Selling Points

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"Unwinnable" Deals—
Spot Them, Survive Them, and Thrive Without Them

The numbers vary by industry, but for many companies the outcome of deals they pursue looks something like this: 25% of the time you win the deal, 25% of the time your top competitor wins, 25% of the time someone else wins, 25% of the time there was no buying decision made.

Regardless of Win Rates, The Same Basic Principles Stand:

- Reduce the time you spend on deals that end in no decision where you can't convince the client to buy, or you have no chance of beating a competitor.
- Spend this "new" time that you've created focused on the deals you are losing—winnable deals.

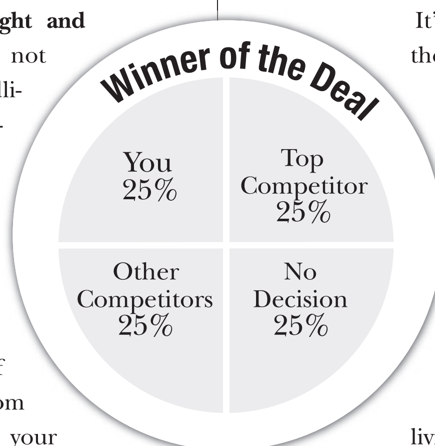
One of the biggest mistakes made by all salespeople is spending too much time on prospects that will never buy from you.

Warning Signs a Deal Is "Unwinnable"

The best approach to identifying a deal as unwinnable is implementing a solid opportunity management methodology that considers "deal probability."

No driving force—The reason so many deals are lost to "no decision" is there was nothing driving the deal in the first place. "Good selling" can only take you so far if the customer doesn't really have a need. To catch this problem early on, consider how the customer would answer these questions: "What is the financial impact of a delay in meeting the objective we've discussed? What would be the strategic impact of a delay to this initiative by three or four months?"

If the customer doesn't see "significant" consequences—costs or benefits—if they don't make a decision soon, then there is really no driving force for the deal, just a driving force to "no decision."



Not enough insight and intelligence—We're not referring to the intelligence of the salesperson. We're talking about your cumulative knowledge about the account, the opportunity, the competition, and the key people involved. If your data is coming from public sources and your competitors are getting inside data from people with power or influence, then you're starting out with a strike against you. This alone is not enough to tell you the deal is unwinnable, but it forces you to think about other warning signs.

Not enough access—Not having access to contacts with power and influence for this opportunity is another strike against you. Most salespeople know how important it is to gain access to executives and identify influencers outside of your target company (e.g., consultants, salespeople for complementary products). However, if it is late in the buying cycle and you still don't have enough access, maybe you also have the problem of not having someone with influence supporting you. That can be a death knell, especially if you are trying to replace an incumbent.

Not enough business value—Your focus needs to be on the customer seeing that you have the most significant demonstrated business value for the deal. This alone can counteract a lot of the "damage" done by having insufficient intelligence and access and not being the incumbent or having a sponsor.

It's not easy to admit, but there are times when it is obvious to you that a competitor will give the client the best business value.

Thriving Without The "Unwinnable" Deals

Today, most salespeople are not living in a world of abundance when it comes to opportunities in their pipeline. Trying to suggest to them that there are deals in their pipeline that should be abandoned doesn't sound sensible. The only way to combat that is to appeal to their wallet.

Let's imagine what would happen if you redirected the time you spend on the unwinnable deals to the rest of your pipeline? You do the math; it would lead to a 20% improvement in your performance!

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