

Keep calm and sell more

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NORWALK, US: 'Keep Calm and Carry On' was a propaganda poster produced by the British government in 1939 during the beginning of the Second World War, intended to raise the morale of the British public in the aftermath of widely predicted mass air attacks on major cities.



Personally, I think that this was a brilliant move during times of distress and great fear and I wish that the slogan would be applied more often, especially during times of stress.

Sometimes, I feel that sales is viewed as a practice where practitioners are expected to hassle and scramble rather than taking a step back, taking a deep breath and carrying on with the plan. Especially, in a consultative sales environment panic appears when sales don't happen because the sales cycle is typically longer.

What happens if sales don't happen?

Usually, panic. And panic leads to more panic. When sales don't happen, very often the CEO thinks s/he needs to step in. Then you have situations in which CEOs are doing the sales training, or CEOs being on first sales calls and getting involved in everything and anything that has to do with sales. They fear for their company's survival and that's understandable.

And what about the sales managers in these situations? Well, as there is no success to show they often panic as well. In these cases they often just give in and let their CEOs take over instead of putting their feet down and demanding to stay on track. They tend to go along with their CEOs rather than providing clear measures, guidelines and leading developments in the sales process.

This can have a snowball effect on the sales team. The sales people might fear that they could lose their job or that they won't be making any money.

The sales managers do both. They panic and fear, both for their team, for their compensation and for their reputation.

Why don't the sales managers keep their CEO in check?

I have always wondered in situations like that why sales manager wouldn't stick to their guns? Is it because they are afraid of repercussions or is it that they are not confident enough to make a case for a structured and meaningful sales process?

Or is it because CEOs are used to being powerful leaders and end up steamrolling their team? Or could it be that CEOs are not always good at allowing other opinions?

It's probably a combination of all of the above but in all fairness, it really shouldn't be the job of a CEO to establish or drive the sales process. When they take control it's usually stems from lack of results and trying to be helpful.

Sales managers need to manage their CEOs

Sales managers are tasked with building and managing an effective and successful sales team. To be most successful, though, they will need to build an effective and successful relationship with their CEO. That includes open and full communication, documentation and also managing your CEO's expectations. Embracing the CEO's vision but also making

sure that your CEO understands and embraces the sales process you put in place. Provide reports on progress, share success stories but also reasons why sales might stall. This will help you as a sales manager or sales person to support your credibility and it will help your CEO understand why things might take a bit longer.

What is the solution?

Stay calm and on-track. If you have a plan, success will follow. It might just take a bit longer. It's better to wait a month or two as oppose to changing everything and getting derailed completely. When CEOs feel that things are structured and on track, they will go back to doing what they do best, rather than dictating the sales process. Sales people and managers need to manage up.

CEOs often don't have a background in sales management, so help them understand the process, manage expectations, stay positive and Keep Calm and you will Sell More!

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