



The Secret To Selling

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I doubt if there are any clients I run into who do not lament about their lack of sales. And, yet I find these same clients failing to practice the five basic rules of selling. Here they are for you.

1. Building A Relationship

People buy from people. How often has that rung in our ears? Yet salespersons bypass this simple maxim by creating sales systems that are computer-oriented instead of people-oriented. They waste time with telephones, emails and in front of computers instead of in front of individuals. This is probably the worst 'sin' of all because it receives so little direct attention. 'Everyone likes to buy but nobody like to be sold to.' Why? Because we want to feel we are in control of the selling decision-making process, not a 'victim' of it. When you develop a relationship, people want to buy from you because they feel they are taking over control of the selling process. All you have to do is give them an excuse to buy from you by meeting their product or service needs, with quality, speed and pricing. While the good relationship will not assure you of a sale (you still have to meet all the other criteria), you will not likely get the sale unless you have a solid relationship with the prospect¹. It is like breathing: you do not hire a new employee because the person is breathing but you will not hire a person who is not breathing.

How do you build that relationship? Two keys are: (a) join clubs and associations and participate in them actively; (b) connect with people one at a time – that is, focus on one person at a social event or party, not a dozen. Be prepared to be rejected: you will not like everyone and everyone will not like you. Focus on those who you really connect with on a personal level. In

my companies, sales people are not allowed to respond to RFPs unless they can assure us they already have a solid relationship with the name at the bottom of the RFP. Think of all your time that could be saved from useless bidding – time that can be directed to building new relationships.

2. Rifle, Not Shotgun

Many sales people scan directories, websites, etc. looking for prospects. Their rationale is that the more opportunities they find, the more chances for closing a sale. This is the same logic as the more lottery tickets you buy the better chance you have to win \$50 million. While perfectly true mathematically, it is focusing on the wrong thing. Scanning for more opportunities may increase your chance of success by 1%. Finding the right prospect can increase your chances by 30%. So, where is your time better spent? Like a sniper, keep your rifle pointed to the smaller numbers, while at the same time, keep your sales effort's effectiveness up. I suggest you snipe in threes:

- Of the dozen prospects on your plate at the moment, look at the three that have the most likely fit for you because of the products you make, the competitiveness you have or niche that you offer. (Then, after you have exhausted the three, go after three more.)
- Of three leading, existing clients, ask

¹ Proof: look at your top five clients. Did you obtain any of these sales without a solid relationship first?



each one to recommend one (and no more than one²) friend to you (non-competitive to your client) who you might approach carefully. Make sure that you can use your client's name as a connection. Then don't blow it by being imprudent. Pursue that lead, slowly, patiently with a long-term view. (I once pursued such a prospect for a year and a half – almost giving up, only to be awarded a contract that was three times the size I had dared to anticipate.)

Give them a reason to talk to you that is in their direct interest. Look for and find that interest; it may not be the same as yours or your company's. Forget the directories: what have they yielded you so far? Keeping to groups of three ensures a rifle, rather than a shotgun, approach.

3. Let Chaos Theory Do Its Work

I admit, this one requires a huge leap of faith, but 'Chaos' is the way everything in the world works. Based on 9 laws³ that allow the universe to unfold, species to survive, eyeballs to see and sales to connect, one might describe it by the phrases: 'the high incidence of coincidence' or 'six degrees of separation' which says that you don't need a top-down system of approach to clients but instead a random steady approach will actually provide higher and faster results. Previously, I built an entirely different business based on the exclusive use of 'Chaos' to find jobs⁴. It increased the job success by a factor of ten and reduced the search time by a factor of 3. (I will understand if you don't adopt this one, but it doesn't make it any less of an opportunity you're missing by not.)

4. Make the Prospect Work

Do not inundate the prospect with all the wonderful aspects of your business, by brochures, quotations, etc. unless you get an immediate return. Make sure the prospect has some skin in the game because that is the only measure that you are on the same wavelength. When no work is required by the client (or anyone else) it leads to a natural abuse of your generosity. Therefore submit only one piece of data (brochure, letter, quotation) and ask for some work from the prospect. "Please advise me of the two top advantages you see in this proposal" (or "the

two worst"). Pass nothing more to this prospect till the person has demonstrated interest that is more than verbal. You can't afford to waste time with a tire-kicking prospect.

5. Bring Closure Quickly

Getting a 'no' quickly from a client is a positive step. It means you can stop focusing on a losing cause and direct your limited time to other opportunities. (And, if closure is a 'yes', you don't need my harping.) That is, bring the transaction to a close as soon as possible. Don't wait around. Don't tolerate the phrase 'We're thinking it over'. Ask the question: "What do you need from me to make a clear decision?" Then, whatever the answer is, probe more deeply until you are satisfied that the next step is controllable by you. If you feel the prospect is going nowhere, bring closure yourself: "If you are unable to answer this point within two weeks, namely 15th June, I will assume your interests have shifted to other spheres and close our own file." Let them tell you that you are still on their agenda. If you phrase it properly (in an inoffensive way), you have nothing to lose, but only a closure to gain.

6. Sixth

The sixth rule is like the 13th roll in a baker's dozen; you don't really count it, but it must always be there. You need to have support at the home front. All your effort will go to waste if secretaries or accountants answer the phone with an indifferent attitude, if brochures or pricing schedules are not up to date or information needed for others for sales quotes is not provided quickly. Make sure everyone in the company has a customer focus; that every phone call or information request is as important as if it were President Obama who was checking in with you.

Good luck

Bill Caswell

² The reason for 'one contact' is that people can focus on one easily and will do so. Suggesting 'any contacts' will seem like a large task and will result in an intolerable delay in the person getting back to you. Interestingly, most people who offer 'one' contact usually suggest more than one on their own initiative.

³ Ask for our treatise on Chaos Theory.

⁴ Like the advice above about RFP's these job seekers were not allowed to respond to job ads – for all the same reasons.