

“Managers can pick and choose the techniques that work best for them and customize them for their strategy.”

## Sparking Sales

*How a community bank grew market share and didn't even need a federal cash infusion to do it*

When a community bank that sells its services to businesses through about two dozen platform managers learned that it had to compete with global banks for business in the new financial world, it had made the transition to actively selling its services. However, the community bank wanted to do a better job of protecting its existing accounts while penetrating new ones.

### THE SPARK

In 2005, Joy Baldrige, president of Baldrige Seminars International and author of *The Fast Forward MBA in Selling: Become a Self-Motivated Profit Center and Prosper* (Wiley, 1999), spoke before a local networking group. About eight of the community bank's top managers were in attendance, and the bank's director of business development approached Baldrige afterward and requested a meeting. During the meeting, the exec said she would like the sales expert to work with her team members, “to put a spark in them,” as Baldrige recalls.

“They wanted to gain market share, to protect the core and go for more. They knew that if they did not grow their customer base, they would be chipped away.”

Baldrige first spoke to the crucial platform managers at an informal holiday meeting. Many of them had come into banking two or three decades ago as tellers, when selling was a kind of blasphemy in banking. They were now salespeople and knew it but did not necessarily have all the skills and habits of top salespeople.

“It was a one-hour holiday party emphasizing attitude and motivation,” Baldrige

remembers. By emphasizing those two qualities she could make sure she could work with the managers effectively.

Meeting with sales leaders taught Baldrige another fact to consider during the implementation of the project: the bank delivered good customer service and did not want to lose that as it sold more effectively. “That was a fine line we had to walk,” she says.

### SIX STEPS FORWARD

In 2006, Baldrige began conducting a series of classes, each attended by platform managers and branch and regional managers. There was about one meeting every four to six weeks through October 2006. The meetings covered a six-step sales process from greeting to close.

Baldrige focused on the psychology of selling and dealing with the fears of rejection, to remove negative feelings these fears can generate. She moved on to the challenge of better managing time in order to see more prospects. The platform managers had other responsibilities in addition to making sales, so she had to teach them to block out time for contacting prospects.

Call preparation was another topic Baldrige focused on. She believes that most successful sales calls are well prepared, but salespeople cannot take too much time for preparation. In banking, with so many details to review, it is tempting to spend too much time preparing.

Baldrige put great emphasis on not just what to say, but how to say things. “Language is behavior and behavior is language,” she notes. Her overall aim was to



#### JOY BALDRIDGE

**Title:** president

**Company:** Baldrige Seminars International

**Product:** Sales management training and consulting

**Market:** Corporations worldwide

develop a language with which platform managers could sell naturally and comfortably. Many platform managers said later in their course reviews that, since taking the course, they now do not feel like they are selling. But they are.

Baldrige merged her own sales language with bankers' language to develop a way of speaking naturally and effectively during initial phone calls, while leaving voicemails, when asking for decision makers, and when dropping into a prospect's office – all steps of the sales cycle.

### PRESENTATION MODE

Then she moved into the presentation phase. Here, she emphasized discussing the “can” features of a product, rather than “can't” features. For example, the community bank could not offer the interest rates that its global competitors could. But it could clear 90 percent of depositors' checks instantly, which was very appealing to local businesses.

The bank had many such special advantages, but Baldrige discouraged a simple data-dump of benefits. “No one wants to hear all those differentiators, because no one wants them all,” she says.

Differentiators must be introduced in response to prospect needs, which are discovered in questions. “And they should not be cliché questions,” Baldrige emphasizes. “For example, ‘What keeps you up at night?’ Cross that out. ‘How much do you know about our bank?’ Cross that out, too.”

She urges salespeople to use common

## to think about!

- Steer clear of gobbledygook jargon and buzzwords.
- Use common and natural language.

and natural language. “Conversations with prospects should be highly structured but not canned or pat.”

Structurally, Baldrige says the job of salespeople is to help prospects think and improve. The right questions help prospects think, while the right answers aid in the improvement. Doing both naturally builds trust, and prospects buy from people they trust.

“Your goodbyes are as important as your hellos,” Baldrige stresses. Many

“Remember, I am always there for you,” and “If you decide to change your checking account or payroll, I really would love to be your first call.”

prospects blow off a first sales call and then feel too guilty about it to call the salesperson back when they do need them. The aim of the right goodbye is to remove guilt and encourage that possible callback. Baldrige taught platform managers to emphasize future services with such phrases as, “Remember, I am always there for you,” and “If you decide to change your checking account or payroll, I really would love to be your first call.”

#### RESULTS-ORIENTED

By 2007, the bank reported it was reaching its goals. Platform managers were no longer hesitant to get out of the office and make calls. There was no more procrastination to

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avoid the hard work of sales. Platform managers deliberately scheduled time for sales calls and were using these scheduled blocks of time. Business was up significantly.

Baldrige attributes much of this success to encouraging an approach, not enforcing a script. “We offer a plethora of ways to listen, and our glossary has terms and tips that amount in the hundreds, so managers can pick and choose the techniques that work best for them and customize them for their strategy. Within every category, there are ten or thirty techniques so they can choose the ones they feel comfortable with.”

The banks' sales staff has now developed its own internal language around the new approach, and this helps extend and enhance the progress. When Baldrige works with a large sales force with a lot of turnover and new hires, she often continues training after the initial sessions. But the community bank's sales force was small and stable enough, so this was not necessary.

To learn more about Baldrige's services, visit [www.joybaldrige.com](http://www.joybaldrige.com).

– HENRY CANADAY

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