

How to Immunize Yourself Against Tough Economic Times

Selling in today's economy is tough. And, it's likely going to get a lot tougher in the upcoming months. That's not news that we want to hear, but it is the reality we face so it makes sense to address it head on.

Recently I noticed that 465 fewer sellers get my newsletter today than 3 months ago, even though I've added tons of new subscribers. Why? Dead email addresses. I can only surmise that these sellers have lost their jobs. Ouch!

So let me ask this: What are you doing about it?

I can tell you right now that I'm taking action. Tough times call for different sales approaches, new offerings and stronger business cases. It's not enough to just make more calls or have more meetings. We have to be better than we've ever been - in every aspect.

But let's talk about you right now. Are you hoping you can hang in there for a while longer? Hoping that you'll still have customers? Hoping that you'll make your numbers?

As Rick Page says, "Hope is not a strategy." As far as I'm concerned, there's only ONE thing that makes sense right now. It's time to take charge of your own career.

You can't count on your employer to take care of you. That's a brutal statement, but true.

Whether you work for a big organization or an upstart firm, you could lose your job tomorrow. Even if your boss really cares about you! Even if your company is still doing okay. Of course, you realize that it's not personal. It's just a business decision.

But it is personal. It's your life, your career, and your family that's at risk. I don't mean to be an alarmist. I just want you to wake up and take responsibility for your future now so you can minimize the effects of this economic downturn.

Too many sellers I know are complacent, coasting, doing what's expected of them but not a whole lot more. If this continues, it will be their downfall.

When companies hit tough times, mediocre sellers are the first to go. Doing an "okay" job or being "average" is no longer an acceptable contribution.

If you're mediocre, you're also disposable to your customers. Being knowledgeable about your product or service is no longer enough. All that information is online, so you don't bring value. When that happens, they replace you with a lower cost solution.

Customers want to work with experts who understand their business and can help them achieve their objectives. To do that well, you need to be a problem solving, critical thinking person who can synthesize lots of information and turn it into invaluable, actionable ideas.

In tough times, you have to sharpen your sales skills and bring expertise to your customers. Doing just one is not sufficient. Whew! That's asking a lot.

You just have to keep getting smarter and better in order to stay in the game. If that's not your focus, you're vulnerable to the ravages of these tough times.

Don't let it happen to you. Give yourself a booster shot! It's time to invest in your own professional development program. Don't wait for your company to send you to training programs to upgrade your knowledge and skills. You're not #1 on their priority list.

But you are #1 on your own priority list. So, wake up. Get going. Your livelihood depends on it.

Booster Shot 1: Open Your Mind to New Thinking

When was the last time you read a book that offered fresh perspectives on how you can be a valuable resource and/or a top seller? Honestly? What are you waiting for?

Here are several books I've found stimulating:

- *A Whole New Mind*, Daniel Pink: Discover the skills needed in a changing economy.
- *Good in a Room*, Stephanie Power: Fresh observations and useful advice.
- *Presentation Zen*, Garr Reynolds: Learn how to tantalize with your presentations.
- *Made to Stick*, Chip & Dan Heath: What makes (sales) stories memorable.
- *Back of the Napkin*, Dan Roam: Discover strategies to really engage your prospects.
- *Metaphorically Selling*, Anne Miller: New ways to make what you say, pay.

And I would be remiss if I didn't mention [Selling to Big Companies](#). It challenges your entire process for getting into corporate accounts and shows you what's required. If you haven't read it yet, you're missing out.

Blogs are also a great place to get fresh perspectives. I regularly read blogs about sales, marketing, business development, creativity, writing and more.

Booster Shot 2: Increase Your Personal Productivity

Virtually every seller I know could get much more done in less time if they leveraged technology better. Not only that, but you'd be a whole lot savvier when you're with your customers - which should directly correlate to increased sales success.

There's no excuse any more for not using these resources. In fact, if you don't know about them or can't use them, it's time to get educated. Here's what I recommend for:

- Finding contacts: Jigsaw, Netprospex, LinkedIn
- Triggering event updates: InsideView, Google & BizJournals Alerts
- Account research: Hoovers, D&B, ZoomInfo
- Industry intelligence: First Research
- Email intelligence: Genius
- Sales productivity: Landslide
- Online Meetings: GoToMeeting, Webex

All these resources are affordable to everyone. If your company doesn't pay for these services, use your own money. The value that you get from them far outweighs the expense. You'll save so much time, plus learn critical insights that can be leveraged for business success.

Booster Shot 3: Get Connected - and Stay Connected

The worst time to build your personal network is when you're desperate. No matter how hard you try to sound normal, every contact oozes with your neediness.

Start by creating or updating your LinkedIn profile. From a business perspective, it's the place to be. If you're not sure what to do, check out my profile at

<http://www.linkedin.com/in/sellingtobigcompanies>. Once yours is ready for prime time, you can:

- Ask your boss, co-workers and clients to recommend you. Do it now, not when you need it.
- Invite your customers to connect with you online. That way, if anyone changes jobs, you can keep in touch.
- Look up former colleagues (classmates, friends, etc.) and invite them to connect.

Get out from your self-imposed isolation too! I know you're busy. But it's important to talk or meet with people from outside your own company. Arrange breakfast meetings. Attend industry events. Take a former colleague to lunch. My favorite? Meet for coffee over the phone! It saves so much time, but it gives you a dedicated time to talk.

Finally, remember that networking is not a one-way street. You'll find people much more willing to help you out if you're a GIVER first. You can share insights, refer potential customers, make connections, or offer genuine assistance in any area. As a bonus, giving makes you feel good inside too!

In Conclusion

While these booster shots can't protect you against everything, they will give you the best immunity possible for these tough times. Plus, when you make them a part of your life, your success is truly guaranteed - in tough times and in good times!

Everything is within your control. That's why it should be your focus right now. Because it is what you can do. Because it will make you a better seller. Because it changes your life & your career.

Jill Konrath, author of *Selling to Big Companies*, helps sellers crack into corporate accounts, shorten sales cycles and win big contracts. She's a frequent speaker at annual sales meetings and association events. To get more articles like this AND a free Sales Call Planning Guide (\$19.95 value), sign up for Jill's e-newsletter. Visit www.SellingtoBigCompanies.com or send an email with a "sign me up" subject line to jill@sellingtobigcompanies.com

The Secret to Sales Success - Even When Times are Tough

"I get so frustrated," Melissa said. "My company is small. No one knows who we are. It's just about impossible to get prospects to call me back when I'm cold calling. If only we were a household name, selling would be a whole lot easier."

I know how she feels. I spent many years toiling in obscurity as a small one-person firm. Cold calling new customers was always a challenge.

Andrew didn't have much sympathy for Melissa. "You're the lucky one," he said. "Everyone knows the company I work for. When I try to get appointments, prospects immediately say we're too expensive or sophisticated for them. If only I worked for a less recognizable firm, selling would be a whole lot easier."

Of course, he's totally right. I used to work for Xerox. The minute I'd say that, prospects would blurt out, "We don't need any copiers" and hang up the phone. It was tough.

But, the reality is, the grass is always greener on the other side. Sellers from no-name companies win big deals all the time. So do sellers from well-known companies.

No matter where you look, you'll find sellers who succeed despite insurmountable odds. Some may work in declining industries or depressed economies, yet they still bring in orders. Others succeed selling cutthroat commodities or complex, over-priced offerings.

How do they do it? Don't they understand they're in a no-win sales situation?

The truth is, you can be successful in just about any situation. However, to make it happen, you'll likely need to change your sales strategies, techniques and mindset.

Certainly, it's much easier to keep doing what you're comfortable with. But, as Dr. Phil says to the self-righteous complainers who appear on his show,

"So how's that working for you?"

Or, you could find a different company to work for. While that might make things better in the short term, it still doesn't teach you how to handle adversity in your sales career. Believe me, you'll have these tough times again!

In my opinion, there's only one viable option. Get out of the "if only" trap - or should I say cut the "if only" crap?

Banish those self-sabotaging words from your vocabulary now. Then, commit to figuring out how to succeed right where you're at. Even if you're working for a no-name company. Even if you're selling non-differentiated products or services. Even though your offering isn't the best or the cheapest.

In my book, *Selling to Big Companies*, I share how I had to entirely re-invent my cold calling strategies because they were no longer effective. I felt grossly uncomfortable trying new approaches. On many occasions, I blew it badly.

There were even days when I feared my mojo was gone and that I'd never land another corporate client again.

I'd think to myself: If only my prospects would answer their phone. If only Wall Street would stop their never-ending pursuit of profits. If only the economy would turn around.

Shoot! I even lived in Fantasy Land for a while: If only a perfect client with massive needs for my services would call me from out of nowhere.

My back luck finally came to a halt when I stopped playing the "if only" blame game and decided to figure out how to be successful again.

The pivotal first step was to accept the situation as it was, not bemoaning or fighting it. Customers weren't answering the phone. Wall Street wasn't going to change any time soon. The economy stunk, but it was out of my control.

Then I started searching for the solution. **I knew it was there, because other sellers were overcoming the account entry barriers.** Ultimately, I found it and my career took off again.

So back to those people who are doing well in your company or industry right now.

Rather than diminishing their success by your "if only" thinking, look at them as beacons.

Success is possible! If they can achieve it, so can you!

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