Relationship Selling by Jack Daly

A sales professional is someone who
1) Gets business from a prospect who is already committed to someone else
2) Helps his or her business sources to reach their full potent
3**) Constantly upgrades his or her clientele**

And there in lies a problem. How do you gain the attention of these attractive prospects? How do you overcome their commitment to another supplier? How do you combat their indifference to wanting to see you?

A core theme of the Relationship Selling system is that if two people want to work together, the details won't stand in their way. Another key idea is that success with a client comes by giving "value-added" service. You accomplish this by delivering more than your client expected when he or she decided to try your service.

"Golden handcuffs" tie business sources to you. Your image, knowledge, sensitivity, attitude, and success create those bonds.

You become someone's business partner because they discover it is in their best interest to work with you. Another way to say this is that a sales professional helps his or her clients be more successful.

Building a relationship starts by overcoming their indifference toward you even before your first meeting together. You shouldn't call on a probable prospect unless you have "pre-marketed" yourself.

A good approach campaign, in which you pre-market yourself, changes the acceptance rating considerably. Create a positive image in your prospect's minds by sending them helpful ideas and general market information. The greater the positive image you build, the greater your success will be.

PATH TO SUCCESS

Sales success begins at the bottom. Our first objective is to define the highest value needs of the prospect. To do this we must conduct a meaningful interview in a favorable environment.

When calling prospects for an appointment, or just before reconfirming the time and place, ask if they would reserve their conference room for your meeting. Tell your prospect that you will have some things to demonstrate, and that the conference room would be helpful.

Our real purpose is to get the prospect away from his or her telephone during the interview. At that time you will want to determine four primary things:

1) Highest value needs (HVNs) held by the prospect
2) Social style of the person
3) Current relationships with competitors
4) Objections to be resolved

Professionals never recommend an action until they have fully determined the problem, opportunity, or need in the relationship. How would you feel towards a physician who prescribed a medicine prior to conducting a thorough physical? You might sue for malpractice a lawyer who suggested language for your will without determining your wishes.

Interviewing For Results

But when you call on someone, do you "show up and throw up"? Do you dump product information on them? We all know that traditional salespeople talk too much. Relationship sales professionals listen - and listen - and listen! A salesperson that shows up and throws up also should be sued for malpractice.

There is a considerable difference between a traditional and possibly manipulative salesperson and a relational, non-manipulative one.

Traditional salespeople spend most of their time on pitching and selling features. But RELATIONSHIP SELLING focuses on finding customer needs and problems and offering solutions to meet those needs. Less emphasis and time is devoted to aggressive selling and more to building relationships and providing value to the customer.

It is suggested that we spend the same amount of time in an interview as we are doing now - our emphasis should be on information gathering and "needs analysis" rather than pitching features. When you are in front of a prospect, how much time do you talk and how much time do you listen? It is important to remember that the listener controls the interview.

We don't sell our products or services to someone unless they perceive it is in their personal interest to have us do so. Therefore, we must determine their interests and highest value needs.

Once we know those needs, we know that we will do business with him or her . We just don't know how long it will take to do so.

Fulfilling Unmet Needs

Moving up the critical path, we next determine our prospects social style. We need to be sensitive to a prospect's style, so that we can prepare an appealing presentation for him or her.

When asking about a prospect's current business sources, find out the strength of those relationships. You already should be aware of any unmet needs.

While interviewing someone you will be able to determine what their objections are going to be when you ask for their business. If someone surprises you with an objection it is because you did not ask enough questions or you did not listen during the interview phase of the selling process.

If we know our prospects' needs, social styles, and objections, we are in a position to offer solutions that they will find not only acceptable but also desirable. Thus we can "motivate" prospects to move in our direction.

It's amazing how many experienced salespeople "wing it" here. Sales professionals should have a notebook full of concrete reasons a prospect should work with them and their company.

Our solution should suggest an action that will move us into, or towards, a business relationship. If we are not successful initially, we position ourselves to continually call on our targeted prospects. Our goal is more to move our relationship along that it is to concentrate on a single transaction.

Prospects tend to react negatively when a salesperson pleads, "just give me a try and I'll show you what I can do," because the statement has become trite. It's far better to suggest some action that will directly benefit the prospect.

We are not suggesting that we avoid asking for the business; but don't be in a hurry. We want all this top prospect's business - not just a single order.

When you feel the time is right to ask for your prospects' business we suggest an open-ended question: "Considering what we have been discussing, do we have a basis for doing business together?" The answer will determine your progress and where the relationship is headed.

If you have demonstrated your knowledge, sensitivity, and constructive help the answer will often be "yes" with some qualifications.

Make Fewer Sales Calls

We start building strong business relationships by targeting a select number of prospects. A successful career as a sales professional is built upon maintaining a limited number of highly productive clients and not on seeing how many calls can be made in any week. "Focus precedes success" is a core concept of the Relationship Selling Process.

Every sales professional should have a written list - by name - of those you have targeted as future business partners. Determine in advance - through your intelligence sources - prospects that you would to be doing business with in the immediate future.

This target list may have as few as ten names for established, career - oriented account executives, and as many as 60 names for a beginner. An exact number will depend both on you and on your industry.

A salesperson - no matter how successful - should develop at least one new client per quarter.

It is essential that we continually upgrade our clientele in order to increase our production. Since we can work only with a limited number of clients, they must be the best available sources of the kind of business we want.

Prospects are open to a new salesperson who will help them to be more successful. Despite this fact, most prospects are reluctant to change, and the more successful they are, the more this is true.

Our goal is to have a predetermined number of clients as business partners. We must select them carefully because it is going to take some time to win them over to us. Additionally, we must get to know our targets' managers, since often they either assist us - or stand in our way.

It is not cavalier to say, "Find out what someone wants and then deliver".

Doing so is far more effective than pitching your products and service in the hope that your prospect will respond. Top prospects are too sophisticated for this outdated selling style.

Preparing For Action

Once we have defined our prospect's HVNs, we must decide whether it's best to ask for a subsequent appointment in order to present our solution, or if we need to suggest some immediate action.

We are influenced in this decision by how well we have determined needs, the prospect's social style, his or her present relationships, and what the objections will be. If in doubt on these issues, continue your interview. Or if you're pressed for time, suggest making another appointment.

Tell your prospect you would like to gather some information and ideas to bring on your next visit. Make sure to schedule your following appointment before leaving!

To sum up, Relationship Selling consists of targeting a limited number of strong potential business sources, developing a relationship with each one, and then building and maintaining those relationships.

You can see that it doesn't matter how many sales calls you make. What's important is how effective each one is. See fewer people if you want to do more business, but be sure they are the right business sources for you.

We wish you - Great Hunting!

Jack Daly is an executive coach, international speaker and the author of several books. www.jackdaly.net , *888-298-6868.*