



“CustomerCentric Selling® Top Ten Selling Tips”

- Jim Lewis, Founder & President, Princeton Sales Partners, LLC

Sales tip #1: Stop giving presentations.

Today's classic sales call often involves a few minutes of aimless chit-chat, followed by the salesperson dimming the lights and cranking up their projector. But does this really work? The PowerPoint thing is a little out of hand. The laptop should be left in the trunk for the first call on any senior executive. Few presentations are effective because they rely on the "spray and pray" approach: Don't tell show them 50 features and hope five might "stick." They may not be awake when you finish.

Sales tip #2: Start having conversations.

The best sales calls are conversations, not presentations. And the best conversations are not about last night's game or how good/bad/indifferent the weather has been. They're about the nagging business issues that directly affect your prospect.

Using sales-ready messaging, this conversation can start like this, "I don't know about you, but many CFOs I've spoken with have told me they're concerned about..."

This kind of opening instantly establishes a salesperson's credibility, and signals his willingness to have a meaningful conversation.

Sales tip #3: Stop giving opinions.

Nobody likes someone else doing all the talking. Yet most salespeople hog all the air time. They talk non-stop and bombard their prospects with a barrage of unsubstantiated claims and hype. There's a huge credibility gap when a salesperson just spews product knowledge. No wonder everyone feels uneasy when they're being "sold": It's a monolog where they can't get a word in edge-wise.

People love to buy, but hate feeling sold. Most people resent having a seller try to control the conversation. We don't even like our loved ones telling us what we should do, much less a salesperson that we've never met before.

Sales tip #4: Start asking questions.

It's always more effective to ask intelligent question and discover what business issues concern the buyer. Asking questions doesn't seem like selling to either party, and it means the salesperson naturally yields the floor. The best salespeople have learned to leverage their expertise by asking questions, not providing unsolicited opinions.

Developing these questions for various job titles gives a salesperson both 'artificial intelligence' to help get on the same wavelength as the executive he's speaking with, and 'artificial patience' so he doesn't rush into prescribing before he has diagnosed.

Sales tip #5: Focus on solutions, not relationships.

Any salesperson who doesn't understand how to relate their offering to the business needs of their clients falls back on building the relationship. But that won't often help them land a sale, especially a big-ticket sale. The best way to start a good relationship is to solve a business problem for your buyer. They will think fondly of you after that.

This can mean saying something like, "Here are the four problem areas that our offering has helped customers with. If you have any of those problems, let's talk. And if not, I'm perfectly willing to leave."

Imagine a world where every salesperson operated that way! Our impressions of the profession would be vastly different.

Sales tip #6: Don't lead with products.

In any sales situation, curb your natural instinct to start talking about how great your software is. Instead, listen for the client to start articulating his own goals, problems or needs. By using sales-ready messaging, you can detect which parts of your offering appeal to him, and which leave him cold.

Most software salespeople bring out their product far too early in the sales cycle. We believe the product should stay in the trunk until you've diagnosed the current situation, presented some usage scenarios, and the buyer has actually responded to some of those scenarios.

At your next meeting, you can bring out the product, but only demo the features that actually engage the buyer. If you do this too soon, you risk appearing pushy and impatient, just like those lying, cheating salespeople we all know.

Sales tip #7: Lead with business usage.

One sure symptom of marketing and Sales not being on the same page is when new salespeople are given "training" that stuffs them full of feature lists, without relating them to any business use or benefits for those features.

A new salesperson will stumble through many calls caught in another huge disconnect: the gap between what they heard on their training and what they hear from their

prospects. Since no one in marketing has connected the dots for them, they have to do it themselves, and not everyone can.

The truly intuitive salespeople—the natural 10 percent—do manage to figure out how to relate their offering to the business problems of their clients. In most companies, they do this by supplementing their normal sales training with picking the brains many other people in the company.

After asking questions to draw out the prospect's business issues, these salespeople use their added knowledge to paint a vivid picture of what their prospect could DO with the software. They help their buyers see how it could help them achieve a goal, solve a problem, or satisfy a need they have articulated for themselves.

This kind of salesperson isn't manipulating anyone. They're helping their clients in a consultative way, and building an unshakable vision of the value of their offering.

Sales tip #8: Use verbs, not nouns.

Most salespeople in software firms today are trained by product marketing people to talk about the product and what it will do. But this is actually dis-empowering the sales process.

When a salesperson boasts, "Our robust and integrated SFA application will dramatically improve your forecasting accuracy!" they are begging their listeners to ask a simple question in response: How?

If your product is a disembodied "It" that can do so many wonderful things, the next logical step is to start talking features. This is the product-centric approach.

But your prospect isn't thinking like that. He's thinking: "What can I *do* with it?" He wants to hear a story about someone who used your product to achieve a goal he can relate to. Use verbs, and inject human content into your conversation with stories.

Sales tip #9: Seek out business people, not users.

You are delegated to the level you sound like. So if you start talking about features, you are quickly ushered out of the office of a C-level executive and shuffled off to the IT manager. Or even worse you get delegated to users with no buying power. They'll be happy to watch your demos. Just don't expect them to sign any POs.

For every prospect, at least three or four sales people have that company in their sales forecast. A sure way to win what he calls "a silver medal" is to respond to an RFP and help a low-level buyer round out their obligatory three quotes—after they're already made up their mind not to buy from you.

Sales tip #10: Send a follow up letter after each sales call.

This letter or email is a significant part of the CustomerCentric Selling® model. In it, you carefully summarize the conversation you had with your prospect, and the potential they saw in it. You must help them articulate how they realized they could achieve a goal, solve a problem, or satisfy a need with your offering.

This is a critical part of the sales cycle. When the buyer sees their vision clearly outlined on a piece of paper, they will generally forward it to every other significant person on the buying committee.

Your salesperson isn't there to influence the discussion when the buying committee meets. But helping his contacts serve as your champion by actually putting words in their mouths—or at least down on paper—puts your firm way ahead of any competitor who didn't do likewise.

For more information about how we teach salespeople these skills you can reach us at the following address:

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