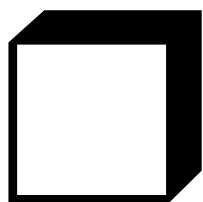




By Carl Davidson

**About the Author**  
Carl Davidson is president of Sales & Management Solutions, which provides sales and management training designed exclusively for the water equipment industry. For more than 13 years, he has helped more than 1,400 companies in seven countries. For a free demonstration tape and catalog, contact the company at 800-941-0068; www.salesco.net.



## Thinking Outside the Box

One of the things I like best about my life is the fact that I have an opportunity to meet people all around the country and hear what unique ways they use to promote and increase their business. Sometimes, we get so used to doing things the way they have always been done that we forget there are many ways to get the job done. This article is a salute to those who think outside the box and an invitation to us all to try the unusual and unique to see if it helps us differentiate our company in the marketplace.

### Would Anyone Pay for a Water Test?

One unique way to get appointments is to charge for the water test. This definitely differentiates the company from its competitors. It also distances the company from those free water tests that some consumer advocates warn the public against. But would anyone really pay for a test? One company recently told us at a seminar that they do indeed successfully charge for water testing.

The company has printed some very attractive packaging that encloses a test bottle for water, a brochure explaining what will be tested and some important information on water and limits for certain organics and nonorganics often found in water. The company takes these packages to local stores, medical professionals and many other commercial establishments. Those "partners" sell the test kits for \$25.00. Here is the kicker ... the seller gets to keep the entire \$25.00. Naturally, almost any store is happy to stock an item that is 100 percent profit. This interesting twist makes this program a win/win/win situation.

First, the water equipment company gets exposure in many stores and these stores

actually sell the tests to customers who call to arrange for the testing appointment they have paid for. They can either call for an in-home test or send in the water sample in the enclosed bottle to have the water tested by the water equipment company. Imagine having five, six or 10 people calling in every day to ask for when you can perform their water test.

Second, the store that sells the water test wins. It receives revenue with no cost. Naturally, this makes them eager to prominently display the water tests and to promote the tests such as in the check out lanes.

Third, the customer wins. The company delivers a more elaborate test than usual and a more detailed report. This sets the customer's mind at ease knowing he received a serious test and not "one of those free tests."

Finally, the water equipment dealer wins again by differentiating himself from the mass of competitors offering the free water test.

### No Good Salesperson in 10 Years

Thinking outside the box also is important in attracting employees. Last week, a dealer called me and lamented that he hasn't hired a good salesperson in 10 years. He maintained that the world has produced an entire generation who cannot or will not sell. Perhaps, but could it be the pay plan? Many dealers are still using the same pay plan they were brought up on ... straight commission. If anything hasn't worked at your company for several years, you need to think outside the box and look for solutions.

Some innovative dealers have come up with several interesting compensation twists that attract great salespeople without paying huge salaries. Here are a few innovative ideas that are working.

**Stop looking for young fresh faces.** One very successful client hires only grandparents. That's right. He advises avoiding young, fresh faces. This manager says that younger people are more concerned with social activities than are people in their 50s and 60s. "Seniors aren't dying to go out after work, don't take days off to look after their kids and aren't desperate to see their spouse after work." Besides, it's harder to say 'no' to kinder, less threatening salespeople." The company has very low turnover and a high percentage of above-average earners.

**Hire a tank driver.** The military has several programs that allow you to hire people who are being discharged from the military and need training to be successful in civilian life. There just aren't a lot of civilian jobs for former tank drivers. Contact your armed forces recruiting office. They can post your job openings on computers that soon-to-be-discharged personnel check for opportunities. Soon, you will be getting e-mail from eager applicants worldwide. Uncle Sam may even assist you with training costs.

**Pay a salary just for doing the demo.** Many candidates will not work for straight commission. Instead of fighting this trend, consider paying them a small salary just for doing a demo, plus a commission if they get the sale. We recommend paying \$25.00 for each completed demo. This way, if they don't

get into homes, they don't get paid. It offers the employee a little security, protects the company from paying out large sums to the unsuccessful and makes everyone pull in the same direction.

These are just a few examples of how dealers like you are thinking outside the box and solving chronic problems. Don't keep using the same solutions if they don't solve the problems. One valuable technique you might consider is brainstorming. Call in every employee at your company and ask them for ideas on how you could solve problems or increase sales. This works only if no one is allowed to make negative comments such as, "that will never work" or "we could never afford that." Judge not and record every idea. Go for rapid-fire idea generating sessions. Later, go back over the ideas to see how they can be improved or if they are practical. This technique is so successful, one large company in our industry even brings in customers and pays them a small fee to participate in a two-hour session dedicated to coming up with a pile of ideas on how the company can sell more and make more.

Don't get stuck in a rut. Times are changing. Think outside the box and get every member of your staff and even customers to help you.

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*For a free copy of a suggested pay plan for salespeople, call 800-941-0068; davidson@salesco.net.*

For more information on this subject, write in 1012 on the reader service card.