

## Thompson Security Systems

*Topic:* Unethical Sales Presentations

*Characters:* Bob Anderson, sales representative for Thompson Security Systems  
Beth Roberts, district manager and Bob's boss

Bob Anderson has been employed as a sales representative for Thompson Security Systems for the past six months. Prior to joining the firm, Bob had worked for three years as a sales representative for a smaller company. Bob had been very excited about working for a high-tech firm like Thompson, which designs and assembles sophisticated security systems and leases them to small and medium-sized businesses. He was especially pleased to be assigned to the district managed by Beth Roberts, who had been the most successful sales representative in the firm prior to her promotion to district manager.

In his initial orientation at the corporate training center, Bob received a great deal of information about the security industry, the history of the Thompson organization, and details about the company's products and target customers. He also received a detailed sales handbook with extensive information on competing companies and their products, compiled by Thompson's marketing research department.

When Bob reported to his district office for the next stage of his training, he shadowed Beth on some actual sales calls. He noted that she expanded on his handbook's competitive information rather liberally in explaining the shortcomings of competitor's equipment, going well beyond the material developed by the marketing research department. Beth was very convincing in her arguments, and Bob could see how she had become the top salesperson in the company. Over time, however, he came to wonder about the accuracy of the information she presented. On one occasion, he asked Beth how she came to know so much about competitor's products. She abruptly changed the subject.

After his initial training and orientation period, Bob began to make his sales calls independently. On several occasions, he called on prospects who leased their security systems from a Thompson competitor. In trying to close these visits gracefully, he would ask the prospective buyer how he or she liked the existing system. In no case did the prospective buyer indicate any defect or problem of the nature Beth had described in her discussions of these competitor's products. In rechecking the information provided by Thompson's marketing research department, Bob was unable to find support for many of Beth's claims. As a result, Bob modified his sales presentation to exclude the questionable information.

As his six-month review approached, Beth visited Bob in his territory to accompany him on some sales calls. On the first call of the day, Beth noted that Bob failed to include certain "key information" in his discussion of competitors' products. Beth eventually broke into the discussion to present her arguments on the weaknesses of other security systems. In spite of their combined efforts, the prospect indicated that she had no interest in the product and ushered them out the door. Immediately after the sales call, as Beth and Bob got into the car, Beth expressed her annoyance with Bob's performance. "Bob, what on earth is wrong with you? It's only been four months since you finished your training, and you have already forgotten the basics. If you don't tell customers what's wrong with the competition, they won't feel ready to sign! What do you have to say for yourself?"

Bob sat there, stunned, trying to formulate a reply.

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