
Under The Influence: Key Behaviors For Sales Breakthroughs



by ALAN VENGEL

You can move people to action better with persuasion than with power. Think of those people in your life who have drawn you in and made an impression on you. Maybe they've convinced you to take action without seeming pushy or panicky, merely stressing the necessity and benefit of what they wanted you to do. Or maybe they won you over through their empathy, seeming to truly understand your point of view.

Consciously or unconsciously, those who have a powerful effect on us use a set of key influencing behaviors. And you can have the same effect on clients when you learn to tap into effective selling influence.

Influence is more motivation than manipulation. In this inclusive form of communication, you get others to do something or give something while main-

taining or improving the relationship and creating a sense of shared commitment with your customers.

When you develop and use your influence, you create a situation where everyone wins. Try these influence behaviors in your sales work, and watch your sales skyrocket while you enhance the quality of your relationships with your customers.

Know What You Want — Then Ask for It!

No one likes to feel as if they're dealing with someone who has ulterior motives. Everyone loves a straight dealer, so be honest and direct about what you are trying to achieve. But in order to state what you want clearly, you have to first know what you want from your customer. What is the purpose of your meeting? What are you hoping to achieve? Are you trying to develop a relationship with your customer,

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for example, in order to warm him or her up for your next meeting? Or do you want to make an immediate sale?

When you know exactly what you want, you can better state your position and get your point across to your customers. When your customers know exactly what you want, they will feel your influence, experiencing a sense of clarity and purpose. They will appreciate your direct approach, even if you don't make the sale at that time.

Create Win/Win Suggestions

You can influence your customers to help you obtain what you want by providing them with specific, concrete ideas that will ultimately benefit you both. To make this happen, preparation is essential, so you must know your customers. For example, if you want to make a sale to a young couple who your questions or research has revealed to have a moderate income, show them how they may benefit in the long run from paying in monthly installments rather than paying in full up front. When you know your customers' needs, you can adjust your approach accordingly. Then ask, "Are you open to some ideas that may help your situation?" or propose "Here's a suggestion that could help both of us."

Build Trust by Clarifying What You Hear

In a sales situation, show your customers that you have listened to what they had to say by clarifying any issues they bring up. For example, when a customer tells you, "I'm interested in the product or service you're offering, but I am not able to do it financially right now," make sure that you have clearly understood. Paraphrase and summarize key points. Pause to ask if you've understood correctly. When you demonstrate that you have heard and understood the customer's position, you will find that you create a shared commitment between you. Your customer will feel as if you share common ground, rather than feeling defensive and sold-to.

Ask Big, Open-Ended Questions

Draw your customer out by asking a mix of open-ended questions and focused questions, then actively listening to the answers. Questions will help you to

establish rapport with the customer, and lead to openness, understanding and commitment, so don't rush this behavior. Taking time now to listen to the customers' concerns will enable you to go faster later.

Avoid closed-ended questions — those that require only a "Yes" or "No" answer — and focus instead on open-ended questions that start with "What," "How" and "Where." These will help you to gather information and find out what your customer is thinking. By seeking a broad answer, you let your customer choose the conversation's direction: "What would be an ideal outcome for you?" or "How have you approached these issues in your business in the past?"

Focused questions help you to drill down and get uninterested customers to focus on alternatives. When you've been actively listening, you should be able to focus in on specific incidents, concerns or objections the customer has raised. For example, ask, "Can you tell me a little bit more about (that relevant issue you brought up earlier)?" or "Could you tell me more about (your last experience that yielded disappointing results)?"

Give Something, Get Something!

Your customers want to see clearly why they should give you their business, so motivate them with sound reasoning that relates your solution to those concerns you know they may have. Make it easier or more attractive for your customers to do what you ask by telling them what you will be happy to do for them if they accept your solution. For example, try offering something sought-after that costs you nothing but delivers a powerful benefit to them: "If you can give me an answer today, I'll set up an immediate appointment with our IT group and that will put you first in line."

Show that you are willing to modify your initial proposal to better suit their needs. This will help you further promote agreement and commitment. Ask, "How can I make this decision easier for you?" or "What would make this offer more attractive for you?" You are inducing the customer to buy, giving them

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an incentive that makes your product or service more interesting.

You don't want to offer a discount; in all likelihood, a lower price is probably not a primary need anyway, and you obviously don't want to take a discount off your commission. Show added value and make your offer more attractive in some way, maybe by changing the payment schedule, or by proving success with interviews of references. Give them something immediately, and you increase your chances of getting what you want.

Meet Their Needs and Achieve Your Goals

The ability to influence is a skill anyone can acquire, and it correlates directly to your success in the sales profession. Using influence skills will help you to meet clients' needs and improve sales. When you follow these behaviors, you will see breakthrough results in your commissions as you build more meaningful relationships with your customers. □



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Alan Vengel has more than 20 years of experience as a consultant, speaker and trainer. He has developed skill-building programs, including the award-winning The Influence Edge. He is the author of The Influence Edge: How to Persuade Others to Help You Achieve Your Goals and Sprout!: Everything I Know About Sales I Learned From My Garden. He has worked with hundreds of organizations including Microsoft, Cisco Systems, Xerox, Intel and Honeywell. For more information, please visit www.vengelconsulting.com or call (925) 837-0148.

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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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