

The Buyer's Position

By Dan Goldberg

In spite of the fact that sales can be a very lucrative profession, closing sales on a consistent basis isn't easy. In fact when you review the steps involved, from prospecting to closing the sale, the process can sometimes be excruciating. But it doesn't have to be that way. Understanding who your are and how to interact and interpret your prospects and clients are extremely important factors that must be considered. The company buyer-user psyche is an interesting study.

If the decision-maker or major influencer in your sales cycle also happens to be the user (either personally or as a supervisor) you need to understand how your product or service will impact on his or her position within the company.

While it's true that a positive personal buyer-seller relationship is always an asset, it's also true that you must understand the features and benefits of your products and/or services. Even more important is developing an understanding of your prospects' needs and desires and being able to identify factors that will motivate the prospect to buy. However, we all know that these concepts have little value if your prospect perceives that what you are selling will negatively impact on his or her position.

Selling is a process that involves more than just showing up, looking good and dumping information on your prospect. If that's all you do, don't expect to walk out with a sale.

Achieving consistent sales requires a step by step plan. And one of those very critical steps is determining whether or not your product or service is perceived as a stop sign or a green light in the buyer-user's agenda.

Let's take a brief look at a real situation that illustrates this point. Years ago I owned a company called For Eyes Optical. Not only did we sell to the public, we also what would be today considered a self contained PPO. The sales team or I would present our concepts to corporate CEO's, H/R execs, heads of unions and offer them special programs for their employees.

One sales experience turned out to be extremely instructive. We were meeting with a CEO and other key company people who all responded enthusiastically to our proposal. The price was right, accessibility fantastic and a proven service program was already in place. We were sure this one was in the bag.

After all, we'd done our homework, or so we thought. I had followed the steps in my sales routine and everything seemed to be moving ahead quite smoothly. Except for one thing. I made an assumption (a very bad thing to do in sales). I assumed that because our program was good for the company it was therefore automatically good for the CEO as well. It proved to be incorrect.

There was one mitigating factor that could have created a major political problem for the CEO. If he "bought into our program", his position would be in jeopardy.

In spite of all the man-hours and money spent on trying to get the business, a valuable lesson was learned - above all, people buy, or in this case don't buy, for reasons beyond the obvious.

That's why it's smart to make a list of qualifying questions for your prospects or clients before you initially speak with them. When the opportunity to ask them presents itself, it's best to ask them in an easy going conversational manner.

Those questions should lead to answers that paint a relatively clear picture of the situation. The answers should give you the knowledge needed to make the sale or decide not to waste time pursuing it further.

And remember that if you don't find out how what you are selling impacts on the buyer's position, you might as well go fishing without a rod, reel or net.

Finding out is easy if you don't forget to ask.