



Your Guidelines To Sales Success

By Kostas Peters

A recent Gallup poll on the honesty and ethical conduct of business professionals found that insurance and car salespeople ranked at the bottom of the list.

Bet you're not surprised to hear this. But did you know that it's not just car salespeople who have a bad reputation? Bill Brooks of the Brooks Group estimates that more than 85 percent of customers have a negative view of all salespeople. But it doesn't have to be that way: You can prove the masses wrong, and learn to develop the skills that will have people thinking differently about the selling process and you. In fact, selling can be one of the most rewarding tasks you'll undertake as a business owner—but only if you follow these 10 guidelines:

Guideline #1: Keep your mouth shut and your ears open. This is crucial in the first few minutes of any sales interaction. Remember:

- 🕒 Don't talk about yourself.
- 🕒 Don't talk about your products.
- 🕒 Don't talk about your services.
- 🕒 And above all, don't recite your sales pitch!

Obviously, you want to introduce yourself. You want to tell your prospect your name and the purpose of your visit (or phone call), but what you don't want to do is ramble on about your product or service. After all, at this point, what could you possibly talk about? You have no idea if what you're offering is of any use to your prospect.

Guideline #2: Sell with questions, not answers. Remember this: *Nobody cares how great you are until they know how great you think they are.* Forget about trying to "sell" your product or service and focus instead on why your prospect wants to buy. To do this, you need to get fascinated with your prospect; you need to ask questions (lots and lots of them) with no hidden agenda or ulterior motives.

Guideline #3: Pretend you're on a first date with your prospect. Get curious about them. Ask about the products and services they're already using. Are they happy? Is what they're using now too expensive, not reliable enough, and too slow? Find out what they really want. Don't ask questions just for the sake of asking them. Instead, ask questions that will provide you with information about what your customers really need. When you learn what your customers need and you stop trying to convince or persuade them to do something they may not want to do, you'll find them trusting you as a valued partner and wanting to do more business with you as a result.



Guideline #4: Speak to your prospect just as you speak to your family or friends. There's never any time that you should switch into "sales mode" with templated persuasion clichés and tag lines. Affected speech patterns, exaggerated tones, and slow, hypnotic sounding "sales inductions" are never acceptable in today's professional selling environments. Speak normally, (and of course, appropriately) just as you would when you're around your friends and loved ones.

Guideline #5: Pay close attention to what your prospect isn't saying. Is your prospect rushed? Does he or she seem agitated or upset? If so, ask "Is this a good time to talk? If it's not, perhaps we can meet another day." Most salespeople are so concerned with what they're going to say next that they forget there's another human being involved in the conversation.

Guideline #6: If you're asked a question, answer it briefly and then move on. Remember: This isn't about you; it's about whether you're right for them.

Guideline #7: Only after you've correctly assessed the needs of your prospect do you mention anything about what you're offering. Understand whom you're speaking with before figuring out what it is you want to say.

Guideline #8: Refrain from delivering a three-hour product seminar. Don't ramble on and on about things that have no bearing on anything your prospect has said. Pick a handful of things you think could help with your prospect's particular situation, and tell him or her about it.

Guideline #9: Ask the prospect if there are any barriers to them taking the next logical step. After having gone through the first eight steps, you should have a good understanding of your prospect's needs in relation to your product or service. Knowing this, and having established a mutual feeling of trust and rapport, you're now ready to bridge the gap between your prospects' needs and what it is you're offering.

Guideline #10: Invite your prospect to take some kind of action. This principle obliterates the need for any "closing techniques" because the ball is placed on the prospect's court. A sale close keeps the ball in your court and all the focus on you, the salesperson. But you don't want the focus on you. You don't want the prospect to be reminded that he or she is dealing with a "salesperson." You're not a salesperson, you're a human being offering a particular product or service. And if you can get your prospect to understand that, you're well on your way to becoming an outstanding salesperson.

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