

# HUNTERS, FARMERS AND OTHER STRANGE LABELS

ACCORDING to many so called sales experts, salespeople are born into two strict categories from which they should never stray since their limited intelligence prevents them from adapting their approach; namely hunters and farmers!

Having spent the first 20 years of my life growing up on a farm (and often going hunting – not the strange red coat stuff but rather more poorly aimed air rifle) I find this idea very odd indeed. The idea that intelligent adults cannot apply their skills to both winning new, and developing existing, accounts seems at best misguided and at worst downright patronising.

It's one of those concepts that seems perfect for the idle sales manager since it absolves him or her of any responsibility for developing their people's skills since clearly the stork pre-determined what skills the person would have upon their initial delivery! It's also marvellous for the fans of the psychometric test nonsense since it's yet another abstract category into which we can pigeon hole people and cul de sac their careers.

Of course we are all far too sophisticated to actually use these descriptions formally so instead we camouflage them with wonderfully trite titles like Business Development Manager (BDM), Major Account Manager (MAM) and even the fantastically pompous Strategic Account Manager (SAM). Can I propose a couple of new ones? How about Account Realisation Strategy Executive (ARSE) or Director In Charge of Knowledge (DICK)? The worst thing about these titles however is not that they are utterly meaningless to anyone outside of your company but that they so limit our salespeople's belief about their own future potential.

Interestingly in some organisations hunters are considered to be the top dogs whereas in others it's more impressive to be an account manager. Some companies reward new business highly where others consider the performance of existing accounts to be more worthy. These inconsistencies at least prove that differentiating in this way is far from

an agreed science.

What does seem to be consistent however is the desire to get more business and it is this overwhelming fact of business life that makes these labels most damaging. Unless you are some bizarre type of new age business my guess is that you are fundamentally interested in making more money. Even if you are a charity you are constantly looking for both new donors and to get more from existing donors. The question is are the tactics different for getting 'new' versus 'getting more from existing' and it's here I think the crucial issue lies. When out 'hunting' it seems we make much more effort to understand our prospects, to intelligently tailor our services to their needs and sometimes even to seduce them with mouth watering financial propositions. However when 'farming' we seem to pop on our comfortable welly's and stomp around in the mud of our client bases arrogantly believing that we are somehow entitled to our customers business, no longer need to make regular effort in understanding their needs and reacting with stunned indignation when they even suggest going to another supplier.

This is perhaps a rather exaggerated view of things (but if you've been reading this column for any length of time you will have grown used to that) but it does go to the heart of the problem with the hunter/farmer thing. Frankly too many businesses put their most valuable existing business streams in the hands of tired plodders who they long since gave up on developing but who 'knows the client terribly well'. Plenty of couples know each other very well but it doesn't stop a staggeringly high proportion of them popping over the side and committing adultery on each other!

Stop looking at your sales force in a binary fashion and instead evaluate what development they ALL need to become much more effective at generating and re-generating new business. Equally take the opportunity to regularly re-new your vows with your existing clients before they start checking into hotels for dirty weekends with alternative suppliers!



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Matt Crabtree and his team deliver provocative training workshops, one to one coaching and speeches to businesses worldwide. Talk to him about kicking the tyres of your business via:

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