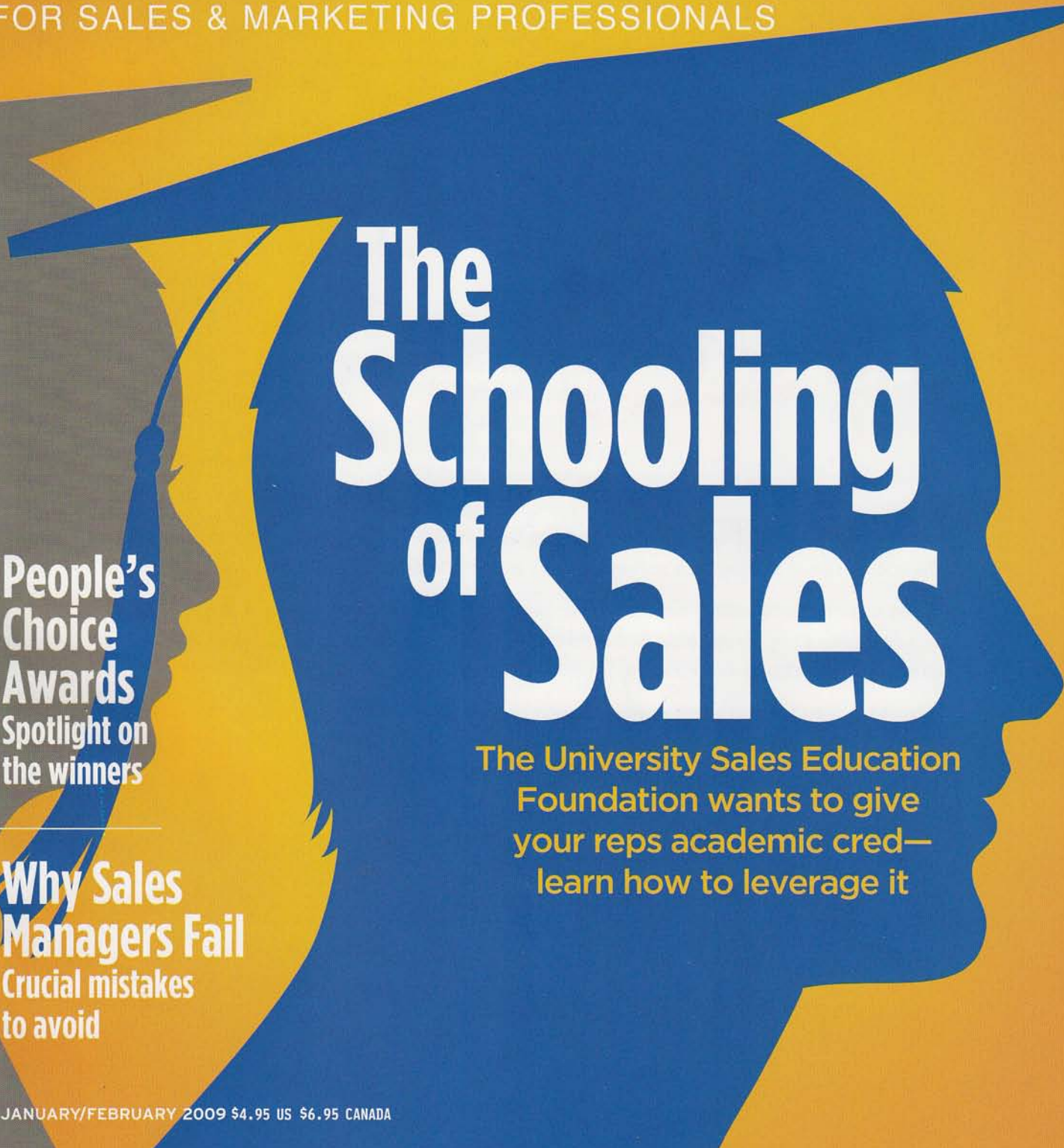


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How to get your team up to speed in a recession market

"I never worry about the future; it comes soon enough."

—Albert Einstein

Well, the future is here ... and it's a recession. So the question becomes, how do you coach your team to sell in such an inhospitable environment? Answer: by looking to the following five action steps, each of which is essential to your success.

1. Re-underwrite your business to a recession scenario. As noted, we're in a recession. That means your sales are probably down, or will be soon. It also means your clients' sales are down, or will be soon. Therefore, you cannot operate your business the same

salesperson is, "We don't have the money ... for you."

What are they spending money on? What aspects of their business are they considering mission-critical? What message is missing for the client to understand that your product meets a critical need? Is your salesperson dealing with the person who controls the purchase decision, or the one following marching orders about curbing spending? Has the salesperson gotten "inside the head" of the client, predetermining what their new issues will be based on the economic climate? Or is he basing his presentation on the same old way of doing things? What new markets are available where your product has become more relevant?

These questions are silver bullets to de-risk your sales pipeline. They illustrate sobering points to your salespeople: that you genuinely want their business to prosper, and you are not willing to allow the two or three potential roadblocks to stop the sale.

Remember, a recession doesn't mean every company woke up one morning with no money, no profits and no customers. It just means that, looking to the future, companies are being far more conservative in their spending. But they *will* be spending. You have to re-underwrite your business to account for a slowing of your sales, but not a complete stoppage.

2. Over-communicate with clients and your internal teams. Every purchase decision made in a recession is under scrutiny, with teams having to justify why they really need your product now. Once they make that decision, you need to help them avoid "buyer's remorse" by keeping

them up to date every step of the way, reinforcing the reasons they said yes to your product or service.

Over-deliver at every chance. It is essential that your team understands and plays back the specific goals and challenges of your clients at every point of contact. Each time you do this, your client has the chance to enhance this understanding. You also have the chance to further tailor your recommendations based on this feedback to lock out your competition.

Your team needs to effectively communicate your

way and expect positive results. A shift must take place, and it must start from how you are looking at your business, how you look at your current clients' businesses, where you are looking for new business and how you are assessing the competition.

Start the re-underwriting process by asking some hard question of your sales team. You need to understand the challenges they are facing. Many times you'll hear, "Client X just doesn't have the money." You need to go deeper, because what the client really told your

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product's value and the core DNA of your company. Is that the key tenet of their sales presentations? It must be consistent. Do not allow salespeople to alter the message you need communicated. This is not to say salespeople can't adapt their personality to the message. They need to be in "one voice" when presenting your offering. They must be able to preempt questions and concerns clients would have before buying your offering.

3. Give your value proposition accountability. The point here is matching your clients' view of what success looks like to what you deliver. A great product that does great things but under-delivers in the key area of most importance to your client is a great failure. Understand your clients' needs. What is the issue your product addresses, especially in today's uncertain

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climate? If your product can deliver for your clients, demonstrate how. And then set a goal for the results they will see when they implement it.

Building accountability into your value proposition is as important today as ever. An example: Make sure your value proposition resolves the accountability issue with a focus on a return on your client's marketing objective versus the return on investment. ROI is subjective and broad versus being accountable for delivering on your client's marketing objective.

4. Ad-hoc ideas are nice to have, but execution is everything. Everyone has ideas. But how and when you execute business is the only thing that matters now. The results you and your team produce are what you are judged on—end of story. This actually makes work a lot easier, easier to manage and easier to score. Proper, successful execution that generates results

your clients want leads to trust.

There is no more powerful sales tool during a recession than having the trust of your clients. You have proven you understand their business, you offered a solution based on what they have communicated success looks like and your product delivered. Now you have their attention. From here, your sales team must always be looking for opportunities to build on that trust, finding new ways to help your clients through these tough times.

Partnering with clients must become the major focus of a sales team. Finding the second and third sale or recommendation to the client becomes the next major focus. In these strained times, you are only as good as your last partnership. Therefore, every salesperson needs to follow her sale to completion and continue her collaboration with her client to determine where they can continue to make a difference and move their client's business forward. Continuing the partnership keeps you closer to your client, retains their business and illustrates the forthrightness of your organization. Remember, the longer you collaborate with a client, the closer you become to them, and the more they open up and share true challenges they need help with.

5. Mistakes will happen—so correct them quickly and responsibly. Focus your team on thinking straight as they hustle in the marketplace to execute/sell. Times like these can force salespeople to become careless. Watch their moves to ensure they are thinking as they execute. When a mistake occurs, you have to know about it and determine its root cause, versus just repairing the mistake. A salesperson's mistake can be a cry for help, but you need to observe it and notice the level of responsibility about it. If it's insufficient, you have just witnessed a mistake destined to be repeated. A leader's job is to pinpoint inappropriate behavior, play it back to the salesperson and teach him the flawed reasoning behind the mistake. This action gets his skin in the game versus picking up after him.

These are economic times the likes of which most of us have never experienced, but they will get better. Being prepared for the long haul by addressing these five action steps will ensure that you are ready for whatever the future brings. —Steve Giglio

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[THE PULSE]

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PERCENTAGE OF HR LEADERS PLANNING TO SLASH THEIR DEVELOPMENT BUDGETS.

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