



The Number 1 Complaint About Salespeople Is...

You talk too much! Instead we need to listen and ask thoughtful questions that will help us to uncover what a client really needs and wants without assuming anything.

When selling is about customers' needs, then the buying happens

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A few years ago, a study was done to assess the relationship between salespeople and those who buy their products and services.

Among many questions, buyers were asked, "What bothers you most about salespeople?" More than half answered, "They talk too much."

The salespeople were then asked the same question and, surprisingly, their answer was, "They talk too much." The salespeople saw their behavior in precisely the same way the buyers saw it.

Why do salespeople talk too much? The answer has two parts. First, they know a great deal about their product or service and, second, they want to generate income. Let's look at each of these parts, both of which are laudable.

As for generating income, no one in business would ever object to that as long as the method and the offering are legal and ethical.

With product knowledge, here's the problem. Salespeople feel they must tell customers everything about their product. They can talk at great length because of their wealth of knowledge. Product knowledge is essential in order to survive and compete. A pen salesman needs be able to describe the manufacturing process, material components, and on, and on, and on.

If a customer doesn't need or want the product or service, however, that's the end of the conversation. If that pen salesman's customer, for example, needs something erasable, no sale will be made, regardless of the volume of information delivered.



In selling, the operative word isn't selling -- it's buying.

Until the customer buys, there is no closure. So it's essential for salespeople to learn what the customer needs and wants before attempting to sell anything.

How can salespeople do that? Simple. Ask the customers. Invite them to talk. Listen to what they say. Then base your presentation on that information.

With the pen salesman example, if the customer had been encouraged to describe what he needs in his business, the ability to erase errors would certainly come up quickly.

Armed with that information, salespeople could adjust their presentations.

If their product lines included an erasable product, that's the one they would offer, and they wouldn't waste time describing something inappropriate. If the product line didn't include such an item, he could conclude the call gracefully and move on to other customers.

That would use his time well, and it would demonstrate his respect for his customer's time by not discussing irrelevant issues.

If you are a salesman, try this sequence. Very early in the sales call, encourage your customer to talk by asking him to tell you what's important for him in conducting his business. Then listen to the answer.

This will immediately differentiate you from your competition in the customer's mind for the simple reason we stated at the top of this column. Salespeople talk too much. When you listen to customers, you demonstrate you value their input.

Encourage the customer to continue talking with comments like, "Tell me more about that. How might that modify your business?"

After collecting that information from your customer, link your offerings to the customer's requirements. This is called a "benefit connection," and it demonstrates you're working to help customers solve their problems, not just sell your product.

Most salespeople are pressed for time, and at first glance this suggestion might seem to use up valuable face time. But just the opposite happens. Most customers welcome the chance to describe what they need. If you can offer a product to meet that need, the customer will buy it.



Using a benefit connection, customers see the sales presentation being based on their needs, not on your catalogue.

It makes little difference if that customer is the buyer for a mega corporation or a walk-in to a local store.

You can usually learn what customers want if you just give them time to tell you.

Then they'll "buy" from you what you might not be able to "sell" to them.

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