

The Sales Study Guide

Five homework tips to make you a best-in-class salesperson

Editor's Note: In this column space of *Vet-Advantage*, we will give you insight into both basic and advanced tactical selling techniques that will help you serve customers better than ever before. But let us preface this with a warning. The material in these articles is not for salespeople who are not ready to push themselves harder than ever before. It is for the professional who seeks constant improvement, fresh ways to serve customers, and constant learners who are never satisfied with being average. If this is you, it's great to have you on board. Now let's get to work!

A few weeks ago my 8-year old daughter came running into the kitchen and yelled, "I am so excited! I just found out I got the best teacher. I can't wait to start." My first reaction was, "That sounds great!" And my second thought was, "Are you REALLY excited to get back to school?" I wasn't about to question her enthusiasm, but what is it about September and the beginning of the school year that



By Brian Sullivan

executive, that first cold call we make when the bell rings in the morning.

Your sales study guide

The following steps will make your homework time more valuable than at any point in your career. Your study guide should include:

Internet Research. Before calling on any client, even ones you are familiar with, go to

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makes kids reenergized? Well, perhaps it's the same thing that makes us "old people" pumped to get back in the sales groove.

Like students, it's important to realize that much of the success that will come from our own "school" year will be determined by how much homework we do. So while it's important to show up for class and pay attention, we must realize that it is equally important to show up fully prepared to succeed come test time. Test time for us is that huge customer presentation, that lunch meeting with the high-level

their website and see what is new. There might be new products they are featuring, news that has affected the company, or initiatives they are focusing on. Then do a Google search on the business and the prospects you may be meeting with. If you have not made this a part of your regular research, you may be floored by the knowledge you will get that will directly affect your upcoming sales call. Another great Internet research tool is a site called Pipl.com. Put in your prospect's name and you will find everything from who their favorite college team is to what neighborhood they live in.

A bit scary, isn't it? But as long as that information is available, we might as well use it to better understand the customer.

Social Networking. Sick of hearing about the likes of LinkedIn and Facebook? They're not going away, so why not use these sites to better understand your prospect? To do so, use your LinkedIn account to find out what that prospect may have to say about themselves and their industry. You can also reach out to people in your network who may be calling on similar prospects and get their advice. I can go on forever on this topic but regardless of your LinkedIn knowledge, promise yourself you will dedicate an hour or two to better understand WHY you have to keep clicking ACCEPT when you get those three invites each day.

Vendors. Whether you are in distribution or manufacturing, your homework assignment starting this school season is to soak up as much knowledge as possible from industry vendors. Company A rep who calls on the same client base as Company B rep (non-competing products) can tell you a ton about how to best approach a prospect. But guess what, YOU have to be the one to initiate the contact. Your homework assignment is to write down five vendor reps who are high performers. Then schedule a specific time to meet. But remember, you need to be specific in WHY you are meeting. Lunch meetings for the sake of "networking" can be construed as a big waste of time. Tell them what you hope to accomplish and how you might be of service to them.

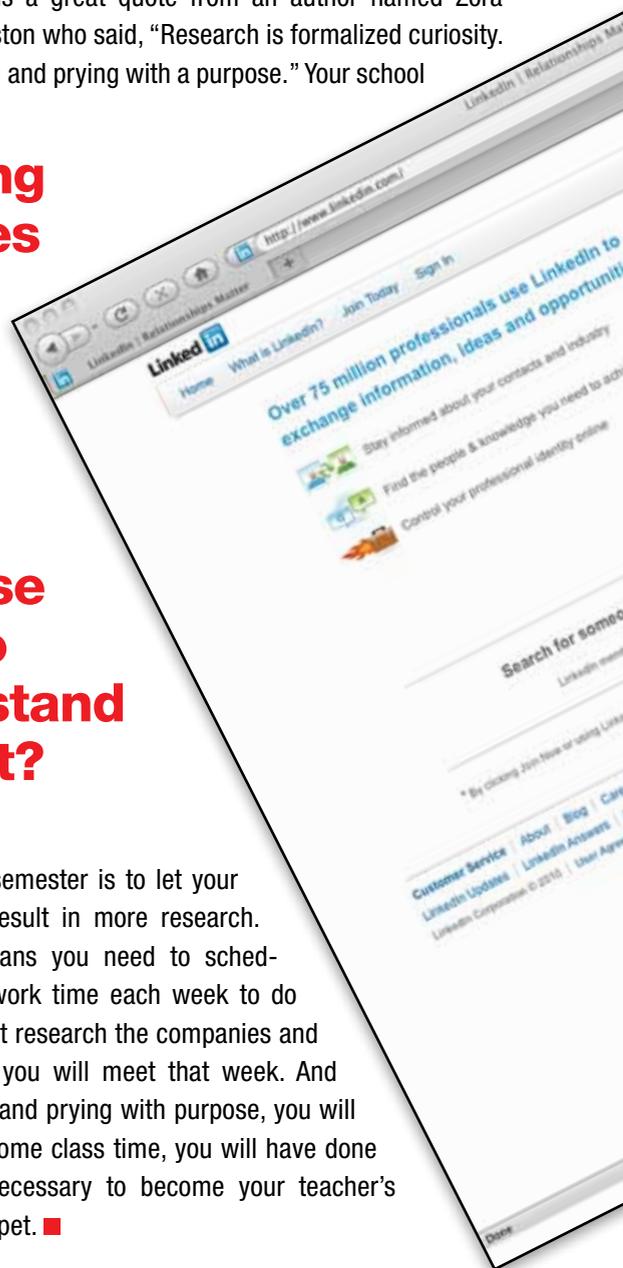
Competition. Face it, sometimes the competition just can't help themselves. With humility as your greatest weapon, you can often get them to divulge what you need to know. You will also get a better idea about how they communicate with YOUR customers.

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Customers. Want to get an A in class? Offer to work a day at your most valued customer's office ... for FREE. They will give you a confused look when you ask, but you can bet the competition has never gone this far to better understand them. You can be sure that you will look back on that day as one of the most valuable workdays in your life. The credibility you will gain will stay with you forever.

There is a great quote from an author named Zora Neale Hurston who said, "Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose." Your school

plan this semester is to let your curiosity result in more research. Which means you need to schedule homework time each week to do nothing but research the companies and prospects you will meet that week. And by poking and prying with purpose, you will find that come class time, you will have done what is necessary to become your teacher's (or CEO's) pet. ■



As president of PRECISE Selling, Brian Sullivan helps improve sales, customer service, negotiations, leadership, and presentation skills through seminars and Internet training programs. He is also the author of the book, *20 Days to the Top – How the PRECISE Selling Formula Will Make You Your Company's Top Sales Performer in 20 Days or Less*. To learn more, go to www.preciseselling.com.