



EDITORIAL | PAUL CHERRY

AVOIDING COMMON SALES MISTAKES

Not all sales interactions run smoothly; even the best salespeople inevitably hit a bump in the road. Maybe you've hit that bump because you unwittingly mishandled a situation, or because your customer had conflicted feelings about a sale. Either way, if you want to salvage your hard work and make sure the sale goes through, you must learn to deal with these obstacles to meet your customer's needs.



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Here are some common mistakes salespeople make and how to avoid or overcome them:

Fearing the Customer’s Reaction

When salespeople are afraid of what a customer might say, they end up losing sales opportunities because they don’t find out what the customer really wants. For example, you dread hearing customers say, “Your price is too high.” It’s almost a knee-jerk reaction to offer a lower price. Instead, be proactive and try to uncover the unique buying criteria important to the customer so the price objection doesn’t come up in the first place.

Taking It Personally

Sure, in your head you know that a customer’s bad attitude doesn’t reflect on your worth as a human being. But our egos get in the way, and we internalize the customer’s negativity. When your customer brings up a problem, don’t get defensive and explain the problem away. Not only will the customer probably not be overjoyed with your response, but you will have failed to address the heart of the matter: how to fix your customer’s problem.

Rushing To Judgment

As a salesperson, you should work to focus all of your attention on your customer and their needs. It’s all too easy to swoop in to present a solution instead of listening to your customer’s complaints and the specifics of their situation. In this rush to cut to the chase, you’re in danger of coming across as arrogant, and your customer ends up feeling that their input is unimportant and unappreciated.

Embrace any information your prospect gives you, whether you believe it’s valuable or not. If you don’t have time to talk at length with this prospect, request the opportunity to call them back when you do have the time. Otherwise,

put down your briefcase, close your office door, and listen to them for as long as they need. Remember, even if you hear the story all the time, it is unique and personal for each customer. Instead of interrupting the customer with your standard solution, let them have the floor and explain the problem. Only then can you proceed with the process of finding a solution for whatever ails them.

Beating a Dead Horse

How do you know when, despite your best efforts, your customer relationship is beyond saving and therefore taking up more time than it’s worth? It is usually when the customer is demanding, even confrontational, yet provides you with little to no business for all the irritation he’s giving you. Sometimes customers like this actually cost you money because you spend so much time trying to please them. You hope that if you keep doing business with them, they’ll eventually reward you for your loyalty — but let’s face it, there are some customers you just don’t want!

Shifting Blame

For the past 20 years, organizations have embraced the concept of teamwork. When things go awry, though, it’s easy to point fingers. Donald Trump’s TV series, *The Apprentice*, shows how individuals can turn on each other to protect their own interests. The boardroom meetings with “the Donald” show a different side of each contestant’s character. One individual must be eliminated from the show each week, so one gets singled out for letting the team down.

When customers come to you with problems, do you know someone on your team who tries to shift blame to another person or department in your company? Pointing fingers only delays resolving customers’ issues. When things go well in your firm, everyone should definitely share the glory — and when things go wrong, everyone should share the blame too.

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Treating All Customer Complaints with the Same Approach

Some salespeople have a one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to dealing with customer objections. They may offer to lower their price or automatically throw in product extras, without listening to the reasons the customer is upset. While you’re being conditioned to respond to objections with concessions, your customers are learning that whenever they complain, they’re rewarded — much like giving whiny children toys or treats to quiet them. For example, a customer might ask you to cut your price by 5% to clinch a deal. When you agree to this deal, you’re setting up their expectations for the next time you negotiate. They’ll think all they have to do is raise an objection and

you’ll always give in. Having only one approach to resolving customer issues results in two mistakes:

- ✱ You’re not addressing your customer’s real problem.
- ✱ You end up offering more than what your customer really wants.

It’s better for both you and your customer if, instead of giving price cuts to close the deal, you really listen to what your customer tells you, then go from there. Slowing down and listening when you reach business relationship speed bumps works better in the long run than always trying to swerve around them. ^{AS}
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