The Data Don't Lie

Many a sales professional, CEO, and Founder have heard those words come out of my mouth……because it's true.

If you read my article in the September edition, you know I've been on a mission to save the Art of Sales from extinction. Active listening, storytelling, persuasion, problem-solving, and negotiation are all skills that too few sales leaders are teaching their team.

That doesn't mean I don't appreciate how critical it is to understand the Science of Sales. Using data provided to you by your CRM, BI tools, marketing automation tools, and conversation intelligence tools can help you better understand where your best leads are coming from, how long it takes to close a deal, why most deals are lost, and if your sales reps are talking more than they're listening.

I don't mean to brag, but with accurate data from the CRM and a good analytics tool, I can know what's going on with the sales team and their deals about 70% of the time without ever talking to them or getting their opinion about why they're missing or hitting target.

I don't need to ask.

"The data don't lie."

Sales is an objective sport and sale math is an easy formula that provides a wealth of information. You just need 3 pieces of data. ACV (average contract

value), close percentage, and the number of days it takes to close a deal. Each of these basic data points can help you understand the areas each rep or the team is struggling.

ACV lower than the team average? The coaching conversation is going to start with questions about the type of companies they are prospecting (ICP or not), whether they are able to articulate the value of the product as it relates to the issues the prospect is facing, and if they are too quick to offer up a discount.

Is the close rate lower than the team average? The coaching conversation will revolve around the number of deals in their pipeline, how they are controlling the sales cycle during each stage, and a better understanding of how they are attempting to close each prospect. I will also dig deeper to see if the deals in their pipeline should have been there in the first place. Perhaps, the rep was wearing rose-colored glasses and hearing only what they wanted to hear without truly seeking to understand not only the problem the prospect has, but also the financial impact that issue is having on the organization.

Is the sale cycle longer than the team average? The first step in investigating the data is to see how long a deal is staying in each individual stage of the sales cycle. This will help me determine at which stage the rep is losing control. I'm also going to explore if they are dealing with a true influencer or DM because they could be getting the run around from a person too low on the totem pole to make a buying decision.

Sales metrics give me an objective way of determining where the coaching opportunities are for each rep so I can have a game plan before the sales rep shows up for their weekly 1:1 or end of the month review. Any propaganda from the sales rep about how that one whale of a deal will close the next quarter or how the budget got cut unexpectedly from the deal that was going to put them over the top will be nullified by solid metrics.

Sometimes we have a Science of Sales issue. Not allocating enough time for prospecting results in too few discovery conversations leading to an anemic pipeline. The root cause of this could be due to the rep thinking their close rate is higher than it really is.

In other cases, however, the data might suggest that it's a skill vs. will issue, or as I like to say, an Art of Sales issue. I had a rep, Kelley, whose pipeline was robust enough to have been hitting her quota and yet, she was always falling short. After reviewing the data, I suspected I had an Art of Sales issue on my hands. No amount of data was going to help me help Kelley. I needed to put my sales coach hat on and listen to enough discovery and demo calls to understand the sales soft skill areas where Kelley was struggling. Then, I could provide the appropriate coaching and training to help her improve her sales skills and increase her close rate.

When a sales rep, or entire team for that matter, is struggling to hit the numbers, it's the data that I review first to help me determine what action is needed. In some cases, it comes down to a lack of activity and discipline around the process. In other cases, it's a skill issue that requires me to provide additional coaching and training. I use data as a shortcut to figuring out which path to take because……..

The data don't lie!

Kristie K. Jones is the author of Selling Your Way IN. She helps founders and sales leaders build and improve their sales processes and manages the hiring process to attract top talent for her clients. She also provides keynotes and workshops to help sales professionals become Top Ten Percenters. Learn more here.