

Breaking the Taboo

What to do when customers bring up the topics of politics or religion

By Kelly R. Thompson

It seems like we are always in the middle of political season in this country, but there are times, like now, when politics seem to be the only thing anyone talks about. As we get nearer to the presidential primary elections and then the general election, the taboo topic of politics becomes next to impossible to avoid.

Religion is another taboo topic in business. While politics might be in your face constantly during the lead-up to an election, the topic of religion can come up at any time. Recently, I was speaking with one of the sales professionals Moti-Vitality hired and trained. She told me about a customer who stopped her in the middle of her presentation to ask what her religion was. She happens to practice the same religion as the customer, but it made me think about how uncomfortable it might have been if that were not the case.

Everyone tells us that we are supposed to avoid talking about religion and politics, and I believe that as a general rule of thumb, that is a good policy. But what do you do if your customer brings it up? Is there ever a time when it is appropriate for you to bring up one of these topics?

Not Your Story

All people who have sold in-home water treatment for any length of time have found themselves in uncomfortable or less-than-agreeable situations. I myself have seen everything from a batch of cocaine on the coffee table to what I consider extremely poor parenting. I have had to walk

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through rooms filled with dog poop. I once was asked to join hands with a family while it formed a prayer circle around a sales agreement that was on the table. While these things did not go unnoticed, it was easy to remember that I was in their home and that my job was to serve them, not judge the way they live or what they believe.

For some, it can be difficult to bite the tongue when it comes to the taboo topics. For those individuals, here is my opinion: If it is blatantly obvious that you share the same religious or political views as your customer, I would encourage dialogue. Finding common ground is hard enough as it is. If that common ground is handed to you on a platter, my suggestion is to run with it. Even in this situation, however, you should remember that it is not your story. Let the customers know you agree, if you do, but remember to let the focus remain on what they want or believe.

Even if you do not agree, you can still engage in conversation with customers in a way that encourages them to share their beliefs with you. By listening to them, you empower them, and if they feel empowered by you, they are going to be more receptive to your suggestions. Avoid debating issues with them, though. If you agree, let them know you agree. If you do not, your customer should not know it.

I am not suggesting that you betray your convictions, and I believe there is never a situation when it is appropriate to lie to your customer, or anyone else for that matter.



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But it is not your job to convince them that what they believe about religion or politics (or, frankly, any other topic) is right or wrong.

But what if you find yourself in a situation where your customer comes right out and asks about your views? It is a little easier to handle the politics question. Most customers will understand if you tell them you have tried to tune it out or that you are doing more research on a topic or candidate. There are probably a few people out there who would demand allegiance to one political party or another, but I think most would understand and move on when it comes to politics.

The topic of religion can be a bit trickier. If you walk into a house and, based on decorations and atmosphere, you are pretty sure you share a faith, I would still caution you against assuming that all of your beliefs are the same. Again, it is not your story. It is better to let them share their beliefs with you, and if you agree, simply let them know you agree. If you disagree, a sales presentation is not

the time to discuss it. Your agreement or disagreement should not impact your ability to “give more than you take” or recommend the water treatment solution that works best for the customer.

If you practice a particular faith, or if you feel strongly about a political viewpoint, I am not suggesting you run from or deny your beliefs if someone asks, but you should be prepared to accept the fact that some customers will base their investment decisions on your beliefs rather than the merits of your service or product. I would personally be willing to lose that customer rather than betray my convictions, but that is a personal choice. I would rather simply avoid the topics of religion and politics during a sales situation and focus on serving my customers and my industry with honesty and integrity, regardless of what they or I believe. **WQP**

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