

OH! YOU DIDN'T REALIZE YOU WERE IN SALES?

By Margery Miller

We are selling ourselves all the time.

How well would you do if you never bothered to “sell” your features and benefits to your family, friends or coworkers? Many think there is something wrong with “manipulating” people—that it is underhanded. The truth is, that we all do our best to work situations into the way we want them. Those who are better at it, usually win out, leaving the rest to wonder what happened.

It doesn't matter if you are selling a product or service, are a teacher, a librarian, a mother, a sister, a lawyer or police officer. Every time you are in front of someone, you are actually on a sales call. So, think about the following information and see how it could fit into your life.

There are three main components of a sales call: 1) the purpose of the call; 2) how to make a connection during the call; and 3) how to continue the relationship after the call. Let's look at how it works.

- 1) **the purpose of the call.** Even though your primary product is yourself, there needs to be a reason for your being in front of the person. What do you have to offer? How would you know if they would want it? The first thing is to find out enough about them to be able to talk in terms of their values. Ultimately, the only reason a company or individual would want your product or service is if it helps them grow their business, or enhances their quality of life. If you don't know enough about them, how will you know if you can do that? You also need to see yourself, your product or service in a much broader scope than just “making a sale.”

For example, I work with a company in France that tutors employees of French companies in business English. If the tutor only sees her job as giving someone an English lesson, odds are that the student, or learner as they call them, would reject the imposition of having to take time away from work projects to study and attend sessions. But, if the tutor understands that she is a part of a bigger picture, enabling the client to grow their international business, and can encourage the learner to see herself as more valuable to the company by acquiring these skills, the learner is much more likely to keep a level of interest in working on English. The sales call in this case is every time the tutor works with the learner. It is part of her responsibility to keep the clients motivated to follow through on the work, not cancel appointments and learn to use English. She is selling herself and her company every day.

My own sales company markets commercial food service equipment to restaurants, hotels, schools and other institutions. We need to know all the features and benefits of our products, but we only talk about the ones that fit the needs of a particular customer. Some are interested in energy savings, others are more concerned about labor costs. By providing solutions to their problems, we help them grow their bottom line. By making sure we are aware of their issues, and responding to them, we build relationships, not just make sales.

The same thing applies when we are working in an office. If you don't sell yourself well to your co-workers, they are not likely to support you. If you see your role as growing the company, and thereby looking for ways to improve the business and help those around you do the same, you gain the position of "indispensable"—an invaluable way to be seen.

- 2) **how to make a connection during the sales call.** Some of this has already started in the first step, in discovering whether your purposes match the needs of the customer. To take it a step further requires time, focused energy and awareness. I have watched many sales people sit in front of people on the edge of their seats, obviously in a hurry to make a sale. As we all know, that is a major turn-off! So why do they do it? They have a sense of urgency, and they are unaware that the majority of sales are made among friends.

Before you appear in front of anyone, look in the mirror and ask yourself, "Would you buy a used car from this person?" Are you dressed appropriately for the situation? Are you more interested in the hot outfit you are wearing than your purpose? Are you showing respect for the people you are seeing?

Take the time to really get to know the client, customer, co-worker or friend or family member. Talk with them, not at them. Ask quality questions, and then refer back to what you have learned. Let them know you are interested in them. Listen to yourself. Do you interrupt them to make a point? Does your attention wander? Are you really focused on them? The most powerful sales people make us feel that we are the only people in the world when they are talking with us. Can you feel the energy in the room? Is it a drain, or are you feeling uplifted?

The relationship you create with people determines the results you will have with them. Do you know what interests them outside of work? If you were interviewed immediately after an encounter with a client, how much could you say about her? Do you make a concerted effort to learn a little more each time you are with her? Does she matter to you?

When people matter to you, you become more important to them.

- 3) **how to continue the relationship after the call.** The “rules of sales” used to demand a close at the end of a sales call. I prefer to see every encounter as something to be continued.

We spend almost as much energy on after the sale follow-up when we sell equipment as we do on getting the order. And, it usually takes five to eight calls before you get a first order. So, creating a way to see each other again is vital. Before you leave, find a reason to make another contact. If you can't immediately set an appointment, set a time to call back and touch base.

Start seeing your work as one long continuum, not spurts of activity. Start seeing how each encounter flows into the next one. Be clear about the value you have to offer people, whether personally or professionally, and make sure that these “features and benefits” are important to them. Think of ways to include them in your network. Do you know someone who might also be able to help them? An inclusive manner is far more attractive than an exclusive one.

It is up to you to create the relationships in your life. How well you sell yourself, first to yourself and then to others, determines the quality of those relationships. It has been said that there are three categories of people, those who make things happen ... watch things happen ... and wonder what happened. Which one describes you?

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