

Effective Salespeople

By Rodney Martin

An effective salesperson is one of the key forces behind every successful business. You may have your product perfected. You may have it advertised and ready for sale. You may even have customers coming through your door. But before a purchase is completed, your customers will speak to an employee—a salesperson. And that conversation has the potential not only to affect the current sale, but also set the stage for many future sales.

There are many levels of salesmanship. Any employee who interacts with a customer is affecting that customer's impression of not only your product or service, but also the purchasing experience. This makes the practical definition of a "salesperson" much broader and far-reaching. Everyone from the person who answers the phone to the hired hand who carries the product to the customer's vehicle is a salesperson at some level.

Since salesmanship affects nearly every position in the business, all your employees should learn to be more effective salespeople.

What is Sales?

People have a general perception that the core skill of the salesperson is trickery—fooling someone into buying something they do not want and do not need. This negative perception is fueled by the experiences we all have probably had with pushy salespeople.

A sweeper salesman stopped at my house years ago. In a moment of weakness, I invited him in, and he took us through his elaborate sales routine. I was, in fact, interested in buying a sweeper. But as the show progressed, I

decided this was not the sweeper I wanted, or at least it was not the route I wanted to take to purchase one.

So I interrupted the salesman: "Hey, you know, I don't want to cut you short, but I don't think this is the route I'm looking to take. I'm not looking for this type of product."

The salesman then turned his routine into a lecture, scolding me for not caring for my children's health. He gave me an unwanted science lesson on the overwhelming presence and dangers of something called "dust mites." He also insinuated that, since I was not buying, I must not have understood something he had said. He was not only pushy, he was insulting my intelligence.

These experiences not only give "sweeper salesmen" a bad reputation, but make people reluctant to talk to anyone with the title of Salesperson. Jokes about salespeople portray them as fast-talking folks who "could sell an iceberg to an Eskimo."

Real, effective salesmanship is not about tricking or manipulating.

A relative recently asked me in jest, "Are you still selling water softeners to people who don't need them?" I answered truthfully, "No." He, of course, then wondered what I was doing instead. So I explained that I was still doing what I'd been doing for a long time: "I'm still selling water softeners to people who want them and need them."

It's true that a salesperson has tactics he can use to

influence a customer to purchase something he does not want or need, such as a freezer to an Eskimo. The question isn't whether the salesman can do that; the question is whether he will or won't!

Real, effective salesmanship is not about tricking or manipulating. It is customer-based selling. **It is matching your service or product to the customer's real need**—not what you perceive it to be. Scripture tells us that our communication should be good and upbuilding while conveying favor to the hearer.¹ To meet this standard, the salesperson must not only speak well, but listen well to understand the customer's need. The key to effective, long-term salesmanship is meeting the customer's needs, not ours!

Four things every effective salesman must sell

As a salesman, you must sell four things to be effective: yourself, the company, the need, and the product.

- 1. Sell yourself.** When a customer buys something from you, does he purchase it from you, or does he purchase it from the *company*? There is a difference. As an effective salesperson, you must build a personal rapport with the customer that will make you the person they go to with their questions and their product or service needs. Earn their trust. Sell yourself before you sell your product. Three things are critical: customers must like *you*, they must trust *you*, and they must listen to *you*!

When a customer comes to your place of business or invites you into their home, it means that they want more information about what you have to offer. If all you give them is information, they will take it and go out to shop around. But if you have sold *yourself*—if they like and trust *you*—then you have an edge that increases the probability that they will purchase from you.

Tips for increasing your likeability:

- **Use their name.** Take time to get to know this person and their uniqueness.
- **Look pleasant and enthused.** Smile with your entire face. Do your job heartily because your joy is full.² Your personal problems, concerns, and fatigue take a toll on your countenance. The customer can sense just by the look on your face if you would prefer to be doing something else. When customers feel like they are a bother to you, they will be inclined to take their business to someone who is excited about interacting with them.
- **Establish common ground.** Look for clues to things that you can connect on aside from your product or service. For example, if a man comes in wearing an Eagle's sweatshirt, ask him how the Eagles are doing this season and see where the conversation goes. Or if a dog meets you at the door during a house call, you know it must be an integrated part of their lives. Get down and talk to the dog – even if you're not a dog lover. Take any opportunity to show that you care about what they care about.
- **Look for other ways to assist them.** Customers will be attracted to a salesperson who looks out for their best interest even above his own.³ I frequently go down into basements to check what plumbing will be required to install our water softeners. Recently I was at a place where the electrical wiring was a disaster. When the customer mentioned that he couldn't find a trustworthy electrician, I referred him to a good electrician who I knew would treat him fairly.

- 2. Sell the company.** Establish the uniqueness of your business. Many companies are family-owned or were established generations ago. This may be true about

1 Ephesians 4:29 "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."

2 John 15:11 "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."

3 Philippians 2:4 "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."

your company too, but it's not necessarily unique. Make sure you know what sets you apart and makes you different. In our business, all our warranty work is done in-house. There are no subcontractors; we do all our own work. Sell your company.

3. **Sell the need.** Usually the need is already established. Since our teenager backed the car through the garage door, we need a garage door—this point is not in question. Sometimes, however, people don't realize there are other solutions to meet their needs. In our line of work, for example, people don't realize the reason they can't get their dishes clean is because their water is "hard." And they may not realize that "water softeners" are available for this reason. We can't sell our product unless we have first sold the need.
4. **Sell the product.** Like selling the company, the key here is to differentiate your product. If you can differentiate between more than just the competitor's price, you have an edge. Know and show your product's superiority.

II Steps For Successful Selling

1. **Preparation.** Being well-prepared will set you up for better success when you meet your customer. Here are some important ways to prepare:
 - **Set goals.** You've heard how to eat an elephant? One bite at a time. Setting long-range goals and breaking them down into daily goals keeps you motivated and engaged.
 - **Know the history of your customers.** You don't need to know the customer's life story, but you do need to know something about your past transactions with this customer.
 - **Know the needs of the area in which you hope to sell.**
 - **Know your competition.** You should not only know what distinguishes you from them, but also know them and their tactics.

2. **A proper warm-up.** It's been said that most people decide whether or not to buy from you within the first five minutes that you are in the house. That's why it's critical to use the first few minutes to build rapport and earn their trust.
3. **Listen.** Ask relevant questions. Find out what they perceive their needs to be, listen to their answers, and don't hurry on to the next thing.
 - I was at a customer's house last week, and I asked him, "What is it that you don't like about your water?" He said, "Well, it just stains everything. My toilets are terrible. My wife scrubs them all the time. It's a problem for me because it's a problem for her."
 - I asked, "How about your dishes? What do you find in the dishwasher?" He said, "Oh, the dishes are fine!" Now I knew that with a Bosch dishwasher, and very hard water (fourteen grains), that his dishes are terrible. But . . . in his mind they are fine. *The problem is the toilets are bad. So, we focused on the toilets. Listen to the customer.*
4. **Be enthusiastic.** Your customer's excitement will usually match yours. Harry F. Banks once said, "A salesman minus enthusiasm is just a clerk." Anyone can take an order. Effective salesmanship, however, is not just an exchange of money and merchandise, but a transfer of *feeling*, of enthusiasm and confidence.
5. **Show and tell.** You can explain something to a customer, but often our words don't create a memorable impression. If you *demonstrate* what you're attempting to explain, however, you create an impressive, convincing, visual explanation of how your product will resolve their issue. To *demonstrate*, according to the dictionary, means "to prove in such a manner as to reduce the contrary position to evident absurdity."
 - For example, I can explain to you the science behind soft water and hard water, the minerals,

the rocks, the calcium, and how soap clings to those micro objects in the water instead of to your dishes—therefore inhibiting the cleaning potential of your soapy water. But you can hardly visualize it, and you doubt it, and can't understand it.

- But if I take a jar of water from your well, and a jar of water that was run through my equipment, and put some soap in each, I can demonstrate the very obvious difference in both the appearance of the water and its cleaning abilities when we wash utensils with it. Now that is convincing, and memorable! Any argument to the contrary is absurd!

6. Build Value. Every price that you present to your customer will be too high, unless they can see the value. This is one of the reasons that “show and tell” is so important. Once they have seen the difference your product makes, you have increased the product's value to the customer.

7. Cost Justify. Help the customer make a decision that is grounded in logic rather than emotion. Cost justification does not apply to every product—only to products that eventually pay for themselves by reducing utility expenses, repairs, or supplies. In our case, I can show a customer that by using our equipment, not only will they have cleaner dishes and toilets, but in three to five years they will save enough in utilities and soap to pay for the equipment and installation.

8. Deal with objections simply and honestly. Sometimes a customer makes negative comments about a product. How we handle those objections can either make the customer more suspicious, or change his mind. The best way to handle objections is to be honest, simple, direct, and non-defensive.

- An even better way to deal with objections is to deal with them before they come up. With a little experience, you soon know what the

common objections are to your product or service. Address them with the customer before they bring it up. One of the common objections to conditioned water is that slippery feeling you have after a shower. So I usually try to find a way to bring that up before the customer does. I'll say something like, “You know that squeaky-clean feeling that people talk about when they take a shower—that sort of stickiness that you think is a nice, clean feeling? That actually is dissolved rock imbedded in soap scum. That's why once the water is conditioned and softened, your skin feels different – it feels slippery. That's clean!” Objections can be used in a positive way.

9. Ask for the sale. Some salesmen have a DNA problem—**Did Not Ask**. Thirty-eight percent of people who sit through a sales demonstration without making a purchase say that the reason they didn't buy is because they were never asked if they wanted to buy it.

- Giving the customer an opportunity to buy is not a high-pressure tactic. However, making fun of them or demeaning them in any way is high pressure. In fact, a well-phrased “closer” can relieve pressure if it's handled well. And “closer” doesn't mean you need to wait until the end of your demonstration. I find that it works best to “close” early and “close” often. Throughout my interaction with the customer I ask things like, “Wouldn't it be nice to have one of these?” or “Wouldn't it be nice to have clean dishes for once?” and I'll even ask about their schedule: “Which is a better day for an installation—Tuesdays, or Thursdays?” This doesn't pressure them to buy, but relieves the pressure of needing to make a choice.

10. Leave Salespeople Behind. Leave any items you used in the demonstration—literature, cost justifications, and the like—with the customer. If only

one of the decision makers was present during the demonstration, when the other one comes home they will be interested only in the cost. Without the benefit of all the building you did through listening, answering questions, cost justification, and show and tell, the price will seem too high. Leaving those visual, logical selling aids behind will help your customer convey your product's value to others who need to be involved in the decision.

In conclusion, you have been an effective salesperson when the customer believes that the product or service is worth more than the money they have invested, and you believe that their payment is worth more than the goods you delivered. When these two things come together, you have done your job well. ✍️

- 11. Follow up.** Follow up before and after the sale. When you deliver the product, make sure you are including everything that was agreed upon. After the project is complete, check back with the customer and make sure that they are happy.

Rodney works for Martin Water Conditioning and has done in-store and in-home sales for 22 years. He is active in sales training with Martin and other organizations. He believes sales, like any other vocation, should be done heartily, as unto the Lord!