



Timely Tips For Mastering The Complex Sale

by JEFF THULL

Every sale is not a good sale — about 35% of all sales are bad sales. In one way or another, they leave the customer disappointed or the seller with excess costs and diminished returns. Often, salespeople are so concerned with “getting the order” that they write business that is not good for themselves, their company or the customer. Walking away from a situation that is not profitable for anyone is the right thing to do. It requires that the salesperson become comfortable with both hearing and saying “no” and moving on to the next opportunity. When professionals move on, they open themselves more quickly to higher levels of opportunity and success.

Spectacular Success is Always Preceded by Unspectacular Presentation

Traditional selling maintains that if the salesperson is clever enough to say all the right “sales stuff,” he or she will be successful. This is far from the truth. Sales professionals know that the preparation put into understanding the customer and his or her industry is vital to success. Understanding the customer’s critical issues and dissatisfactions — and recognizing the business opportunities that arise from them — takes research time and dedication.

Do Not Allow the Customer to Self-Diagnose

This is not to say that the customer isn’t intelligent,

it’s just that he or she doesn’t make a decision regarding your products and services very often. A customer may only make such decisions once a year or even far less often. Sales representatives, on the other hand, continually diagnose customers with similar situations. The successful sales professional takes on the role of valued advisor or business consultant.

You Have Competitors — Your Customers Have Options

When you’re with your customers, don’t refer to your competitors as competitors; for example, by asking a question like “Who are some of our competitors you’re considering?” It conveys a very traditional sales image of concern about the competition in the sales process vs. concern over the customer’s situation. A better question would be, “What are some of the options you are considering?”

Never Ask For the Order

If you have to “ask for the order” it should be clear that your customer has missed something, and it’s your fault. If the diagnostic protocols have been followed, and the customer has recognized problems that can be eliminated by the solution you offer, the decision to buy will come as the next step in a well-executed quality decision process. The arm-wrestling of the traditional selling process is replaced by the

acknowledgment that a mutually beneficial business relationship is developing.

You Will Gain More Credibility Through the Questions You Ask Than the Stories You Tell

Every prospect expects salespeople to say good things about themselves and the products they sell. Thus the stories you tell are rarely taken seriously and are frequently discounted. What is taken seriously is the concern and knowledge you display in learning about the customer's situation. Ask thought-provoking questions which will help you to understand the customer's unique situation and will help you and the customer to manage quality decisions. When the customer hears your question, he should say to himself: "She wouldn't be asking that if she didn't understand our business."

Always Be Leaving

Customers have learned through annoying experience that a traditional salesperson won't take "no" for an answer. They hang on to their customers like a bulldog on a postman's leg. Consider that the customer's view could be valid. Displaying a willingness to accept the customer's view will greatly reduce the tension and cause the customer to be more comfortable in expressing his or her real feelings. This relaxes both of you and helps build an atmosphere of mutual cooperation and trust.

Don't Get Emotionally Involved

Salespeople don't have problems, their customers do. As you perform your diagnosis and lead the customer through a quality decision process, "yes" is not a problem and neither is a "quality no." The customer who is losing \$1M in sales due to inability to get a finished product passed by QC has a problem. It is only when you feel the need to get the order now — when you come across as "too hungry" — that you run into problems. The professional operates with an objective and clear mind and methodically unravels the customer's challenges so both the salesperson and the customer can come to a mutually beneficial understanding of the problem and the alignment of the

solution. Being emotionally involved is being defensive and biased toward your needs.

People Never Say What They Really Mean — At First

People learn from a very early age that saying what is really on their minds can have negative consequences. As a result, they are cautious to express their real feelings until they feel "safe enough" with another person. The professional salesperson "peels the onion" to allow the customer a feeling of safety, which allows for the free expression of thoughts, opinions and feelings.

You Can't Sell a Group

A guaranteed prescription for failure is to present to a group without having first identified and appealed to the critical perspectives of its members on an individual basis. By the time you present the solution, there should be no surprises to anyone. Everyone should be aware of how the proposed solution will impact them, and enough support should exist to guarantee that the group decision will be a mere formality prior to implementation of the solution.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

For the past 22 years, Jeff Thull, CEO/President of Prime Resource Group, has gained a reputation for expertise in the arena of sales and marketing strategies for companies involved in complex sales. His wealth of real world experience has made him a leading authority and valued advisor for executive teams of major companies worldwide. In addition to Mastering the Complex Sale, he is the author of Diagnostic Selling and Prime Performance Leadership. He is highly regarded as an entertaining and informative keynote speaker for corporate and association audiences worldwide.

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One Spectrum Pointe, Suite 150, Lake Forest, CA 92630-2283 • Phone: (949) 859-4040 • Toll-free: (877) 626-2776 • Fax: (949) 855-2973
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