

You May Actually Sell More By Not Asking for the Sale

Developing a deeper relationship with your sales prospects can put the brakes on automatic “no’s” and gear them up to say “yes.”

Everyone in business knows the old chestnut “You have to ask for the order!” We are taught from the first day of salesperson school that most sales are not consummated because the salesperson never asked for the order. Consequently, legions of salespeople are out prowling the streets with their hands out.

The same individuals who are insisting on the order, however, often find themselves walking away from the prospect disappointed and dejected since the sale was not made. These salespeople were rejected because in no small sense they were “only” asking for the order and not listening to the prospect’s screams.

Yes, prospects seem to scream, not only when they tell us “no,” but they also scream with words telling us of their needs, desires and expectations. However, some salespeople are so deafened by the need to ask for the order that they don’t hear anything except the expected/hoped for “Yes, I’ll buy some,” or the (perhaps more) familiar “No.”

An Alternative Approach

When Jack, the top performing salesperson on his team, took the role of sales manager in the company, he shocked everyone on the sales force by telling them his simple philosophy of becoming the top salesperson. He explained that while he made more sales calls than anyone else in the room, he only asked for the order half as often as the weakest person on the team.

He went on by pointing out that most customers and new prospects don’t want to be sold anything. They want to be given a reason to buy, and the salesperson’s job is to facilitate that process. By forcing the customer to say, “No, I have no needs now,” the salesperson is actually building a wall of resistance that will need to be overcome in future sales calls.

The customer develops a pattern of seeing the salesperson, knowing he or she is going to be pushing for the sale, and then learning to say “no” in order to end the conversation. The “no’s” come more frequently, and earlier in the conversation, due to this customer conditioning.

Determining the Buyer’s Perspective

Jack encouraged everyone to go out and make twice as many calls the next week and not ask for an order during any of them. Rather, he suggested, “Ask about the customer’s business and how the competition is doing. Ask about his or her personal challenges as they relate to the job: time management, kids getting ready for college, plans for retirement, a planned extended vacation, whatever.”

Further, he suggested that the salespeople ask, as they leave each sales call, if the customer was satisfied with the last order of merchandise. Usually the response will be “Yes, it was fine.” By conditioning customers to think in positive terms and obtaining “yes’s” in the conversation, the salesperson is changing the sales environment.

Show your customers that you are interested in more than just the next order, and find out more about

them so that the relationship becomes deeper than just the two-dimensional one of showing up and asking for the next order.

Power of Relationship Selling

Jack's philosophy of selling worked for him, and it may work for you as well. It seems counterintuitive that by not asking, you actually are developing a more meaningful sales relationship and getting beyond the superficial aspect of "transactional selling."

This process works for nearly any type of business, especially where the sales transaction is based on a relationship with the purchaser. However, it does not work as well when a person is selling a one-time item—think of train tickets or hot dogs at the park.

The relationship element in the sales process has been validated by many studies as to its importance. It is a measurement of the trust factor without which the sale will not take place. Relationships help in obtaining fair pricing and—more good news—better profit margins. Relationships also help ensure that repeat business is more reliable. They are a key component of making sure that the competition does not get a foothold with your customers.

The next time you are frustrated with all the "no's" you are getting, try an alternative approach to selling. Don't ask for the sale; instead, develop a deeper relationship with the sales prospect.

By Richard Delaney