
Creating Profitable Relationships By Earning Trust And Credibility

by DONNA L. COHEN

What counts most in a sales relationship? Without a doubt, it's trust and credibility. You may have the world's best selling techniques, but if prospects don't trust you, there goes the sale. Trust and credibility together are essential for getting to the truth as quickly as possible in a sales situation — and for developing long-term relationships. Without them, you can write off a successful sales career.

Easier said than done? Here are some pointers gleaned from years of sales experience. To build trust and earn credibility, start early in the sales process by level-setting expectations. Sales involves mutual understanding through management of expectations and commitment by both parties. Setting the expectations of the relationship up front clarifies the sales process for both you and the prospect. It eliminates confusion and wasted time. Moreover, when there is mutual consent about the next step you both will take, and both parties fulfill the agreed-upon step, there is a willingness to continue. There is trust.

Accept that not every prospect

qualifies to be a customer! By giving yourself permission to work only with those individuals whose needs match the services you're offering, you immediately eliminate stress for yourself and your prospects. You can take the pressure off both parties and establish trust more easily.

Taking Control of the Process

Another way to take the pressure off the prospect is by using permission-based phrases, allowing him or her to feel in control of the sales process. Here are some examples of permission-based phrases:

- “Would you be comfortable let-

ting me know if you don't think we are a fit and that we shouldn't spend any more time together? Because my intention is not to waste your time.”

- “Would it be OK...?”
- “Does it make sense...?”
- “I need your help...Would you be comfortable...?”

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- “I am unclear about...Have you considered...?”

It doesn't hurt to take a lesson from the pros in other fields. They know how to listen, be themselves, show personal vulnerabilities and struggles. They have respect for their subjects and, as a result, their interviews have impact.

Think of other truly successful people who are also trustworthy and you'll find that, first and foremost, they are true to themselves. They intuitively know that the most important thing they have to sell is themselves. They understand that the public buys them first, before their services or products.

Which Are You?

Salesperson #1:

- Tells prospects what they want to hear
- Tries to make everyone his or her customer
- Focuses on closing first and foremost

Salesperson #2:

- Remembers that the prospect buys “you” first, before your product or service
- Uses permission-based phrases so the prospect feels in control
- Focuses on adding value

For example, in my work, every time a new account is closed, it is part of my sales process to ask new customers what I did to earn their business. Without exception, I get responses such as, “We bought you, your experience and your expertise. We trusted that you would help us achieve our goals.” Or, “You ‘outsold’ the competition by being you.”

But credibility is not something you can claim as a personal quality. It is an attribute other people grant when they trust you. Credibility in sales is earned when you are clear about what you can and cannot do. It's important to understand the difference between what the prospect wants and what your company's area of expertise can provide.

Other tips:

- **The 4-H Club**

What better way to demonstrate trust and win credibility than to make sure these qualities are in play — Honesty, Humor, Humility (i.e., the willingness to say, “I messed up” and be ready

to fix your mistake), and cHutzpah (guts). Who wouldn't want to do business with someone who genuinely embodies these qualities? Wouldn't you want to buy from a person like this? The 4-H Club works in sales and in life!

- **Be “In the Moment”**

Many salespeople spend so much time worrying about technique they forget that sales is about respecting the prospect and figuring out how to offer value. Trusting the process is about paying attention to what's happening in the moment — by listening. It's not about closing the sale as quickly as possible to move on to the next prospect. It will be impossible to trust the process if you do not believe that what is happening right now is what's important.

- **Take Control**

The idea of taking control usually means going it alone, being in charge and having all the answers. This type of personality may inspire some people, but typically it is intimidating. If we're completely in control and have all the answers, there's no room for the other person to contribute. When trust is present, the word “control” becomes synonymous with self-responsibility. Use the Golden Rule as your guideline and you won't go wrong.

- **Be Approachable**

Successful salespeople are approachable, accessible and easy to talk to. They never fit the stereotypical description of “sleazy, fast-talking and I-centered” that the general public often perceives them to be. Instead, they speak the language of their prospects and understand their culture. They listen. They have boned up on psychology and can say the

right things. Sometimes they even “play dumb” and discover it’s a winning strategy.

The most successful relationships rely on trust and credibility. The only way for a customer to become a long-term client is to develop this relationship. You’ll see that it takes more than just closing skills to be successful in sales. These tips will help you build rapport and develop a long-lasting client base. □

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Donna L. Cohen is president of Performance Insights, LLC, a sales training and consulting company in Greenwood Village, Colorado. She is the author of the book on B2B selling, GO BIG...or Stay Home! Exploding Your Sales Potential and Achieving Your Financial Dreams. Visit www.performanceinsightsllc.com for more information.

