

Sales and Marketing STRATEGIES & NEWS E-zine

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Sales Training/Management

Sales Training: Are You Telling Your Prospects Too Much?

By Bill Caskey

Sometimes I come across a brilliant client who knows too much for his own good. His team knows the product inside and out. They believe in it. And they are bursting with genuine excitement to tell people about it.

But their sales numbers stink.

I observed one of these sellers, Tom, at a major industry trade show. Tom was like the 'venus fly trap' of salesmen. His product was exciting and new, and with his friendly manner he had no problem pulling buyers into the booth for a chat. But his excitement got the best of him as he inundated each prospect with a litany of features, brochures and demos.

Barely able to get a word in edgewise, I could see the prospects' eyes begin to dart back and forth, desperately looking for an exit. As they finally found a pause to make hurried exits, they often left without even exchanging a business card. In one instance, I actually saw Tom chase after a prospect walking down the aisle. "Wait," he called. "I forgot to tell you about an important feature..."

This is an extreme case, but not rare. After spending countless hours in product training, sellers are so eager to share their answers that they never spend the time to find out the questions. What's missing is a strategy that most don't figure out: How to help their prospects see that change is in their interest. Why am I here? What is your problem? Can my product help solve your pain?

Emotions First, Education Second

Too much knowledge can be overwhelming. Buying isn't a purely intellectual exercise, but a rich combination of intellect and pure emotion. Facts and figures are important, but without an emotional appeal, sellers will never understand the buyer and never control the process.

Most salespeople do not understand how emotional the first part of the sales process is. You are contending with the prospect's ego from the very beginning. Ego is pure emotion, and usually it is rooted in fear – Fear that he will make the wrong decision, for example, or fear that you will expose his previous wrongs. Here, it's the process you must be conscious of. You must find yourself saying things like:

"I don't know if this will help you."

"I don't know if you have any interest in talking about this."

"I'm not sure if I even belong here ..."

The less you pretend to know, the safer a prospect feels in sharing with you his feelings about the situation. Only when your prospect reveals his compelling reasons for seeking to buy will he connect your solution with his problem.

Stay Focused on Solutions

Your sole purpose on any first call should be to find out what the conditions are which caused the prospective client to invite you in. Salespeople must be gentle, assertive and nurturing. The goal is to make the client feel good about sharing his problem. By creating the right environment through a good process, the seller can take control of the process without making the prospect feel apprehensive.

Understand that your prospect does not immediately connect his problems with the features of your product. The real issues are always a level deeper than where the prospect begins. Help your prospect make the connection himself.

The first step is to let the prospect paint the picture of his problem. Ask why he feels the way he does. Ask basic questions. Find out what he thinks you should do next. Ask questions from a place of curiosity – not from a place of manipulation. Even if you think you know the answer to your question, preserve your prospect's integrity by not making the assumption. Focus on creating an outcome – determining whether your prospect is a fit for what you're selling – rather than your need to make the sale. You will create a better environment for your prospect to open up and tell you how to sell him.

Whatever you do, don't revert back to the laundry list of features you learned in training. Use your product knowledge in a way that is meaningful. Remember, once you know the prospect's problems and you've determined that you can provide a solution, he has told you exactly what he needs to hear in order to buy. Now is the time to show that you were listening: Tell him exactly how your product will solve his problem. Show him why it is in his self-interest to buy from you.

Make him give you a reason to say no, rather than the other way around.

Bill Caskey is president of Caskey Achievement Strategies, specialists in Business to Business sales development. He is the author of "Same Game New Rules: 23 Contemporary Insights for Selling and Negotiating". For more information visit www.caskeytraining.com.

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