

Welcome to this issue of *The Sales Solution*, the semi-monthly sales tip from [Sales Solutions](#), the one stop for all your sales training and coaching needs.

This issue's tip is in the [Communication](#) category.

Are you listening?

What's the traditional image most people have of sales people? Great gabbers and slick talkers, able to use their verbal prowess to finesse even the most reluctant prospects into buying. Those of you who have seen the movie *GlenGary GlenRoss* know what I'm talking about; a crew of desperate, veteran, old-school sales people trying to talk their way into a sale - with no success. While this method may work in some 1-call close situations (selling vacuum cleaner or encyclopedias, for example), it is a recipe for disaster in all other situations. Why? Let's investigate.

In most business-to-business selling situations, buyers are looking for more than a product or service. They're looking to address a nagging problem, or to achieve a corporate or departmental goal. Such situations are, by their very nature, more complex than the 1-call close alluded to above. Multiple decision makers with differing agendas, shifting and competing priorities, and competitive pressures dictate the need for a higher level of skill on the part of the seller, if he or she is to be consistently successful. Now, common sense tells us that you can only solve a customer's problems, can only help them achieve their goals, if you know what those problems and goals are. And you can only know what their problems and goals are if *they* tell *you* what they are, and you *listen* to what they are telling you. We are all born with two ears but only one mouth - maybe that's nature's way of telling us that we're supposed to do more listening than talking. And adopting that discipline is, in fact, what separates great sellers from mediocre and poor ones.

Now, this may all seem quite obvious - and certainly not deserving of an entire Sales Tip. If that is the case, why is it, then, whenever we get in front of a customer, the first thing we do after the small talk is done is whip out our brochure or fire up our Powerpoint and start showing the customer what great widgets we have? We do it because (a) we are familiar with our offering, and we feel comfortable talking about that with which we are most familiar, (b) we assume if the customer has agreed to meet with us they are interested in what we have to show them, and (c) we don't know any better - the necessity of asking questions to uncover a customer's objectives has never been explained or impressed upon us.

This creates a few problems for us as sellers. First, customers aren't really interested in what you have to show them *per se*; they want to know, and *want to be convinced*, that what you have to show them can solve their problems or help them achieve their goals. So if you start out talking about product features while your customer is listening for solutions to problems, you're going to have a communication problem on your hand right off the bat. Second, being familiar and comfortable with our offering is all well and good, but that and

two cents won't buy you a cup of coffee. Customers are not interested in *your* comfort; they're interested in their own. And if *you* don't make them comfortable, well, guess what? Someone else will. And as for the last reason, well, ignorance is *not* bliss in the sales game; the seller who does understand the importance of asking questions, who has learned what questions to ask, and now *asks* them, is the seller who is empowered to bring home the bacon, to seal the deal.

So, what can we do about this?

Just as you got familiar with your product by studying it and asking questions about it, so to must you get familiar with your customers - by studying and learning about their business before even contacting them, and by *asking questions* to determine what their problems are, and what they hope to achieve by investing in your solution and partnering with your company. You must strive to become as familiar with your customers as you are with your offering. Then tell them *that* you and your offering can help them achieve their goals, *how* you can, and *why* your company and your offering are the best choice.

Action item:

Old habits die hard - but die they must. It will take some work. It will force you to leave your comfort zone. But that - no surprise - is the only way we grow. The hiker who is unwilling to exert himself will never enjoy the splendid vistas from the peak. The seller who is unwilling to master the art of listening, and its precursor, skillful questioning, will never achieve the level of success he or she could. So here's what I'm asking you to do in your dealings with customer: Commit to talking less, and listening more. Next time you meet with a client, ask lots of questions to find out what they want to achieve. By asking the right questions, you'll learn a great deal not only about what they want to achieve, but what *you* need to do to ensure that yours will be the one solution they select to help them achieve it. Then, once you've gotten all the information you need, it's your turn to do the lion's share of the talking - about benefits first, supported then by features (during the first part of your meeting - the "information-gathering" part, the percentage of time your customer should be speaking/you should be listening is about 80%).

Let me know how this exercise works for you. If done properly, you should find that your customers are "handing you the key" to opening many more mutually profitable, long-term relationships. **Send your examples to me and I'll publish the best one** (I have to highlight this because no one has sent me any!), so we can all learn from them.

Good selling!

Craig

Sales Solutions can work with your organization to implement what was discussed in this issue, translating the knowledge into hard dollars for your company. To learn how, to explore any other issue, or if you would like to explore creating a program custom-tailored to your requirements, contact us at the number below, or email us at info@sales-solutions.biz. You may also want to review the [Sales Solutions Course Catalogue](http://www.sales-solutions.biz/courseofferings.shtml) at www.sales-solutions.biz/courseofferings.shtml.

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