Six Best Practices to Win More Sales

“Any customer can have any color car he wants, as long as it’s black.”

Henry Ford’s strategy for mass producing the Model T also defined the baseline attitude of most sales organizations for the last 100 years: “The customer can have any product or service they want, as long as it’s what we tell them.”

Obviously the world has changed. Buyers now have instant access to real-time reviews and opinions of your products and services. They are in charge and operating from a new mindset: They aren’t looking for products as much as they are seeking specific outcomes.

The way to close more business now lies in being sensitive to the customer’s needs. You should then adopt a flexible, creative approach to customizing products and solutions that will help customers achieve their desired outcomes. Here are six best practices for winning more sales in this environment:

1. **Focus on how you can help the customer reach his or her goals.** With this simple shift you avoid getting locked into a product mentality, and you maximize your ability to stay flexible and creative.

2. **Think of your product as only one aspect of the value you provide to your customer.** Successful sales professionals today are valued for their expertise, experience and ability to collaborate with customers and design custom solutions that deliver specific outcomes, adding value for everyone.

3. **Get used to a longer sales cycle.** It takes time to get to know the client and understand their situation, possibly several conversations over weeks or in some cases months. The longer sales cycle generally leads to a higher trust level between you and the customer; it also often leads to bigger deals and long-term relationships that drive greater revenues year over year.

4. **Focus on real discussions about real concerns, and steer away from cookie-cutter solutions.** Some sales professionals may feign interest in the customer’s needs and goals just long enough to steer the conversation to position the solution they already want to offer. Customers won’t tolerate being manipulated like this. Once they sense that you are setting them up so you can deliver your preconceived solution, they will withhold their trust and become more resistant.

5. **Tell the truth, even if it means telling customers what they don’t want to hear.** This is critical to developing credibility that will pay off in the years to come. Sales professionals are competitive, and they work hard at winning new business. However, never let this desire to win tempt you to promise something you can’t deliver, or agree to a solution that won’t produce the outcome the customer needs, even if the customer asks for it and even if it will make you a lot of money. Without a doubt, the customer will remember your integrity the next time you call on him.

6. **Know when to assert your expertise and when to defer to the customer.** There will be times when it is important for you to assert your expertise. Usually, these times will come after you have built a strong relationship with the customer and have developed a thorough understanding of the outcomes the customer desires. Ultimately, though, the customer is the expert on his or her business needs and the solutions he or she feels most comfortable with.

“Before this weekend, I’d been struggling in my life to unlock hidden potential I KNEW was there but couldn’t find in order to get to the next level. I used a resistance free sales approach based on this lesson the next morning to close the single largest deal in my career.”

—Jeff Heilman, Silicon Valley Entrepreneur

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