

# A Better Approach With Purchasing Departments

BY MARK HUNTER

It's easy to view purchasing departments as evil. The number of salespeople who have told me stories about how much they can't stand working with purchasing departments is huge! I've heard every reason "why" salespeople don't like working with purchasing departments, but let's cut to the chase.

When a salesperson does nothing more than bash a purchasing department, the only thing they're doing is chipping away at their own personal motivation and credibility. Talking negatively or thinking negatively isn't going to help the situation one bit. It's more important to view the purchasing department as an asset to their company, which they are. It's more important to view the employees of the purchasing department as dedicated employees of their company, which they are. It's also more important to view them as an intellectual resource in your selling process, which they are.

Do you see the difference? Start now to view purchasing departments not as an obstacle, but rather as a valuable source of insights that are critical to your sales process.

### **Adopt a Professional View**

Keep in mind that the typical purchasing agent or buyer will deal with far more salespeople over the course of their career than a salesperson will deal with buyers. This means the buyer is a lot smarter in knowing what makes you tick than you are in knowing what makes them tick. When you begin to view them in a professional manner, not only when you're with them, but also when you're not with them, you will find your attitude toward them changing. You will be amazed at how far your relationship with them will go.

When salespeople comment to me about how much they dislike dealing with purchasing departments, I love to ask them

the following question: "Who does your competition deal with at that company?" The answer invariably is something like, "Oh, they have to deal with the same people I'm dealing with." Right there is the solution.

If your competition is dealing with the same people you are, then one of your goals is to ensure your buyer has a better experience with you than with your competition. This means that if you feel your buyer is hard to work with, then chances are your competitor feels the same way. This should help you put things into perspective and give you the confidence to know that by developing a positive attitude toward the purchasing department, you are most likely stepping ahead of your competitors.

You want to be the salesperson who leaves a more favorable impression. You have it within your power to develop a reputation as being the person with whom buyers want to interact.

Another activity you can do to improve your attitude with purchasing departments is to view them as conduits of information. They are sources of knowledge that can only be accessed by developing a relationship and being willing to serve them. Every purchasing de-

partment has goals that must be met – goals that go beyond merely securing a lower price on what they buy. Unless you approach the purchasing department with a positive attitude, there is no way you'll ever be in a position to learn the key pieces of information about how they operate.

One way to begin opening doors with the buyer is by allowing them to see you too as a source of valuable information. I am not talking just about what you sell, but also about the industry as a whole and business in general. In this way, the relationship becomes reciprocal, creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and openness. Be willing to take the time to provide them information and insights that will benefit them. As simple as this is, it is amazing how few salespeople actively do this. What I've found is that the only salespeople who do it are those who approach the purchasing department with a great attitude.

### **Develop Relationships**

A final way you can use your positive attitude with the purchasing department is to develop relationships with as many people as possible in the department. Yes, there are some purchasing de-

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partments that put up barriers to salespeople being able to do this (I might add that these are the same barriers they are putting up with your competitors, so don't think that you are at a disadvantage if this happens).


Even if the purchasing department puts up some barriers, what I've found regardless of the industry is that the employees in these departments are still very much human. They tend to have a natural desire to interact with others. When you have a good attitude toward people, they will naturally respond positively toward you. In time, you will find professional

relationships developing that go beyond the corporate expectations of the purchasing department.

Ultimately, you have to ask yourself what level of results do you really want. The truth is that the results you achieve from working with purchasing departments are a direct reflection of the attitude you take toward them, regardless of the pricing you offer.

Your long-term profit will be in relation to the efforts you make with a respectful approach. The key word is "long-term." If you base your relationship off short-term responses, then you can expect your attitude to come under

attack. Just as you have a job to do, so too does the purchasing agent. There obviously will be topics discussed and decisions made with which you do not always agree. It is in these exact situations where you have the greatest opportunity to allow your positive attitude to come through. In doing so, you will be sowing the seeds for a profitable long-term relationship.

A positive attitude isn't everything, but it is so foundational that without it, you will never go as far with purchasing departments as you would like. Make the attitude adjustments that make a difference. 

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