

Recipes for Sales Success

By John Vamos

The lifeblood of any small business is sales. Even if a business is large enough to have a dedicated sales team, the ultimate responsibility for meeting targets and for relationship management always rests with the business owner.

Many people confuse the functions of marketing and selling, but they should be viewed as completely separate. I define marketing as anything that gets you the name of a potential customer and sales is anything that happens after the name has been obtained. Marketing has many components; branding, lead generation, public relations and advertising to name a few. None of these functions should be carried through into the sales process.

Most people believe that successful sales people are born being good at differentiating selling from marketing. I disagree. Sales skills can be developed although if consistently high sales results are to be achieved, they must be supported by a number of personal characteristics.

To describe these characteristics I use the acronym **PROBE**:

Persistence

See relationships as a series of steps and move between these steps at the speed the customer indicates is appropriate. Today there are a number of contact management software products on the market that ensure there can be perfect communication between a sales person and a client.

Rational

This is where sales people can get a bad reputation! There may be many valid reasons why a prospect is not able to make a commitment, so only expect what is reasonable. And if you see signs that the client is uncomfortable, don't ignore them, no matter how much you want the sale.

Optimistic

A positive outlook is what prospects and clients enjoy. Optimism is a sign of control and confidence.

Belief

A genuine belief in the product is paramount. The sales person must believe that his or her product or service can provide a genuine solution to a client's problem, if they are to be truly convincing, both verbally and non-verbally.

Enthusiasm

You can not convince anyone to do anything without it!

The Sales Process

There have been innumerable books written on successful sales techniques and over the years I have selected different aspects of these and developed my own sales model.

The first task for a skilful salesperson is to discover enough about a potential customer to see if they are likely to buy your product or service. Qualify them early in the process and don't waste time if it is apparent that your product or service is not appropriate for the prospective customer.

Then move on to what I call "the deal before the deal". Put a time frame on the first meeting. Explain that you are asking for a certain amount of time, and if at the end of this time the potential customer cannot see the relevance of what you are offering, he or she can terminate the meeting.



Many years ago I was introduced to a sales cycle outlined by Wilson Learning, which still has merit.

The Wilson Learning sales cycle had four stages:

Stage One

Relax potential customers, showing a genuine interest in them and begin to establish trust. Without trust it is impossible to move on to the next step.

Stage Two

Why will people buy unless they have a problem that needs solving? You need to *disturb* them. From intelligent questioning, the problem being experienced by clients will emerge naturally, their impact or threat becoming self-evident to the prospect.

Stage Three

This involves showing how your product or service can fix the problem and bring *relief*.

Stage Four

Close – This is where most of us start to quiver, hold back and many of us needlessly lose the sale!!!

The only comment I'd make to the Wilson Learning cycle is about this hesitance to "Close".

Why? Because if steps one to three have been performed properly, I've found there is no need for the sales person to fear closing the sale. Once you have worked through *relaxation*, *disturbance* and *relief*, the only conclusion the prospect can make is that he or she needs to buy – and self-close.

