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## **Is your Sales Force Ethical?**

By, *Landy Chase, MBA, CSP*



Several weeks ago I received a telephone call on my voice mail. It was from a person (we'll call him Fred) whose name I didn't recognize. Fred's message to me sure sounded important. In an urgent tone of voice, he said, "It is extremely important that you call me back as soon as possible. My number is -----. I will be expecting your call!" Fred didn't include any information on what the call was regarding.

Concerned, I immediately returned Fred's call. When Fred answered the phone, he thanked me for returning the call and immediately began a sales pitch on a product his company offered.

Now, some of you managers reading this article may think that Fred's tactic is very clever. You may have attended the same sales training seminar that Fred did, and you may also think that tricking me into thinking that the call was urgent was a perfectly acceptable way to get his call returned, as it certainly did accomplish this objective.

So he got through. Congratulations, Fred. Let me tell you what happened next to our clever salesman.

"Fred", I replied, "there is no need for you to continue, as I could never consider buying from you."

Fred's smooth delivery suddenly hit major turbulence. "And why is that?" he asked. "Because", I replied, "You deliberately misled me. You misrepresented the nature of your call to me, and essentially lied to me about why you were calling. Therefore, you have shown me that I cannot trust you, and consequently we will not be doing business together."

Poor Fred had difficulty handling this objection. So much so that I seriously doubt that Fred will continue this tactic in future telephone calls, which I would call a step in the right direction. What about your sales team? Do your people sell in an ethical manner? Here are 7 ethically challenging situations that most sales people find themselves in. What would you do? And, by the example you set as a manager, what would your people do?

(1) A customer asks you why your product or service is better than your competitor's. Do you resist the temptation to say negative things about your competition?

- (2) You can sell an expensive option that is more than is needed, or recommend a better fit that costs the customer less money. Do you go with the lower-cost recommendation?
- (3) The delivery of a customer's order is going to be late. Do you call them to let them know, or do you hold your breath and see if they complain?
- (4) You mistakenly get a lead in another sales person's territory. Do you turn it over, or do you write up the order yourself?
- (5) A customer wants to know if you can get an order filled by a certain date. You have reason to think that it will not be possible to meet their needs, yet you want the sale. Do you tell them your concern, or do you say "no problem"?
- (6) Your customer is due for a price increase, and you are hesitant to bring up the issue. Do you discuss it with them, or just bill them at the new rate and see if they complain?
- (7) You are filling out a business expense report for meals, transportation, etc. You have some blank receipts that you've collected from non-related personal expenses. Do you turn in these "phony" receipts for items that weren't part of your business trip to get additional cash?

All of us find ourselves in situations where we can take financial advantage of our customers, our employer, and our peers. My question to you is what amount of money is your integrity worth?

People don't just buy from people they know. They buy from people that they respect. As a sales manager, if you behave in an ethical business manner at all times, you will find that your sales people will follow your example, and success will come from the reputation that your organization builds in the marketplace. If you don't, you will always, sooner or later, pay the consequences.

*Based in Charlotte, North Carolina, Landy Chase, MBA, CSP is an expert who specializes in speaking to corporations and associations on advanced professional selling and sales management skills. For more information, visit his website at [www.landychase.com](http://www.landychase.com) or call (800)370-8026.*

***Ethics and longevity in business go hand in hand. The term sustainability (the ability to keep in existence or maintain) is currently used with regard to being environmentally responsible but true sustainability also applies to business as a whole. If your sales force is ethical and you manage your business in an ethical, socially responsible manner, your company has the best chance of remaining in business over the long haul.***