

Sharpening Your Sales Moves

It may sound crazy but we live in a hostile selling environment. People don't want to be "sold" to anymore. They have lost confidence in the process. The trust is gone. Sale people are trying to overcome the barriers, but the mutuality of the sales process is gone.

Even the most experienced salespeople need to be reminded, from time to time, that sales is the art of engaging in a process whereupon, at the end of this process, you have not only a sale, but a customer that will return again and again to buy more and more from you. This process has 3 phases – before the sale, the sale, and after the sale. Reviewing the processes associated with each phase will help you sharpen your sales moves, making you even better than you are today.

Phase One – Know Your Prospect

There is a difference between knowing the industry you want to sell to and knowing your specific prospects. Too often we get confident because we understand so much about what ails our prospects and we know how well our solution serves to ease their pains. We believe that our presentation of the remedy, along with our ability to demonstrate that we understand the pain, will serve to create the relationship necessary to drive home the sale. This could be. But the chances for success are so much greater if you take the time to understand not only the industry and the company you will be meeting with, but also the individual. As you enter their office try to get a handle on some common interests you might have that can lead to the development of a relationship even before you begin discussing your product. Are their sports paraphernalia on the shelves? Pictures of children? There is, without a doubt, a number of hints you can use to engage in conversation, show commonality, and create a comfort zone. Once you have established the relationship you can move into the business conversation smoothly. It is important that you not come on as all business. The trust factor being diminished as it is, people now want to feel they know the person they are buying from.

Other things you may want to know before entering the meeting are:

- Are you meeting with the sole decision maker? If not who are the other decision makers and what is their decision making process?
- Are you replacing an existing product that is dedicated to the problem you solve? Make sure you understand not only how your product is better, but also what aspects of the other product the prospect is unhappy with.
- Are you certain the company has allocated funding for products that address the issue you are resolving? If funds have not been allocated your chance for a quick sale is nil, as the allocation process will have to be initiated. Moreover, your chances of a sale are compromised because the lack of allocation may indicate either no available funds or no sense of urgency within the company.

Phase Two - Make the Sale

Making the sale needs to be done from the position of trust. You need to genuinely match your capabilities with their needs. If you fail to do this, the sale will get knocked down at the review level, or, even if it goes through, the customer will turn dissatisfied,

which will cost you on a variety of other fronts. In other words, sell only what the customer really needs and what you can truly provide.

Tudog has a saying that God gave us 2 ears and one mouth because we're supposed to listen twice as much as we speak. During the sales phase make sure you allow the prospect to do the talking. It will help you understand the person, and the company, and also reduce the chance that you will hard sell and chase the customer away.

Here are some additional hints that could help close the sale:

- Ask a lot of questions. It gives the person a chance to talk, shows interest and concern and gives you the opportunity to learn.
- Personalize the process a bit by learning what the person with you does within the company and how your product can help make him or her more successful.
- Handle questions, challenges and objections by listening in full, acknowledging the validity of the point, and explaining your position clearly.
- Focus on benefits and how your product resolves the issues the company has acknowledged it has.
- Commit the individual to the process by asking whether or not they will support your efforts to introduce your product to their company if indeed you can demonstrate that your product provides all the benefits you claim.
- Since it is probably impossible to meet all the prospects needs make sure you prioritize their needs and address them in order of importance from their perspective.
- Make sure you actually ask for the sale and discuss what subsequent steps are necessary to conclude the transaction. Try to get an understanding of the internal process and timetable and take responsibility for follow-up. Let the person you are meeting with know when you will be in contact again and what each party is supposed to have prepared by then. Place a closing date on the sale and a timetable for implementation.

Phase Three – Fulfill Promises

All your efforts at building a relationship and closing the sale will be for naught if you do not follow-up the way you promised. This does not only mean in terms of meeting your timetable, but also in terms of maintaining your relationship. Some helpful hints include:

- Call to thank the person once the sale has gone through. Let them know that you are available should you be needed.
- Enter into your schedule periodic visits to make sure everything is going well and to show your appreciation and availability.
- Interact with your own integration and service departments to make sure everything is going smoothly.

Selling has never been an easy task. The combination of economic slowdown and increased suspicion of sales agents only serves to make it tougher. Stick to the 3 phase sales process and things should be a bit easier.