

Contact:
John Graham
GrahamComm
jgraham@grahamcomm.com
617-774-9759

Why Salespeople Don't Make More Sales

By
John Graham

Things don't go well for some salespeople. Simply put, they say they want to sell, but their numbers tell a different story. What's missing? What needs to change?

The answer may rest in how they view their job. We can call it *task tunnel vision*. It's common throughout business organizations, including sales, and here's how to spot it: "That's not what I'm hired to do. I want to sell. Just leave me alone and let someone else do all that other stuff."

Whether salespeople recognize it or not, they are like many others who are self-defining when it comes to their job. They erect an impenetrable mental wall that stops them from venturing outside their self-imposed prison. All they want to do is make sales. Ironically, their mindset has the opposite effect; they fail to get the order.

The way to break free from *task tunnel vision* is to focus on what customers look for in a salesperson:

1. Customers expect a salesperson to be their advocate

The role of the salesperson is more necessary today than ever. It's a fact. With everyone having incredibly instant access to information, it may seem counter-intuitive to suggest that salespeople are needed more than ever—except that it isn't!

There is nothing worse than making a purchase only to discover that it's not what we wanted, even though the promise of the Internet is to make us better informed so consumers won't make buying mistakes. The sheer volume of returns from online purchases alone, puts that idea to rest.

Confusion and doubt make the salesperson's role is more critical than ever. With the complexity and plethora of today's products and services, what customers need (and deserve) are advocates, those whose job it is to help them sort things out so they can make decisions that are in their best interest.

This isn't to suggest that salespeople pretend they're "consultants." That's not only fakery, it's also what makes customers suspicious of salespeople and gives them a bad name.

Some may think that the role of customer advocate is too much to ask of those who sell—and it may be for some salespeople. It isn't, however, for those who believe trust is the basis for earning the order. It's an opportunity to be more than a huckster, a true professional.

2. *Customers expect answers to their questions*

Whatever else the Internet may have done, it's made us more inquisitive. As one marketing director said, "People are always searching for answers. And whoever provides the best answers to the most questions at the end of the day will be the winner."

If this is true, then why are so many salespeople in such a rush to launch their sales spiel? Are they just in a hurry or are they afraid that customers will start asking questions?

It's time to drop the sales presentation and to turn it into a customer-focused FAQ session. It might start this way: "Here are some questions customers ask, along with my answers." When you let customers know you value questions, it's easy to shift into asking them for theirs. When this happens, sales presentations become interactive learning experiences that satisfy both the salesperson and the customer.

3. *Customers expect to be offered choices*

Researchers have long shown that too many choices lead to being overwhelmed. If you've gone to a paint store no one needs to tell you about "choice paralysis." After about five minutes looking at paint chips, you want to get out of there.

However, faced with too few options makes us want more before deciding. We may even feel we're being forced into doing something we may come to regret. Yet, this is what happens when salespeople skew presentations so they lead straight to one conclusion. When this happens, customers don't buy, they rebel.

So, ask yourself how many choices can you get your head around without getting overloaded. Some say about six or seven. But even with that number, the task is to narrow the field down further. This is when the salesperson job is to help their customer make an appropriate decision. The scenario might go something like this:

- Let's go through the options. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each one?
- Would you eliminate any? OK, we have several left. Let's discuss and make a choice.
- Are you comfortable going with this choice?

This is a quick way to narrow down the options to two or three so the customer can settle on the one that's best for them.

While making sales is the goal, how you get there may be the most important part of the journey.

John Graham of GrahamComm is a marketing and sales strategy consultant and business writer. He is the creator of "Magnet Marketing," and publishes a free monthly eBulletin, "No Nonsense Marketing & Sales Ideas." Contact him at jgraham@grahamcomm.com or johnrgraham.com.