

Talking Sales Fundamentals

The art of sales has been getting attention for more than 100 years as sales gurus come and go, each one leaving behind him a legacy of fancy yadda-yadda and a cadre of people all the poorer for having paid him for his “knowledge”. To be sure, there have been tremendous advances in our understanding of the dynamics of sales, customer behaviors, and sales techniques. True too, there has been an expansion of the role of sales, as the use of information technologies has made it easier to sell (but, ironically more complicated to be a salesman).

Still, with all our technologies and psychological profiling, there is no real substitute for the basics of good sales. The danger that we will lose our basic sales skills to the so-called advances in technique has led Tudog to pursue this article. As anyone who has ever witnessed the collapse of a supposedly better way that ignored the fundamentals can attest to, there are no advances that can replace the fundamentals. We lose sight of them at our own risk.

There are 8 core fundamentals of sales that Tudog would like to revisit in this article, so that those of you who feel yourself slipping can be refreshed, and those of you who are growing up under the new systems can finally learn. This is not an exercise in nostalgia. These fundamentals are as compelling today as they ever were.

The 8 sales fundamentals are:

1, Communication

Sure we all know to tend to market communications materials and websites and all the other tools of communication we use in today’s modern business environment. But do we know how to communicate? The key to communication is what you say *and* how you say it. All too often these days we have placed an over-emphasis on how we say things, considering the content to be secondary in importance. Communication remains the central most sales fundamental because it is our shot at telling our story, explaining our benefits, demonstrating our expertise, and showing our understanding. It is true that communicating these things is more effective in an attractive and compelling graphic setting, but even the most impressive graphics will not replace your content. You need to communicate.

2. Professionalism

Being unprofessional can kill a deal because it signals to the other party a chance that you may be untrustworthy or sloppy or simply unable to deliver on your promises. The core of being professional is keeping your word, making sure you don’t over promise and delivering on everything you did promise. You need to call when you said you would, show up when you said you would, and bring with you everything you said you would. You need to come completely prepared to do business, including being able to demonstrate that you did your homework and know the needs of the customer. If you engage in the process like a professional you will earn trust and loyalty, and while these are not fundamentals of good sales, they are just about the most essential of ingredients.

3. Promptness

A key to good sales is being quick. You should always go into a sales meeting either knowing what your price options are, or with the ability to go back to them extremely rapidly with the price quote. Most customers are going to want your quote in writing, and you need to make sure that you have the systems in place to get that proposal to them the same day you meet. You need to consider that they may be entertaining other bids, and your delay in presenting your quote could lead to the sale going somewhere else. You need to be prompt.

4. Accuracy

Going back on what you said in a sales meeting is a definite deal killer. You need to make sure you do not give in to two powerful temptations while you are in the sales process. First, once you smell the sale is possible, it is tempting to offer something you feel will seal the deal, a sweetener of sorts. This is excellence, except in circumstances where you are unable to deliver the sweetener. You need to make sure the excitement of the process and the prospect of closing don't get you to say things you'll regret later. The second temptation is far more cynical, and that is to use language that is intentionally vague so as to knowingly lead the customer to a conclusion you have every intention of later denying. Doing this may not kill your deal (you may have them signed and sealed), but it will kill your reputation and ultimately it will catch up to you.

5. Simplicity

If your sales process is convoluted or the steps the customer has to engage in so they can either order or re-order are lengthy and complicated, you will lose customers. The notion of keeping things simple means that your offering is clearly defined, your prices are visible and accurately marked, and your ordering process is fast and efficient. If you keep it simple customers will enjoy the interaction and not hesitate to come back. Make it complex and people will find someone else they prefer to buy from.

6. Visibility

Visibility in the sales context is not about advertisements and public relations, but rather one-on-one communications, expressions of interest, and the development of human relations. The old saying that people buy from people is as true today in our email world as it was when the horses used to pull the carriage of goods into town once a week. You need to stay visible to your customers, letting them know you're there, care about their wellbeing and success, and are committed to doing everything you can to help them.

7. Excellence

The idea that someone can sell ice to the Eskimos is an excellent saying when trying to communicate a persuasive individual. Nonetheless, no one can sell ice to the Eskimos because the Eskimos don't need ice, and they don't want ice. When it all boils down to it, we buy because we need something or we want something. And most often, if we can afford it, we want the best. By being the best, you can grow your sales on the basis of your excellence.

8. Know-How

There are lots of sales gurus out there who are claiming that not only could they sell ice to the Eskimos, but also that they don't need to understand anything about a product in order to sell it. Why? Because they are masters of the fundamentals of sales. Ironically, a core fundamental of sales is know-how. People want to buy from people they trust, people who demonstrate knowledge and expertise with respect to what they are selling. Beyond the obvious need to be able to answer questions about the product, know-how creates confidence and confidence creates comfort. We buy when we are comfortable with what is being sold to us (and who is selling it).

These fundamentals are not rocket science. They aren't even slightly hi-tech. But they are essential. Keep them in mind. Practice them. Watch your sales grow.

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