

Selling Starts When the Customer Says “No!”

and negotiating begins when you say “Hello!”

by

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“No!” is the most painful, the most frustrating and the most common response that a seller receives from customers or prospects. But psychology teaches us that “No” is what first comes to mind when we are solicited. “No” is more easily said spontaneously than “Yes”, either to protect ourselves from the unknown, from fear of losing control, from fear of engaging, or for any other reason. “No” is a natural reflex. Salespeople, especially those young in the profession, dread this response. However, when a client tells you “Yes” right away, or very quickly, you are actually not in the process of selling. It is the client that is buying. It’s not by provocation and it’s not to make the act of selling more difficult than it is, but I strongly advocate that “No!” should create a feeling of joy because it is the “No” that gives salespeople the true meaning of their job and the opportunity to demonstrate their talent. In truth, the challenge and the beauty of selling starts with “No!”

Successful selling requires a relationship of trust with your client, which I refer to as “the alliance”, a concept borrowed from coaching. The alliance starts with your very first meeting and must be based on authenticity, respect and empathy - three qualities that are key to successful customer experiences. Successful selling also relies on a specific mindset: one of not accepting – in theory – things as they are. One of not stopping at the first contradiction and looking at the bigger picture when faced with a refusal. One of understanding what is beyond appearances, understanding others, their motivations and their reasons for accepting or refusing what is proposed to them. This mindset is based on empathy, a quality and competence essential in sales. I insist on the term competence because empathy can be learned and developed. It is not up to you to put yourself in the client’s place saying “if I was in your position, here is what I

would do”, but rather to help the client by asking yourself “if I was the client, what could I do?” Empathy is the ability to mentally and emotionally identify with others, to understand their point of view and to feel their feelings. That is the true nature of empathy.

Thus, empathy is at the heart of all sales success. To summarize in a few words, *Empathy is to Negotiation what Charisma is to Leadership*. And negotiation’s place in the sales process is not what most sales people think. Contrary to widespread thought, sales is an element of the negotiation process, and not the reverse. Negotiation begins when you say “Hello!” to your client. The way you present yourself, the way you establish the first contact and engage in the first discussions, positions you in your client’s mind and in their perception of the relationship that could develop between you. Even if this perception is not initially conscious, it develops very quickly and will determine, to a large extent, the emotions that will subsequently be expressed during the course of the sales relationship, and the quality of the alliance. Of course this process occurs in the same way for you.

The initial perception you have of your client, and the emotional, intellectual and instinctive positioning that you will establish in your relationship, happens right away. Yet, for the moment, the question of buying or selling something hasn’t even come up! The selling will begin later, when a need has been expressed, a solution starts to be put together and a common desire to cooperate is confirmed, without a commitment to signing a contract and finalizing a deal. However, negotiations have already begun. Managing this first contact effectively is therefore essential, and is one of the three vital facts that prevail over the negotiation process and its success: the perception of your client, the trust that you inspire and your capacity to maintain this trust.

In “Authentic Selling: How to boost your sales performance by being yourself”, we explain and share real life examples of the role that perception plays at the beginning of establishing a sales relationship, how trust is at the heart of the customer experience and how to co-build a successful sales strategy over the long-term based on a solid alliance with your client.

To learn more about these and other sales performance essentials visit <http://www.theauthenticsellingbook.com>