

# AFTER-SALE FOLLOW THROUGH: A JUGGLING ACT THAT PAYS OFF

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The process of attending to established clients and winning new ones can appear to be a precarious juggling act. The juggler's fear is that if any of those whirling balls drop, the act fails. The bad news is if the balls drop too often, the fear will probably come true. The good news is that if a ball or two occasionally drops, the act usually can be salvaged. The successful salesperson needs to learn to balance and organize his performance so the movement continues in a positive, exciting direction. How do you, the modern super salesperson, accomplish this?

First, the maintenance of all your accounts requires scheduling them for periodic calls. The timing and logistics of calling on your accounts should be planned but flexible. Monitor your customers and be sensitive to their needs. Be alert to the concrete warning signals of client dissatisfaction - the dropping of one of those gravity-defiant balls:

1. **Changes in purchase volume.** Unless external variables have a bearing on a product's sales, a decrease in volume should be interpreted as a warning signal.
2. **An increase in the number and frequency of complaints** about your product, customer service, company policies, pricing or delivery.
3. **Repeated comments about the merits of the competition.**
4. **A decrease in rapport.** A less cordial atmosphere during your sales calls indicate a breakdown in the relationship.
5. **The hiring of managerial personnel** who are **not familiar with your product** or service and seem to have no desire to become familiar with it.
6. **The absorption of your client's company by a larger firm.** Often they "start over" by accepting bids on different products or services. You may find yourself back at square

one.

When it comes to your attention that an account is unraveling, conduct an immediate and thorough investigation. Contact the client and respond to his complaints in a realistic, calm fashion.

If you are lucky, it will just involve the effective handling of the complaint. On the other hand, winning back lost customers can take you through the entire process of establishing trust, identifying needs, determining solutions and assuring the customer that things will improve in the future. This can be a time-consuming job, and you must decide if the account is worth your time and effort.

Annual or periodic client reviews are valuable tools for looking at the activities of an account, the industry in general, competitors, company strengths and weaknesses, and so on. Evaluate each aspect, both privately and in conferences with your client. In addition to determining this information for yourself, meet with your accounts to discuss where you've been and where you're going together.

This special meeting will give you feedback about your customer's level of satisfaction, give you the opportunity to introduce new products or services, convey to them that you care and strengthen the trust bond between you.

The following guidelines set the stage for an effective meeting:

1. Arrange a breakfast or lunch time meeting, if possible.
2. Select a place that is well-lighted and conducive to conversation.
3. Invite all the necessary participants in the account. If there are two buyers, take them both to lunch.
4. Bring all the records needed to discuss the previous year's business.
5. Allow an adequate amount of time for the meeting.
6. Be organized. Know what you want to talk about and proceed in a logical manner. Take notes if necessary, and send a clean typed copy to the participant(s) within one week after the meeting.
7. Listen carefully for implied needs and concerns.
8. Reiterate your desire to be of service and to maintain an open, trustworthy relationship.

9. After the review, offer a new idea, service, product or a special promotional offer whenever possible. This is an excellent opportunity to spark their interest in something new.
10. During your conversation, look for opportunities about and beyond their immediate horizon. Ask for referrals and letters of testimony if appropriate.

It isn't enough merely to service your present clients. You should be continually looking for new sources of business within your present customer base.

There is a famous story about a 19th Century farmer who sold his farm and traveled the world in search of his fortune. After he exhausted his resources, he lost hope and threw himself into the ocean. Meanwhile, back on his farm, acres of diamonds were discovered which yielded untold fortunes!

Opportunities are in front of us every day, but we miss them in our anxious search for new horizons. The professional salesperson recognizes that current clients represent the best source of new business. If you have a strong relationship with your customers, you can feel comfortable asking them for referrals which may bring you additional accounts. There are several ways to expand your business through your customers:

1. **Referrals within their company.** Whenever you talk to a client, keep one ear open for clues which indicate needs within their company. For example, a new office or branch might open which may need your product or service. Ask your customer for a referral, either verbally or in writing. Keep your eyes open for new "pockets of opportunity" within your client's company.
2. **Referrals outside their company.** It is important to ask your clients if they know anyone else who may have a need for your services. In doing so, it is helpful if you can get a testimonial letter than simply saying, "Bill Jones of Real Time Systems sent me." Always ask your client for permission to use him as a reference.
3. **Sell more of the same.** If, during your servicing of the account, you see that they have the capacity to buy larger volumes of your product, suggest that they buy more. Under no circumstances, however, should you try to sell them more if they don't need it.

4. **Sell them additional products or services.** Again, if you see the need or the capability, offer new products/services to your present customers. If they like your original product, they'll listen to your ideas about expanding into other products.
  
5. **Upgrade your clients.** If a client uses a medium-priced product, you may be able to upgrade it to a higher priced, higher quality product, especially if the company is growing and its needs are changing. For example, a company which uses a copying machine may find they need one with more capabilities such as photo-reduction and collating. If you are aware of their increased needs, you can suggest the upgrade before your competitor does.

After-sale follow through is a never ending balancing act. It requires communication, a sensitivity to the other person's needs and a commitment to grow together. As a salesperson, you need to exert an extra measure of effort to ensure the continuation of your performance. Unlike an act, however, your client can walk out on you anytime he feels dissatisfied or doesn't like your performance. So visualize yourself as a command performer for your customers and you'll find they appreciate you more because of it. This will undoubtedly result in numerous encores with your current clients and their referrals.