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## A role for salespeople **Helping customers navigate the pandemic's emotional challenges**

By  
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Now that we're once again getting open for business, this raises the question of what we'll be talking about with customers. Millions of Americans remain unemployed, more are still on furlough, while others are underemployed. Countless businesses are on the brink and others are going over the edge. Too many families will remain in the grasp of financial hardship for months, some for years.

And then there's coping with upended lives, dashed dreams, sleepless nights, endless worries, mind-boggling stress, as well as the painful after effects of social isolation. In such circumstances, who would dare minimize, let alone turn a blind eye, to the realities of life for so many?

If this picture is even close to accurate of where we find ourselves today, then talking with people can be a helpful task, one that deserves to be near the top of the list of our priorities. What's needed isn't difficult to accomplish. It's simply giving people an opportunity to talk about what's important to them, to share their thoughts, feelings, and, yes, their fears. We may be resilient, but all of us can benefit from support and understanding.

Even though being helpful is rather simple, not many of us find it easy to speak about much other than sports, the weather, or the boss's limitations. This is where professional salespeople can come into the picture to play a role. Unfortunately, as it turns out, those in sales, are both an undervalued and underused business resource.

When it comes to connecting with people, few others are better prepared than are salespeople for engaging others in helpful and sympathetic conversations. Before rolling your eyes and passing this off as another crazy idea, consider the following:

- Except for those in sales, there are few among us who are trained and skilled listeners, who know how to put others at ease. This is how they earn their living.
- Salespeople know how easy it is to turn off customers by talking themselves right out of a sale.

- They are astute at asking questions that give customers permission to express themselves.
- Although they can be accused of being overly zealous and pushy, experience has taught those in sales the value of patience.
- Because their antennae are always up, they're sensitive to a person's feelings. By coming on too strong or inappropriately, they know they will drive prospects away.
- They recognize that customer connection and intimacy are at the heart of selling.
- They know that telling a good story is one of the best ways to engaging customers. At the same time, they learned not to talk about themselves.
- Salespeople also know why it's important to slow down and remain silent so customers have time to think.

But this is not all. To their credit salespeople don't wallow in pessimism. When something goes wrong—and it always does, they dust themselves off and make another call. Even on the darkest day, they are (thankfully) upbeat and optimistic. The salesperson's cup is more than half full.

All of this adds up to one conclusion. Those in sales are an incredibly valuable resource for doing good at a time when many are isolated and alone in one way or another and long for someone to notice them, whether it's in the course of the day, around the neighborhood, at work or anywhere else, including making a sale.

This suggests that there are always opportunities if you seek them out, even in trying times. And this is certainly one of them. Even though you may be preoccupied with your own issues, it can also be that there are customers who need to know you are concerned about them and their well-being.

Expecting anyone to change the world is certainly asking too much. Even so, as a salesperson, you can demonstrate your commitment to helping customers by putting your skills to work beyond closing sales. You can make a difference by engaging your customers in such a way that enhances your relationship with them. It may not change the world, but it will help make it better for them and help your business thrive.

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