

# THE TOP 12

# Mistakes Salespeople Make

## The Cost Of Poor Strategy

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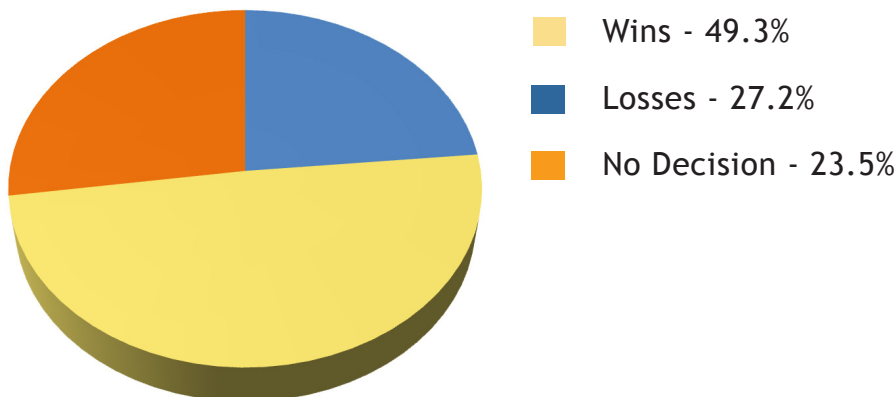
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# THE COST OF POOR STRATEGY

In research conducted by CSO Insights<sup>®</sup>, it was discovered that less than half of all forecasted deal actually close. About a quarter (27.2%) are lost to competition, and 23.5% stall and buy nothing from anyone.

This means that salespeople are usually overconfident in their chances of winning because among other reasons they:

- Misread individual preference
- Lack competitive strategy
- Sell too low to people without adequate power
- Lack a source of urgency to close
- Don't understand political decision-making process



# SALES EFFECTIVENESS BACKSTOPS

Just hiring good sales talent is not enough to achieve maximum performance. A complete sales process that includes politics, competition, strategic solutions and a closing strategy can increase win rates and consistency.

Finally, good deal coaching by a sales manager can improve strategy and win rates by as much as 25% or more.



## MISTAKE #1: WRONG PEOPLE

Often, salespeople get stuck in their comfort zone and sell to the people that they are familiar with and that like them. What a salesperson should be doing is asking themselves “Who do I need to gain access to if I want to win this deal or dominate this account?”. You need political navigation to get access and you need to know what you’re going to say when you get there.

Some salespeople think that they should sell the same way to all individuals. But, some individuals eat up a lot of your time and yield little influence on the choice of a vendor.

Depending on the decision-making process, you may not need all the votes.

You can’t afford to, nor need to, spend equal time with each person involved.

It is far harder to change someone’s mind than to help them make it up in the first place. So finding out whose votes you need can guide you in deciding with whom to invest your time.

## MISTAKE #2: NO POLITICAL STRATEGY

Not all individuals in a complex sale have the same amount of power or play the same part or role in the decision. You can either ignore politics at your peril or make it work for you.

Recognizing the below key points is crucial to developing your strategy.

- Not all buyers are equal
- Influence is different than authority
- Influence is invisible
- Some people have high authority but no influence
- Others lower can have large influence
- Reps often miss the impact of new players



## MISTAKE #3: POOR COMPETITIVE STRATEGY

You can win without a strategy. It's called luck. If you want to achieve your best chances of winning, you need a strategy that focuses your strengths against their weaknesses with the right people early in the process.

You must differentiate your solution in a professional manner and demonstrate how you solve the more strategic problems better. Depending on the decision-making process, you need to know whose votes you need to have and how you plan to win them, or live without them.

Great strategists always play both sides and know their competitors very well. Knowledge allows you to anticipate the competitor's tactics, predict and neutralize them first. Competitive selling, however, is not negative selling. You can and must stay on the professional level.

"A competitor will find a way to win. Competitors take bad breaks and use them to drive themselves just that much harder. Quitters take bad breaks and use them as reasons to give up. It's all a matter of pride."

- Nancy Lopez

## MISTAKE #4: MISSED LOSING SIGNALS

In a complex sale, if you are losing, clients won't tell you because it is in their interest to keep you in the evaluation.

Without insiders who prefer you telling you where you stand, you must look for clues that you may not be winning while you can still change your strategy.

Bad news early is good news. At that point, you can change your strategy or qualify out. Finishing second late into the deal is the most expensive outcome.

Some signals that you're losing the deal:

- Unreturned phone calls - radio silence
- Cancelled meetings
- New requirement late
- Slippage, stalls
- No questions about T&C's or support issues
- No access
- No inside information

## MISTAKE #5: “HAPPY EARS”

Over the past few decades, we’ve all been conditioned to use positive thinking and that is a good thing. But since we don’t always get the truth about where we stand, it needs to be combined with critical thinking to get truer expectations and avoid complacency.

This is where an experienced manager can help you ask the tough questions so you build a better strategy while there is time.

A veteran salesperson knows that if no one is telling you that you’re winning, you’re not. The rookie thinks they’re winning right up until they lose; the veteran assumes they’re losing right up until they win. They anticipate what could go wrong and cut it off before it happens.

Remember that misreading individual preference - “They like me!” - and believing that it is buying preference is a rookie mistake.

## MISTAKE #6: POOR TEAM LEADERSHIP

Team selling is a leadership job. And probably almost nobody on your team reports to you. So communicating the plan to them in writing assures that they will do their part accurately without you having to explain “the story” every time. Each member of the team needs to understand their role.

Everyone who touches your account should know the plan, the pain, the politics and the strategy. Taking a few minutes to write your plan is actually a labor saving investment in the long run.





## MISTAKE #7: TACTICS DON'T MATCH STRATEGY

We don't get paid to be busy. We get paid to be effective. Without a defined strategy we often waste time selling to the wrong people and the wrong accounts or doing things that don't lead to victory.

When a client makes a request, rookie salespeople go into react mode. A veteran will drill down into a client's request to find out more specifics about what the client is really wanting.

How you craft your message, your body language, your speed, and whether you're working on tasks or relationships depends upon the behavioral dimension of your buyer.



## MISTAKE #8: POOR QUALIFICATION

Many deals are largely decided before an evaluation starts. Other evaluations are started without the blessing of management by people who can't drive them through the process. Almost a quarter of deals end in no decision.

Picking the right battles is the key to spending your time wisely. Segmentation and investing in accounts that will yield greater volumes, better pricing, or preferred status is essential. The worst outcome is to invest resources and finish second. Second place pays zero.

How you qualify personally depends on two factors: 1) your chances of winning and 2) the cost of the next card or step in resources and time. What is qualified in demand creation would not be qualified to a hunter with many leads to pursue.

"There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all."

- Peter Drucker

## MISTAKE #9: NO STRATEGY REVIEWS

Abraham Lincoln said, “If I had nine hours to chop down a tree, I’d spend the first six sharpening my axe.”

Many salespeople stay very busy chopping with a dull axe, doing activities with no strategy. Forecasting without strategy analysis just adds bad numbers up faster. Take the time to make a plan. Thirty minutes or more with an experienced manager or a peer review increases win rate by as much as 25%.

The consistency of this review process is the key to competitive sales advantage.



## MISTAKE #10: NO CLOSING STRATEGY

In a tough economy, closing a deal may take as long or longer than winning it. Deals don’t coast across the line - you have to kick ‘em across. Prepare for a counter-attack from a losing competitor.

You should determine the client’s approval process once you’ve made the short list, not late into the deal. New players emerge from legal and procurement. Without help from Power Sponsors, to whom the value is emotional and personal, your deal can stall or slip.

An ROI alone won’t close a deal; it is merely a satisfier, not a motivator.

Often at this point, your competition becomes other opportunities for investing limited funds.

## MISTAKE #11: NO PLAN B

When you start to slip out of control, you should reevaluate your strategy in a purposeful way and decide if you need to change the game. Sometimes you need to change to plan B during an actual call or presentation. Outlining your options in advance makes this possible.

When new information emerges - retest your strategy.

"Consequently, you must not only have a plan but also prepare for what happens if the plan works or fails or if an unexpected situation suddenly requires a completely different approach."

"What then? And what happens after that? And after that?"  
- Bill Walsh  
Coach of SF 49'ers  
Three Super Bowls  
Stanford Coach, HBR Article

## MISTAKE #12: BLIND SPOTS & ASSUMPTIONS

Information is crucial to strategy. Often, a salesperson is flying blind through a snow storm and they find it out at the end of a lost deal. The key is to find out before hand. Cultivate high-level informants within the customer's organization to let you know where you are, what to say, where to go and what the competition is doing.

Discover the root cause of the customer's pains. Salespeople should know the strategic pains of the customer's business and how their solution links to those pains.

Salespeople also need to ask better questions earlier on in the sales cycle. Another set of experienced eyes can help you realize what you don't know or think you know that is wrong about your deal in time enough to make a difference.





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This eBook provides you with valuable insights on how to recognize pains and win the sales you can't afford to lose. Rick is the founder and CEO of The Complex Sale, Inc. in Atlanta, Georgia.

The Complex Sale, Inc. is a sales methodology and consulting company that helps you win the sales you can't afford to lose - from speeches and tools to training and coaching to total sales force transformation. We help leading companies create pipeline, win opportunities, and dominate accounts in the complex selling environment. Founded in 1994 by Rick Page, author of the sales bestseller *Hope Is Not A Strategy - The 6 Keys To Winning The Complex Sale* and *Make Winning A Habit - 20 Best Practices Of The World's Greatest Sale Forces*, The Complex Sale delivers programs taught by executives who know the environment firsthand. We provide the skills and processes you need to make winning a habit in your organization.

For more information on how The Complex Sale, Inc. can help you and your organization, contact us today at [info@complexsale.com](mailto:info@complexsale.com) or call us at 770-360-9299.