

# The Thinking Salesman Letter

June 15, 2011

Hello Everybody,

Al Brosseau, forty years identifying, setting up and administering distribution networks across the USA, Canada and Latin America as salesman, sales mgr., independent rep and now consultant.

Our Mission:

To openly discuss and challenge all aspects of sales and distribution and to promote the sales profession.

Al Brosseau,  
Former President, ALBRO Export & Marketing, Inc.  
Former CSI (Vermont chapter) & CDT  
CPMR (Indiana U., 2003)  
MANA board of directors (2002 to 2007)  
[www.TheThinkingSalesman.com](http://www.TheThinkingSalesman.com)

## On the Firing Line

We recently suggested to a manufacturer to use the LOP/LOP agreement with their Reps. One of the managers (from production) rejected it outright stating ***"no way will we be stuck with having to work with any particular Rep forever"***. This manager missed the point entirely; with a LOP/LOP agreement if a customer is not active (does not place orders) for a pre-established period of time (say 6 months) the Rep loses the account. Perhaps this manager should stick to production...

In our June 1, 2011 issue we talked about joint calls; that's sales calls where the Principal accompanies the Rep on a territory tour.

One of our contributors sent us the following: ***You touched on some sensitive subjects re the joint sales call. There were times I felt like I was just the driver of the car, nothing else. Some sales managers demand complete control. They only see reps as the "door opener". Lack of respect and "team" approach usually end up with declining sales and then the end of the relationship.***

Right on!!! We wish sales managers would understand that their role is that of a coach, make their players look good and promote team spirit.

## Sales meetings

A former Client of ours, instead of holding open meetings with all their Reps all together in one room held only private meetings with each Rep firm in their suite. Good Reps recognize these "control freaks" and shied away in drove.

Getting all of your Reps together under one roof and encouraging a free flow of ideas is good and should take place once a year. The Manufacturer's top management such as the owners and middle management such as the sales managers, order desk and those who interact with the Reps the most should attend.

One of the best times to hold these meetings is at national exhibition. We have Clients who organize their sales meeting right at the exhibition hotel while others hold separate fully fledged private exhibitions attended by their Reps and their mutual Customers in the city where the exhibition takes place.

For sales meetings pivoting around national exhibitions, keep in mind several other Manufacturers also hold their sales meetings at national conventions and demand the attendance of their Reps who might also be yours. So announce the date and time of your sales meeting as soon as possible (as much as 1 year before).

Breakfast meetings have always worked well for us (Reps don't tend to pour scotch over their corn flakes ☺) however, make sure you order a good breakfast buffet (yes, it will entice Reps to attend). Two months before the meeting, send a location and time reminder.

Five to four weeks before the meeting ask all for topics suggestions. Follow up with an agenda, two to three weeks before the meeting.

Establish before the meeting who is to run it, who will be the MC otherwise it can be a very disjointed meetings.

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We organized a sales meeting for a former Client. The day before we reviewed everything with their V.P of sales and asked him who was to "run the show". He emphatically said "you". However, every time we said something or a Power Point slide changed he had to get up to add some comments; he even closed the meeting before we were finished. Nobody looked good.

Keep in mind the purpose of sales meetings is to spur the Reps, not discourage them. We have heard of sales meetings that Reps called them "Rep flogging sessions". It may sound macho and impressed the uninitiated and ignorant management but such meetings are simply counterproductive.

Start with a word from the President or owner. Remember, if the owners are not involved, if the Reps feel the "owners" are not committed to going to market with Reps, it will not work.

The sales and/or product managers should then take over. Review products, new or upcoming items, new prices, incentives, support programs and leave at least an hour at the end for a "bitch session" where all will feel at ease to say exactly what's on their mind. Make sure the Company's owners attend; what comes out of these sessions is priceless and can be very revealing.

Pre arrange with Reps to relate or report on particular successes. How they did it. Ask for their input.

Plaques such as "best overall sales", "best increase in sales" etc. are not essential but add a

nice touch at the end of the sales meetings. It's nice to have one's efforts recognized.

## Whisky Tango Foxtrot Moment

These are challenging times for our Rep associations. The financial downturns have brought a drop in membership and revenues. Several of our associations are like a deer caught in headlights; no new programs are launched, no new people are brought in and the same "old guard" keeps throwing the same old "mud" at the same old "wall".

The spin doctors like to call this the "status quo". Unfortunately, it's not. It's a downward spiral for ALL; the members, the manufacturers, the associations themselves and even our profession.

It's time we do what we preach. It's time we outsource. It's time our associations assign seats on their boards to (A) their manufacturing members and (B) to associations of young people like the "University Sales Education Foundation" and "Pi Sigma Epsilon" who encourage students to chose sales careers. Having manufacturers and younger people on our association's boards would not only bring in new ideas and broaden the horizons of our associations but it would also help ALL to provide better opportunities for the new generation while ensuring a smoother transition to the new reality.

A BIG thank you to Tom DeHart of Special Metals for his contribution to this editorial. Tom's web site is at: [www.specialmetalsupply.com](http://www.specialmetalsupply.com)

## Thought:

**First rule of Sales:  
Stop selling and start helping.**

Bits & Pieces

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