



Advances: How To Measure Daily Success in Senior Living Sales

By David A. Smith, CEO of [Sherpa](#), a Senior Housing Forum Partner

It's time to redefine what day-to-day "success" means in senior living sales.

I don't mean to change the definition outright; certainly, we all want to see full buildings and happy, higher functioning residents. But sales success doesn't start when the contract is signed or the deposit is received. In senior living sales—where both cost and emotional resistance is high—success comes from helping prospects advance each day toward a buying decision. And that takes an investment of our time.

Closing the sale

J. Douglas Edwards, known since the 1950s as "the father of closing," always taught that successful sellers make an average of five attempts before closing. "The more closing techniques [sellers] use," he said, "the more successful they are likely to be."

Today we know that's only partially true. In the mid-1990s, sales researcher Neil Rackham found that, while Edwards was correct for small dollar value sales, in large-value, multi-call sales there simply is no direct connection between the number of attempts to close and the rate of success. Rackham tested further to see if a better sales attitude or better training on closing techniques would improve results. Neither did.

What Rackham found is that multiple attempts at closing a large ticket sale pressure the prospect into a decision sooner and thus "speeds up" the transaction. That urgency may be useful for small ticket items, particularly if there is a long line of interested customers waiting for attention. But in senior housing—where roughly 90 percent of prospects say they "aren't ready" to buy—what we need is to invest more, not less, time with each prospect.

It's about time

[ProMatura's study of Sherpa sales data](#) shows that it takes an average of 10 hours of Time in the Selling Zone® to help an assisted living prospect get "ready" to buy and 20 hours for an independent living prospect. In our industry, the top sellers spend more time working with each lead and invest nearly 50 percent of that time in planning before and creative follow-up after each prospect interaction.

During an average month, a typical senior community might have a total of 250 or more face-to-face and voice-to-voice interactions. At best, the average community will "close" perhaps five new residents in that month. This means the overwhelming majority of those interactions aren't given an outcome designation at all. That's no way to gauge, predict or enhance day-to-day sales performance. And it's no way to actually help the higher functioning (non-crisis) prospects that reach out to us to "get ready".

So how do we measure success in senior living, where sales progress is incremental and only a tiny fraction of prospects who call or tour actually end up buying?

Advancing the sale

To keep track of how well a prospect is progressing toward a buying decision, we measure Advances. An Advance occurs when something happens that helps the prospect "get ready," including a new awareness or acceptance of problems in their current living situation that motivates them to take action. Those small steps towards readiness are reflected in specific actions or commitments.

Typical examples of Advances in a Senior Housing scenario include:

- Continue a conversation when we begin to engage in emotional issues;
- Agree to share personal information;
- Commit to a home visit or to a tour;
- Agree to allow us to follow up with another phone call or delivery;
- Consent to our calling a son or daughter;
- Agree to come back for dinner or an overnight stay;
- Invite us to come over and measure furniture;
- Sign a lease and give us a check;
- Refer us to another qualified prospect;
- Set a move in date.

Advances are possible every single day and with any of our qualified prospects. Small, incremental Advances add up and result in more sales over time. That's why we celebrate every Advance as a success.

Next month, I'll share more about advances, including how to effectively plan for them in the sales office.

To be continued...



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