

CAN ANYBODY SELL...?



I don't know about you but it's not often I meet an effective sales person.

It isn't the buyer's fault. Buyers, guess what, generally want to buy. And they can even buy without being tiresome or difficult if they are helped to buy rather than sold to.

What's the difference? The difference is empathy with the buyer and an understanding of the buying process. Grasp these two essentials and selling becomes a problem solving skill that **anyone** can employ.

When, as a buyer, I meet sales people I simply want them to follow a few simple rules.

Let me outline them.

MAKE ME FEEL SPECIAL

Demonstrate that you have done some research and know something of my market sector, my business, my organisation and, perhaps, even me! Given my job and the reality of current trading, show an understanding of my likely challenges and goals. Speak to me strategically, demonstrate an understanding of underlying commercial, business and financial issues. Don't bluff, don't show off but do show me that you have taken the trouble to bring more than just you and your product to the meeting.

DISCOVER MY NEEDS

As a buyer I wouldn't be meeting with you if I didn't have needs. Needs that neither I, nor others within my organisation, can meet. So please ask me about what I'm trying to achieve, how I am trying to achieve it, my priorities, my opinions, previous experiences of other suppliers and products, what's worked, what hasn't and why. Identify any major financial constraints. Ask how would I measure the success of a product, service and supplier and how that success would impact upon my business.

Ask me about time frames, others involved in the decision and how the buying process works. Identify who else you might need to talk to. Don't sell. Question and listen so that you can build up the picture. I need your help to tell me the true reality of my situation, to verbalise what the solution might look like and to understand how that solution can be best brought to bear to achieve my goals.

CONSULT WITH ME

Take each issue in turn and help me come to a conclusion with which I am comfortable. Where necessary educate me (but don't be patronising). Simplify issues and problems. If appropriate, sketch diagrams, use illustrations, explain what is (or is not) happening right now and why. Give me advice; use other customers as case studies so that I don't feel alone. Reassure me and give me time to understand

what you are saying. Some of it might be a surprise and I'll need to take it in.

CONFIRM WITH ME WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN NEXT

The issues may be so straightforward that you can prepare a proposal immediately.

Or it may be you have to meet with others in my organisation for a more in depth study of my needs. Fine, give me good reasons and I'll help you involve others.

Perhaps you need to think about it and consult with your own colleagues first. That shows you haven't got all the answers and that you want to get it right. Maybe you want to return with someone else, a specialist, to carry out further fact finding. If it makes the solution better, then again, fine. Do it.

Whichever route you suggest, do so revealing the experience and judgement that draws you to this conclusion. Show, too, that you know that I need to make the right decision the first time. And show, through every conscious and unconscious signal, that you would like to do business with me tomorrow as well as today. Understanding, openness and commitment can only increase my confidence in you.

INVOLVE ME IN THE PRESENTATION OF YOUR PROPOSAL

When you present your solutions to me don't make it a slick one-way sales pitch. Take me through your proposal a stage at a time, discuss points with me, let me put you on the spot, test you out, ask the difficult questions and pose objections. In the final analysis, this is the only way that I can assess the quality of your proposal and discover if I can trust you.

When you've presented your proposal then please leave me alone. If you will, ask when it would be convenient to call and enquire if we need any more information or advice. But don't pester me; let **me** get back to **you**. I have to own the initiative in order to be truly committed to the decision.

The key to me buying from you is that I respect you, I trust you and you have taught me to believe in the product or service you offer. I shall buy from you because during the buying process I've glimpsed how you and your organisation perform and whether you truly value me as a customer.

Talk at me, be overly smooth, drown me in product talk and feign sincerity and you'll get the response you deserve- 'Very interesting, I'll get back to you'. And of course, the chances are I won't!

Can anyone sell? In my view, all too few are capable of doing it well. Can anyone sell? The answer is "of course", because, let's face it, it's only common sense and empathy with the buyer. And all of us are buyers.