



The Secret of My Sales SUCCESS

Insider tips from award-winning chamber sales pros

By Cathy Lada

Traditionally, while sales professionals don't run chambers, they do "drive" them. Chamber sales professionals have different educational and motivational needs than other chamber staffers, yet they have the same desire to give back to their profession. They also have the same need to learn, whether through their peers or their own experience, what it takes to carve out a career in selling chamber memberships.

"Selling chamber memberships successfully requires a combination of several talents, including skill with technology, teamwork, solid sales techniques, a high level of motivation, and the ability to recharge oneself," says **Dawn Moliterno, President & CEO of the Walton County (FL) Chamber of Commerce**, and a former regional instructor on membership development for ACCE. "A quality sales force must have all the elements to achieve success. A salesperson can possess several of these elements, but without the others, will have to work harder to compensate."

Through the Membership Development Division's Circle of Champions program at ACCE, chamber sales professionals are able to share their viewpoints and experience with each other, especially on the topic of what makes a successful and long lasting sales person. "The Circle of Champions instills these sales-oriented staff with the training, information, motivation and enthusiasm to promote the growth of their chamber of commerce," says **Kyle J. Sexton, Director of Member Services at the Salem (OR) Area Chamber of Commerce** and Chairman, ACCE Circle of Champions. "Their connection to each other across the industry is a valuable asset to every chamber."

In considering what makes a successful chamber sales career, we considered

three parts of the job: prospecting, slow times, and personal "advantages."

Prospecting

The process of gathering and approaching prospects is perhaps the most vital part of any sales career, not least of which is chamber membership sales.

Cheryl Clark is one of three membership professionals at the **Cocoa Beach (FL) Chamber of Commerce**, which covers about 10 towns. She sometimes makes as many as 35 calls per day to keep her appointment schedule busy. "I spent a lot of time getting to know as much as possible about their business," says Clark about her clients. "I form a relationship with the people that join our chamber. I always return a phone call, and I always try to deliver what I offer."

Also from Cocoa Beach Chamber, **Kristine Adams** finds prospects by referrals from existing partners, new occupational license listings, and previous business contacts in the community. "I usually set aside two days a week that are dedicated to phone calls for follow-ups and new client contacts," says Adams, who says she's doing a lot more selling by email. "Before anyone joins," says Adams, "I find out what their top three goals are, both personally and for their business. It helps me develop a path for their future with us."

For prospecting, **Tameron Kugler, Member Services Manager, Glastonbury (CT) Chamber of Commerce**, conducts a twice-monthly leads exchange group that averages between 35 and 45 participants. Attendance is not limited to chamber members, but a good number of regular attendees who are not members do join because of the constant conversation about the programs and benefits. Likewise, Kugler she finds the

most successful approach for selling a membership is a face-to-face meeting with an invitation to an event. Once she gets them to an event, she usually signs 90 percent of them on. While she does sell on the phone, it is not the preferred method. If a sale is made by phone, Kugler prefers to meet the new member face-to-face within the week so that they can get acquainted.

Nell Moll, Director of Membership, Milford (CT) Chamber of Commerce prospects by watching the papers for comings and goings, participating in outside lead groups, working closely with the Ambassador Committee, and with service organizations. She emphasizes that so much of it is about retention: staying visible within the community and keeping existing members aware of what the chamber is about and what can be accomplished, collectively.

Moll makes about six to eight 'warm' prospective calls daily and four to five face-to-face meetings (both in and out of the office). "Working on a variety of projects at any one given time leads to a shuffling act of sorts," says Moll. "Sometimes I am responding to calls relating to a certain program or function that requires membership to participate. Perhaps it's time to close out the Membership Directory; to be included you must join by a given date. Offering a variety of 'reasons to join' gives you a broader audience, and you are often selling two things at once."

Slow periods

In Topeka, **Diana Gillespie, Sales Representative, Greater Topeka (KS) Chamber of Commerce**, finds prospects in all the usual places; from member referrals, TV, radio, newspaper, phone calls, walk-ins, and direct mail to driving around in her car to see what's happening in the marketplace.

For more on the circle of champions, visit networking/divisions/membership/

When times are a little slow, however, she just makes more phone calls. Whenever possible, she uses whatever the chamber is offering to tailor her sales pitch. "In one case, we had a deadline for the membership directory that helped them to say yes."

Like other salespersons, Moll has trouble with how to work through slow periods. The common consensus would be if it's slow, it's because one isn't working hard enough. According to Nell, the closest she comes to that is during summer when she's actually busy coming up with some great ideas for the chamber's yearly activities. "This is the time we do our annual planning," she explains. "Bringing new and exciting energy back and putting it to practical use sets the stage for you as well as your members for getting ready to tackle business head-on."

"Advantages"

When it comes to professional development, Kugler seeks out experienced mentors. "I always look to find individuals with better skills, who have achieved success in their field, and learn from them. This is a great way to push yourself to the next level. I have also learned a great deal from attending the conferences and programs presented by ACCE and other organizations, and I cannot stress enough the importance of networking with your fellow professionals."

Similarly, **Vance Adams, Account Executive, Las Vegas (NV) Chamber of Commerce**, feels his even-handed temperament serves him well the job. "The one thing I do differently that makes me successful is I let prospects know up front that I do not need their business and that it is OK to NOT join the chamber and people tell me no all the time. I show no signs of desperation, ever."

Moll feels what works to her advantage is her strong feeling of customer service. "Being a former chamber member, I think to myself, 'How would I like to be treated as a member?'" says Moll. "My answer is, with courtesy, honesty

and interest. I never hard sell or just close them to make numbers. I start out by telling the prospective member 'We're the vehicle, you're the driver. Where do you want to go?' I ask a great number of questions and try to find what their needs or reasons for joining are. Once those are established you are in a better position to help them find *their* reasons for joining. This reinforces to the member that their decision to join was based on what they wanted or expected, not what we are trying to sell.

Final words

A career in chamber sales, like a career in any field of selling, requires a smart balance between selling the product and addressing consumer (or in this case, member) needs. Those who can meet both of those challenges equally will succeed on multiple levels in chamber sales. ☐

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