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TIPS FOR SALES PEOPLE:

Effectively Communicate to Make Them Choose You

By Meredith O'Connor

If you're involved in selling, you know the perils of the sales process. Come on too strong and you'll be seen as pushy. Come off as passive and your potential clients or customers won't remember you.

Everyone knows the stereotype of the typical "car salesman" who comes on too strong. Effective selling requires a firm understanding of how to connect and communicate with a lot of different types of people.

As you enter a meeting or conversation with a potential client or customer, you want to be open to them. You also want to take note of how they move into the room. Make note of their handshake, body language, smile, dress and manner. In a few seconds you can learn a lot about someone, and adjust, ever so slightly, to the way they approach a meeting with you.

You can tell, for example, in an instant whether a person is more comfortable with a formal or informal approach. Are they casual in their word choices, or do they follow more formal business etiquette? Do they want to chat or get down to business? Are they hurried or unhurried?

The next step to building rapport is to ask questions that warm up the conversation. How much time you spend on this will depend on the signals you get from the client. Paying attention to body language, facial expression and their responses will tell you how much time to spend on the warm up act.

Now you are ready to move to business questions. Notice we said questions. Don't move to selling; your next step is to find out about the problem or need. You can have the greatest product in the world but if they sense you are trying to "sell" too soon you will turn them off.

We use a tool called the "Audience Agenda System." In this system, we ask you to prepare for a meeting by writing down what you want to accomplish, and then, what you think your client or

prospect wants to get from the meeting. Often the two don't quite match up. It requires you to get into the mind of your buyer, and really think about what is in it for them.

Think long and hard about why your buyer would meet with you. Then write down questions that will help you understand them better. Why are they talking with you in the first place? What is on their minds? What is important and why?

Going in with a set of good questions will impress a potential buyer. These questions show you have a genuine interest in them. And by answering your questions, they articulate exactly what they need without you telling them. They find their own solutions in their answers, and you have a far better chance of success.

As Jeffrey Gitomer puts it in *The Little Red Book of Selling*, "Good questions get to the heart of the problem, need, or situation very quickly, without the buyer feeling like he or she is being pushed."

Building rapport by asking good questions is the secret to success in selling. Connect with people, read them, and then ask great questions. Finding out about them is the first, most important step in selling yourself, your product and ideas. Remember, they won't care about you, until you care about them. In the long run, no one wants to buy a process or a technique. People want results. Focus on results and outcomes.

Here are some more tips on how to be persuasive and effective in sales conversations:

1. Listen, and then listen some more! One of the biggest mistakes even veteran sales people make is jumping in as soon as they hear the door to opportunity open. By doing that, you may miss critical information. Don't take over the conversation as soon as you get a signal. Take the time to ask another question and find out more.

2. Never assume! Whether you're new at sales or a veteran you don't have all the answers. Every customer or client situation is a little different. Even if it sounds like something you've heard before, you will alienate people if you don't "hear them out."

3. As the conversation progresses, allow people to complete their thoughts. Let the conversation breathe. Wait a beat before you interject a comment. Never appear to be in too much of a hurry to listen. And never, ever, ever interrupt.

4. Watch how sales people you admire conduct themselves in a meeting. Take cues from them. You may even ask them to give you feedback on how you're doing. Be gracious if you get negative feedback. It's valuable information that's going to help you make that next big sale.