
Opening Doors And Establishing Winning Sales Relationships

by DAVID FARNETI



To succeed in today's hardened economic climate, salespeople must rely on several ancient concepts not practiced nearly enough in recent years. To retain present customers, attract new ones and grow one-time purchases into long-term partnerships, respect and honor must be demonstrated and reinforced continually throughout the entire sales process. This entails respect and honor for the customer as well as one's self.

While honor has not lost its meaning throughout the centuries, it has lost a great deal of importance in the business world during the past few decades. In many circles, greed has replaced principles to make house size and car model the determining factors for social standing.

As we look back, disingenuous business may well be one of the enduring trademarks of the 1990s. The corporate culture, driven by

a "greater profits at all costs mentality" at many firms, is largely to blame for the deception that resulted in a multitude of recent scandals. Additionally, the continually rising demands of C-level executives for perks and bonuses at the expense of employees and shareholders also played a significant role in corporate America's plunging spiral of lost principles.

But, let's not forget that there have been many other culprits throughout the past few years. Opportunity is equal in many circles within this country. Senior executives are not the only frauds and charlatans.

There are thousands, if not millions, of willing participants worldwide that aided and abetted the practice of trading falsehoods for profits. These people attempted to further their own cause by knowingly complying with the shady behavior of senior executives, ignoring the warning signs sounded by an increasing number of false promises or actively participating in misdeeds themselves for personal gain.

Consequently, we now must all suffer together. The backlash has arrived. Trust is not given lightly,

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The Pressure of Salesmen

For the salesman, no matter the industry, this is neither good nor new news. The sales process has never been harder and the barriers to break with new customers never higher, longer or thicker. Old techniques seldom work. Schmooze and "schtick" are out.

The truth is today's buyers are far more elusive and less trusting than ever before. In recent years far too many executives were burnt by promises for revenues and services that never materialized, as well as by the salespeople who offered these false bills of goods only to disappear shortly thereafter. The margin for error has shrunk greatly in the business world, and few are now willing to risk livelihoods on unknown commodities. Unfortunately, the entire industry is jaded and not changing any time soon.

As a result, numerous cliches have never been more applicable. You only have one chance to make a good first impression. Treat everyone with respect. No one will ever believe in you if you don't believe in yourself. Be prepared.

In addition, here are several more that may not be as well known, but should be remembered nonetheless. Most alienated people love to get even. People may forget being treated well, but always remember poor treatment. Demonstrate respect for yourself and contacts with every opportunity. Stand for something.

In relation, discouragement is not an option. Opportunity does

exist for the honorable and persevering salesperson. The trail to successful sales deals is lengthier and contains more hurdles and roadblocks, but it is negotiable.

Conducting a Self Appraisal

The first step starts with thoroughly knowing yourself. Take a long look in the mirror. Do you like what you see? Do you believe enough in yourself to be totally honest with the person looking back, as well as everyone else in your life and business? Here's a news flash — if you doubt who you are and what you stand for, so does everyone else. The time for change is now. The patience and time for unscrupulous underhanded behavior is past. The walls are up. Too many people have been hurt by deception in recent years and will run the other way if they so much as sense a lie.

Next, learn as much as you can about your company. Talk to the technical and production staff. What are your company's strengths and weaknesses? How does it compare to the competition? What is the best position for your company? Is it price, service or quality? Pick one as a primary selling proposition and use the others as support. For instance, Priceline sells price. Lexus sells quality. IBM sells service. They also do the others, but each is primarily known for these qualities.

In addition, choose your sales targets wisely. The days of spray and pray for a hit are gone. The sales process is now too long and consuming. You cannot mine too many fields at once. The time is just not there. Carefully target prospects according to their needs

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and your company's ability to meet them. This will take lots of homework. But, it will be worth it because this initial effort will drastically shorten the approval or disapproval cycle. Plus, in-depth knowledge of the prospect's business and unique needs shows respect and will undoubtedly impress the customer.

Overcoming Stigmas


As for getting in the door to meet a new prospect, the old methods with a new twist are still the most cost-effective and timely alternatives. Cold calling is desirable for making new contacts, but more difficult due to the stigma of telemarketing and the many additional screens. Most secretaries have been instructed to place sales calls directly into voice mail, and caller ID is now a common feature on many business phone systems.

Consequently, everyone contacted must be shown respect. Demeaning, self-absorbed behavior will only earn a meeting with oblivion. Remember, most administrative assistants are only doing their jobs. So, use courtesy and competency to break down this first line of defense and reach decision makers.

Opening salvos and voice messages should identify name, company and the key selling proposition in 10 to 15 seconds. For example, "Hi, my name is John Smith and I represent Admiral Software. We know you are having a problem with your inventory control software, and we believe we can save you time and money by..."

If more information is requested, answer questions briefly and honestly. Be congenial and intelligent. The idea is to turn this potential enemy into an ally. Also, only send expensive collateral with a hand-written note if requested to do so or if the initial conversation goes reasonably well. There is no need to waste this material unless you're certain it's expected and going to reach the proper individuals. The material should also be addressed directly to the C-Level executive with the words "Personal and Confidential" emblazoned on the envelope. In this way, the material is less likely to be discarded or filed with junk mail.

Afterwards, a follow-up phone call should be placed within two days of the initial call or the de-



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livery of the requested material. Again, the message should be brief, and the follow-up to this message should be within another two business days, if there is no response.

One last attempt to reach the decision maker should then be made within three to four days of the last call. As before, state your case briefly and firmly. Do not appear desperate. Appropriate messages and statements include, "Hi. This is John Smith of Admiral Software again. I've tried to reach you several times regarding my company's ability to reduce your costs. Please let me know if

there is a synergy between our two companies. I would honor the opportunity to meet with you."

If you get a response, be proud of your perseverance and strong effort. If not, move on. No tactic or strategy will work 100% of the time. The only aspect of the process that you can completely control is your manner and integrity. There is no shame in walking away with honor. In fact, while your service may not present a perfect fit this time around, your behavior and intelligence could make a lasting impression that reaps benefits at the company in the not too distant future. □