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Interactive sales workshop shares insights of corporate buyers

By AUNIE EDWARDS, SPECIAL TO THE TORONTO SUN

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Remember the natural-born sales professional capable of selling ice cubes to the Eskimos? conditions were pretty robust for the inherently charismatic and heavy competition seemed to favour that conflicted combination of charming, eat-what-you-kill persistence.

In fact, during the 1990s, the sales sector increased more than any other occupational group; according to a Labour Force Survey, roughly one quarter of all workers in Canada were employed in sales and service by 1998. And yet, Manpower Inc. conducted a "Talent Shortage" survey in January 2006 in which nearly 33,000 employers across 23 countries and territories cited a qualified sales representative as the No. 1 toughest position to fill.

The arena in which sales professionals are commissioned to compete has changed dramatically. Today, the sector exists in a competitive global market dominated by sophisticated buyers who are dedicated to corporate purchasing decisions within a finite budget -- buyers who do not view charisma and a snappy suit as deal-closing material. Sales representatives, managers, recruiters and trainers still competing -- consciously or otherwise -- on the merits of "relentless charm" must seek appropriate training to save the bottom line and the professional soul.

One option is a thought-provoking workshop called "Buyer-Approved Selling Excellence." Currently on its Toronto leg of a North American tour, it takes place this Friday, March 24, at the Delta Toronto Airport West on 5444 Dixie Rd. The event will run from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. and features the talents and experience of facilitator Michael Schell, author and CEO of The Approved Group Inc.

"The effective sales person offers a well-informed connection between client-specific needs and the product or service for sale," Schell says. "Sure, charisma helps, but relevance, substance and professional courtesy within a trusting, long-term relationship will win the day."

Schell addresses the critical underpinnings of that buyer-seller relationship as he leads attendees through the dos and don'ts of the sales journey. And he would know -- partly because he has years of relevant experience, but also because he's secured hundreds of priceless perspectives from eminently qualified experts: the buyers themselves.

"We use our research arm of The Approved Group to publish a series of books about professional relationships," Schell says. "This workshop will bring Buyer-Approved Selling to life.

The Approved workshop is an interactive event that fully leverages the insights of corporate purchasers. "What's really exciting -- and incidentally worked brilliantly at our Vancouver workshop -- is that buyers of major business will share the stage with me and answer questions from the attendees. In Vancouver it was extremely educational and we're confident that we can re-create that value here." Indeed, The Approved Group has gathered an impressive panel of decision makers including Bonita Cowan, C.P.P., senior procurement specialist, Bayer Inc.; Raymund Rozsa, C.P.P., C.P.M., national procurement manager, Strongco Engineered Systems; Neil Bishop, C.P.P., P.Log, CPPO, president, Prism Management Services; and Kathleen Callan, C.P.P., C.P.M., contracts consultant, Trillium Health Centre.

For last minute tickets to Buyer-Approved Selling Excellence call 1-888-310-2665. Tickets come with a free copy of Schell's bestseller Buyer-Approved Selling and the first five callers will win free admission.

Says Schell: "A great sales rep is an incredible asset -- properly trained and reasonably monitored, the sky's the limit for that individual and the company. Conversely, an ill-prepared sales rep is an incalculable disaster -- a poor ambassador wreaking long-term damage while limiting the bottom line on a client-by-client basis."

5 DEADLIEST MISTAKES SALESPEOPLE MAKE

1. Being unprepared for meetings -- not doing the homework and not having a plan.
2. Over-promising and under-delivering -- sloppy follow-ups and being late.
3. Back-door selling -- not going through the proper channels.
4. Continuous cold calling or showing up without an appointment.
5. Talking too much and not listening.