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## When the Selling Gets Tough, the Tough Get Smart

**E**ven in a down economy, people are still buying--you just have to find them.

"How do you sell in an environment where no one is buying anything?"

A frustrated and frightened salesman asked me that just the other day. And I had a hard time answering him. Not because I didn't think I had the answer, but because I didn't think he was really a salesman.

Sure, his card read "Sales Representative," but a title does not a salesperson make. And one thing that assures that a person will not sell, at least not to any significant level, is if he is frightened and frustrated.

So for my answer, my suggestion, my real world advice on how to sell in a miserable economy: Keep in mind that you don't sell to the statistics, the unemployment figures or the consumer confidence levels. No matter how bleak the headlines may be, people are still buying--millions of them. Even in the Great Depression, roughly 75 percent of the work force was employed. Salespeople were selling them homes, suits, travel, chess sets and lawn furniture. Yes, many salespeople hung their heads low. Many more washed out of the business. But the ones who got smarter as the going got tougher still took home commission checks. Nothing was going to stop them.

As you know from the name of this column, I believe great salespeople are machines--heat-seeking selling machines. They find the pockets of heat and they hone in on them. They make their opportunities. They are not order takers--they are order makers.

Last week I also spoke to a client who heads a New York real estate brokerage firm. How many homes do you think the firm's agents have sold this year: 50? 100? 200? Actually, 3,000 and counting. Sure, this is off about 25 percent from the boom, but it is not mashed potatoes. It is not the brick wall so many would have us believe it is. It is 3,000 because real salespeople put on their suits in the morning, ignore the headlines and sell.

My prescription for selling in a meltdown:

- Drop the word "recession" from your lexicon and replace it with "opportunity." People are buying homes, cars, shoes, software, copiers and even yachts. Find out where the opportunities are and make that your market.
- Experiment with sales and marketing initiatives you've never tried or have avoided. Say, for example, that you detest the idea of hosting a seminar. Well, seminars are a powerful way to sell through education. And today, with impulse sales on the decline, selling by advising and informing can deliver a strong advantage.
- Remember that buying is linked to key human needs and emotions that prevail regardless of economic conditions. The drive for success, wealth, beauty, security, entertainment, peace of mind and love never goes away. This may be the ideal time to change your approach from a product or service focus to a pitch based on these enduring drives and values.

Think of it this way. In the coming year:

- Salespeople will break their personal best records. Will you?
- Salespeople will increase their average gross sale. Will that be you?
- Salespeople will chip away at your customer base. Will you let them? Will you return the favor?
- Salespeople in every industry will be among the top producers. Will you be among the elite?

Fear is contagious--build a firewall around it. And remember, optimism is contagious as well. Feel it, live it and you will be the bright spot everyone is looking for at a time when the shelves are stocked with gloom.

