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Lessons From A Toothache – Part 3

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This is the final entry in a three-part series[1] about what I've learned about selling from having a royally painful toothache.

SO FAR WE'VE LEARNED

We discussed two lessons (or principles) regarding pain:

Lesson #1: No Pain = Lack of Urgency
If a prospect is not purchasing your product or service, they are not experiencing enough pain with their current situation.

Lesson #2: Action Is Directly Proportional to the Amount of Pain Experienced
To be successful selling product, services or ideas, we must find the pain the prospect is experiencing <u>and</u> it must be acute enough to take action now.

We have discussed two strategies in prospecting and selling that make use of these principles.

Strategy #1 deals with how we target our prospecting. In other words, we want our marketing to focus on *"attracting prospects who are already consciously aware of the pain of their current situation."*

Strategy #2 is all about "*helping the prospect in front of you <u>become</u> painfully aware of the current problems (pun intended)."* This involves being skillful in asking the right questions in the right order during a selling conversation.*"*

In this final entry we will look at a third strategy to non-manipulatively utilize the concept of "pain" to grow your business and influence.

Strategy #3: Bide Your Time Until The Pain Is Acute
Strategy #3 addresses prospects who are qualified in that they are experiencing the "right" problems, but the timing is not quite right (i.e., the pain is not acute enough yet).

This whole series was born out of my experience with a painful wisdom tooth. I got that handled with urgency once the pain was bad enough. However, I have three others *that have yet to be extracted*, even though my dentist has strongly recommended I do so. Why? Not a priority. If they start hurting, I'm sure I would be on the phone quickly making an appointment with the oral surgeon.

Here's the deal: I know logically it's in my best interest to get this done. I know it makes sense, but other priorities are currently distracting me. I intend to get it done, but after I take care of other things first.

Have you had this experience with prospects? They definitely have a problem where you can help. They are totally aware of the problem, but the consequences don't feel acute enough to take immediate action.

What are we to do in this situation?

TIME IS ON YOUR SIDE

You certainly want to use the techniques described in Strategy #2 first. If those don't work, we are dealing with a *timing problem.*

What that means is that you need to allow more time for the problem to become big enough that they want (or need) to solve it immediately.

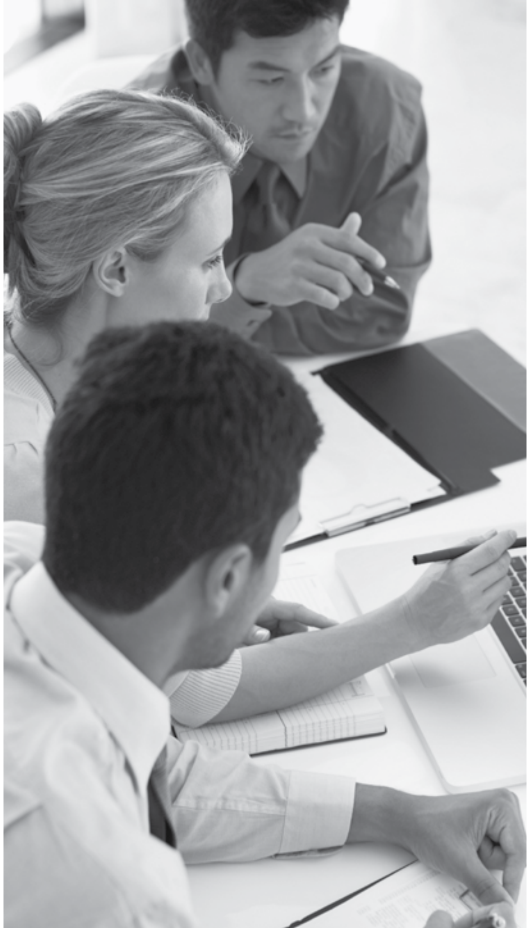
Just as putting off taking the remaining three wisdom teeth out may come back to bite me (I know, bad pun!), problems don't tend to disappear, they tend to grow, accumulate and get worse.

When you revisit the situation with your prospect at a later time when the pain is much greater, you should have a much greater chance closing the deal.

BUT THERE'S A PROBLEM

Most consultants and business owners do a poor job of keeping in touch and following up with their prospects. Here's what typically happens:

1. you meet with a prospect,
2. they are interested, but not ready,
3. you (correctly) move on to other prospects who



might be ready to buy now (see Strategy #1), and
4. you (incorrectly) lose track of this original prospect – they fall off the radar screen and when the time comes that they are ready to move ahead with your services, you missed the opportunity!

THE ANSWER

In order to avoid this problem, you must develop a "keep-in-touch" (aka KIT) system that ensures solid target prospects don't fall off the radar. Your KIT system needs to include three core elements.

1. CRM Database

"CRM" stands for "client relationship management". If you are truly prospecting full out, then you will have many prospects to keep track of. They will be in various stages of the selling process. It's critical to have a system to keep track of your prospects, along with key information like:

- Contact information
- Details of your conversations with them
- Next steps

Depending on the type of business you have, your system can be as simple as using an Excel spreadsheet to as robust as something like Goldmine or Infusionsoft.

One thing that is critical in your system is to have reminders about when to contact your prospect next, whether this is automated or you mark your calendar.

2. KIT Follow-up Strategy

You need to decide exactly how you will keep in touch with your prospects. Keeping in touch should include more than calling to "just check in to see if you are ready to engage me". You can increase "touches" if you don't always make it about selling. It can include one of more of the following:

a) **Newsletters** – whether by email or snail mail, having a monthly newsletter is a great way to keep yourself in front of prospects. It has several benefits: it is leveraged, it provides valuable information, it develops the relationship, and, without you focusing on it, will pass you in front of the prospect possibly at the perfect time!
b) **Event Invitations** – a great way to call a prospect without selling is to invite them to a free or low-cost seminar or webinar. This provides value to them and reminds them about how you can help them.
c) **Articles** – send articles of interest about their problem areas.
d) **Cards and Letters** – send cards through snail mail celebrating holidays, birthdays, etc.
e) **Phone or Lunch Check-ins** – finally, your KIT strategy should not exclude checking in with your prospect about the specific issue you originally met about or any other issue they may be struggling with. This also applies to clients.

   For example, I remember scheduling lunch with a previous consulting client in order to catch up and see what was going on in her world. It turned out the client had no major needs at that time. But here's the power of a KIT strategy: she called me the next day to hire me for a project. Apparently, right after a lunch she attended a project meeting and had some challenging deadlines. She even told me, "I don't know if I would have thought of you if we didn't just have lunch!"

3. Your Discipline to Keep on Task

Having a robust database and a KIT strategy will

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only be effective if you have the discipline to take action and follow up with your prospects on a regular basis. You can automate much of this follow up. Depending on your business, you may still want the personal touch of voice-to-voice or face-to-face follow up.

Remember, these days prospects have short attention spans and short memories. It takes some work, but persistence pays off. A strong KIT system will make sure you are top of mind when their need is great enough to take action. Make sure you don't miss your window of opportunity!

END NOTES

[1] *Editor's Note: You can catch up on the series by reading Part 1 in the November 2011 issue and Part 2 in the May 2012 issue of* The Stepping Stone. *Both are available on-line at www.SOA.org. Just click on The Management & Personal Development Section paragraph on the Professional Interests page.*