

The Art of Selling

By Sarah Ripley

I could truthfully state that I was a door-to-door salesperson—for one whole day.

I shadowed a security system salesperson to gain an accurate view of different sales techniques and potential customer reactions and interactions, and to gauge success rates of and attitudes toward this type of direct marketing.

It was a long but educational day.

It prompted the question of which sales techniques work well and which do not work so well. Often, a business's lack of turnover is not due to dwindling inquiry, but improvable conversion by frontline salespeople. That is, the salesperson has not transferred enough confidence to the buyer to make the sale.

Sales Slip-Ups

According to Roy H. Williams, the “Wizard of Ads,” “True selling is never based on pressure, deception, trickery or gimmicks. True selling is nothing more, or nothing less, than a transfer of confidence.”

Face-to-face selling often is perceived as more successful, because the seller is able to speak directly to customers and transfer confidence to them in a straightforward manner. Door-to-door selling is said to have originated in the 1800s, when traveling salesmen first started visiting homes in towns across America, walking or riding door-to-door, selling everything from scissors to perfume. I wonder if those salesmen of days gone by had a similar experience to mine.

Some key observations I noted during that day included:

People often are suspicious when opening their doors. This immediately puts you at a disadvantage before you have even opened your mouth. When potential customers engage a selling situation, they either will enter a store or visit a website. This puts the customer in control. When people are door stepped, they have no idea what to expect, and this element of the unknown is enough to scare many off.

Salespeople are trained for and rely heavily on the “urgency factor” in their sales pitches. That is, salespeople put forward a “special offer” that is only available then and there. Research shows that just 2% of the population on average is in the market for your product today. Furthermore, the higher the value of the item, the less likely it is that the purchase can be made on impulse. As a rule, as the value of an item increases, so should the time you allow for decision-making. “Sales resistance is what happens when a customer is asked to jump too deeply into the well too quickly,” according to Williams.

Salespeople leave the customer with nothing. There was a lack of supporting material, such as an informational brochure or business card, left before leaving the premises. This meant that a customer had to purchase on the spot, as attempting to explain all of the benefits to another household member, or simply mulling over the products prior to making a decision to purchase, would be difficult without additional

printed or website information and contact details.

The sales pitch was company and product heavy, and was not directed to the needs of the potential buyer. In the same way that it is irritating when people just want to talk about themselves, a sales interaction that does not have the salesperson “buying in,” but is, instead, business- or product-based, makes it difficult for the customer to see how this product will indeed improve their lives or solve their problems.

“Buying in” is an empathetic approach to selling that enables you to cut through to your customers’ feelings and see the world through their eyes. This requires taking a genuine interest in them and their best interests. Moreover, [it shows them] how you can help them achieve their goals and aspirations in some way,” said Trent Leyshan, founder and CEO of BOOM! Sales. “For many companies, buying in is too hard. They just don’t make the time; nor do they possess the desire to create and develop meaningful conversations with customers—the dialogue is all about themselves and little else.”

Salespeople were reluctant to give an accurate price. The strategy was this: Tell the customer the system was “free” at the front door, and use this as a way to gain entry into the home. All other details were worked out later. The price was only outlined after the sales pitch and was cleverly disguised. Often, the first thing that customers

Tips for making the most of door-to-door sales presentations

would ask was the price, but the salesperson would never divulge it until the end. This immediately casts suspicion on the integrity of both the salesperson and the business.

Follow up is not encouraged. The policies for selling this campaign did not encourage follow up, either for someone still debating a purchase or for those who went ahead with a purchase. This is an example of a “one-off-buy-it-now-or-miss-out-and-never-hear-from-us-again” situation.

Of these six observations, perhaps the two most glaringly negative aspects of this kind of selling strategy were the reluctance of the salesperson to name a price, and asking a customer to commit on the spot.

As a salesperson, customers will undoubtedly ask you questions. Take that as a good sign. But you should always try to answer any question as asked. This includes the price. Your reluctance to name a price when asked rings warning bells in the minds of customers—they will think, “If it were a good price, they would just answer my question.”

A reluctance to divulge price, and then further straining the relationship by asking for a commitment, is like proposing marriage on the first date: If you move too quickly, you will scare a customer off. The best way to operate in these situations is to ask for a small investment commitment first. Start small, then increase.

Tips for the Future

With this in mind, here are the ways I would change my one day of door-to-door sales if I had the chance:

Send out a courtesy letter. I would advise the residents of when I will be in the area on which day and time, and of the purpose of my visit. I may even hand write the address, just for the added touch of personalization and to increase the chances of it being opened. This will reduce anxiety for those opening the door, create an air of familiarity prior to the sale and act as a general consideration.

Outline in this letter what the benefits to the customer are. The letter should tell them how the product or service I am selling will make their lives better. Follow up with this during your meeting. Make it about them—not you, the product or the company.

During the interaction with customers, tell stories—real ones. Stories are powerful. They make the interaction more personal and real.

Be transparent. I would tell the person about my commission, my

successes and my failures. This makes me more credible, and therefore more likeable, and ultimately someone a customer is more likely to buy from.

I don't think I will be taking up a career in door-to-door selling anytime soon, and the above examples are but a

small sample of the various techniques to explore when looking to increase your selling conversion.

“Your customer will buy whichever product she feels best about. Make sure she feels best about yours,” Williams said. That starts with you—the salesperson. *wgp*

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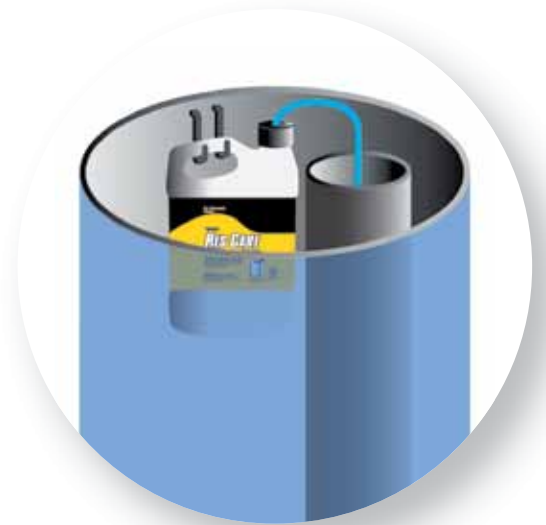
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