalized training regimen and recommends the necessary gear—right down to the moisture-wicking socks that prevent blisters.

Similarly, a professional review of your company's sales operations objectively evaluates its existing customer relationship management (CRM) solution, marketing collateral, sales scripts and target account lists to identify areas for improvement and create a customized approach.

Once plans are complete, it's time to hit the road. No pain, no gain is the rule of the day—a coach trains our aspiring 26-miler in muscle development and new running habits. But he's also careful to prevent injury and burnout by ramping up methodically. We're all familiar with Aesop's fable of the tortoise and the hare. A fast, showy lead counts for nothing because it creates a false sense of security. To reach her goal, our runner must train consistently day in and day out. This is the difference between casual jogging and long distance running—between New Year's resolutions and the New York City Marathon.

PERSEVERANCE

The ability to persevere also differentiates average sales performers and industry leaders. Initial Call's experience in lead generation indicates that it takes between four and sixty significant activities to schedule one qualified sales meeting. “Pounding the pavement” is an absolute requirement in the effort to find and nurture opportunities.

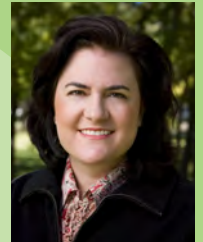
Just as most of us could never manage to run a marathon without a trainer, the typical inside sales person is most likely unable to dedicate the time and attention required to fill the pipeline. Trying to balance prospecting with other responsibilities—plus the sheer discomfort of cold-calling—hinders most salespeople, despite their best efforts. Engaging professional sales operations support can make the difference between meeting your sales revenue goals or settling, quarter after quarter, for less than optimal results.

SUCCESS

When our runner breaks through the tape, she experiences well-deserved success. She has also developed an ongoing relationship with a trusted advisor that will carry her forward in subsequent races. If you're running the sales race—and who isn't—consider enlisting the support of a veteran lead generation expert to take you to your goals. We at Initial Call believe that we can help you achieve more than you ever thought possible. ●

ABOUT AMY KEUPER

Amy Keuper joined Initial Call in March 2003, bringing extensive sales, customer service and business management experience to the table. Now the firm's senior sales executive, Ms. Keuper has a deep understanding of Initial Call's values and operations and has proven her ability to close business, customize sophisticated sales tools and mentor sales consultants. She has driven multiple complex sale projects and is an expert in Salesforce.com and lead generation best practices.



ABOUT INITIAL CALL

Initial Call is a professional services firm specializing in contracted inside sales operations. Our services include B2B sales lead generation, appointment setting, customizing Salesforce.com and other CRM solutions, target account research, list scrubbing, and database management and cleansing.

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