

**HOW TO ADD
VALUE ON
EVERY
CONTACT,
BUILD
RELATIONSHIPS
AND
SELL MORE TO
CUSTOMERS**

ART SOBCZAK



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Welcome, and congratulations on investing in one of your most important assets: your customers, and your relationship with them.

Because, after doing the most expensive and the hardest part--acquiring them, the profitable part is keeping them happy and buying.

Yet it is an area that many companies and salespeople neglect.

And often, their customers leave as a result.

In this book I'm sharing hundreds of specific techniques you can use right now to keep your customers buying from you.

Pick and choose, put the ones that resonate with you into practice, and you'll find your sales, profits, and customer satisfaction and loyalty increasing!

Art Sobczak



Table Of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. Just Introducing Yourself is NOT Adding Value | 4 |
| Instead of the Networking Mixer Opening | 8 |
| 2. How To REALLY Set Yourself Apart and Build Value-Based Relationships | 14 |
| 3. Are You Providing Personalized, Customized, Tailored Value? | 20 |
| 4. 10 Valid Business Reasons for Interrupting Them | 23 |
| 5. How to Increase the Average Order Size of Every Sale | 29 |
| How to Cross Sell in Four Simple Steps | 31 |
| 6. Three Sales Follow-Up Strategies to Avoid "Just touching base." | 35 |
| 7. Your Prospect Doesn't Work There Anymore. Now What? | 38 |
| 3. Fact vs. Fiction About Your First Contact | 42 |
| 8. Following Up on a Promotion to Existing Customers | 44 |
| Recommendation | 45 |
| 9. "How's it going?" is NOT a Good Call Strategy | 46 |

| | |
|--|----|
| 10. The Most Powerful Forms of Questioning | 49 |
| 11. How to Be a Problem-Solver to Provide More Value to Your Customers | 53 |
| 12. How to Increase Your Sales By 50% This Year | 55 |
| 13. Quick Tips for Moving the Relationship Forward | 57 |
| 14. Are You Pitching a Commodity or Do You Sell Real Value? | 58 |
| Symptoms of "Cream Skimming" Calls | 59 |
| What to Do to Sell Value | 60 |
| Specific Call Tactics to Deliver Value | 61 |
| 15. Do You Sell a Commodity? | 63 |
| 16. Stop Your Customers From Leaving With These Three Questions | 63 |
| The Satisfaction Formula | 64 |
| What Triggers Performance to Go Down? | 65 |
| The Three Questions | 66 |
| Who Should You Ask? | 66 |
| 17. How to Keep Your Best Customer from Going to the Competition | 69 |
| 18. Are Your Follow-Up's Accomplishments, Or Just Activities? | 71 |
| 19. How to Turn Around an Under-Performing Territory | 75 |
| 20. Increase Sales to Current Customers | 79 |
| 21. Putting the Personal Touch Back Into Sales | 80 |
| 22. Little Things You Can Do That Have Huge Impact and Keep Customers Buying | 85 |
| 23. A "Personal" Personal Touch Story | 89 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| 24. Little Things Lead to BIG Sales | 90 |
| 25. How Little Things Can Mean Everything | 92 |
| 26. How to Create and Build Client Relationships | 93 |
| 27. Don't Lose Interest After the Sale | 99 |
| 28. A Tale of Two Banks | 100 |
| 29. Avoid Just Touching Base | 102 |
| 30. Learning From a Mishandled \$8000 Pizza Order Call | 104 |
| 31. Your Four Keys to Building Rapport With Prospects and Customers | 110 |
| 32. Using Small Talk to Build Rapport | 117 |

1. Just Introducing Yourself is NOT Adding Value

Have you ever attended a business networking mixer?

You know, the happy hour events where people walk around introducing themselves, hoping to make contacts that will result in referrals or business.

Oh I know they are useful for salespeople in certain types of businesses.

And perhaps the couple of events that friends have dragged me to are not representative of most, but I was amused by the ones I did visit.

I observed plenty of hungry-almost desperate-salespeople walking around, introducing themselves, feigning interest in the other person, then launching into their own pitch, stuffing their cards in the hands of everyone they could.

I'd watch people during these interactions-and experienced it myself-where after one person would leave, the other would roll her eyes and say to a companion,

"Gawd, I'm glad he left."

These types of events caused me to borrow the name and attach it to a type of call: The Networking Mixer Call.

It's calling and to say you "Just wanted to introduce yourself."

Just like at the event itself, that is not adding value on a call.

I'm talking about the sales rep who starts a call with, "I've just taken over your account/I'm new here/I the rep in your area and I wanted to introduce myself to you."

This type of call is very common with reps who are new to an organization, others who've just been handed inactive accounts, or accounts from a departed (and/or fired) sales rep.

After introducing themselves, these callers normally continue with something about how they'll be calling on a regular basis, and if the customer ever needs anything to just call, yadda, yadda.

The callers seem nice enough when they phone, but let's get real here: what are the listeners thinking after they hear this introduction?

About the best that can be expected:

"Oh, OK, thanks for calling."

And that's the response from the customers who actually ARE customers ... those who buy on a fairly regular basis. But let's face it, most of the best accounts are quickly gobbled up by, or assigned to more experienced reps. And that leaves the marginal "accounts" that we're talking about here.

So, when these "accounts" get this networking mixer "I wanted to introduce myself"-call, the confused customers are likely thinking,

“Account? I don’t ever recall buying from you.”

Or, “I bought from you guys once, over a year ago. I don’t care who my rep is.”

“I have a sales rep?”

“You’re with who?”

“Oh, another new one.”

I’m sure there might be some managers reading this who have instructed their reps to use the Networking Mixer Introduction, and they’re feeling denial right now, trying to defend the approach, saying it’s service-oriented, and all that other touchy-feely stuff.

But anyone who has actually placed these calls for a few days has likely been bloodied up enough to have realized the cold hard truth:

It wastes the listener’s time.

This might come as a shock to some, but unless the customer’s very business existence relies on your regular phone call, calling them with this self-serving declaration is viewed as a call that simply announces a policy YOU’VE implemented, or news at YOUR company. It’s all “us” oriented. You might as well call them and say,

“I’m just calling to let you know that here at our company we’ve added three new people in the Accounting department, and we just resurfaced the parking lot.”

Bottom line, it evokes a yawn, and a great big, “So what?”

It doesn't move you closer to your objective, which is to make a sale either on this call—or a subsequent one—and build a relationship.

So, what SHOULD you do?

First, to set things up, we'll focus on calls in a couple of categories:

The “Networking Mixer” calls... phoning accounts you haven't spoken with previously because they have just been assigned to you, and, regular calls to existing customers—who might be at various levels of ordering and volume frequency.

I've always said that these are some of the toughest calls to place. Because, it requires creative thinking and lots of sales pros don't want to think that hard.

Except the best sales pros. I bet you're in that group.

Lazy sales reps, or those or don't know any better, are content calling to “just touch base,” or to “see if there's anything on your desk I can bid on.”

These approaches are reactive, provide nothing of value, can be viewed as nuisance calls, and leave you open to being treated as a simple vendor who can be manipulated into a price war.

Calls to regular customers– those new to you, and to prospects you're clinging onto– should always contain something of value... something that lets the customer feel you are contributing something useful by calling.

Keep in mind that your customers are someone else's prospects. If they feel they are being taken for granted by a sales rep, or a transactional telemarketer-type who simply calls and says, "Do you have an order for me?", ...might eventually fall for the wooing of a competitor who is creative enough to dangle something attractive in front of them.

Also keep in mind your prospects are likely buying from someone else, and won't budge unless they see some value in what you have.

So, what to do?

Here are just a few ideas to spice up these calls to position you as a value-added resource, and not just a salesperson.

Instead of the Networking Mixer Opening

Of course you are introducing yourself, but think about WHY they would be interested in knowing you: sorry to break it to you, it's not because of the charming, witty individual that you are. Well, maybe that will play a part later, but initially it will be because they *think* you can add some value to their world. So you must get to that quickly.

“Hi Pat, I’m Dale Johnson with Synergy Solutions. First, we want to thank you for your business with us the past couple of years, and I wanted to let you know that I am your point of contact whenever you need product research done and quotes so you can get answers quickly. Plus, I’ll be letting you know when there are promotions that you might have interest in...”

Begin with “YOU”

A good way to begin calls to customers is by saying something like,

“I was thinking of you,”

“I heard some interesting information, and you immediately came to mind,”

“When this news came out, I thought about you...”

News or Trigger Events in Their World

A quick Google and LinkedIn search could bring up valuable intelligence about them or their company. Perhaps they just won a major contract, they were featured in the news, your contact wrote an article or had an interesting LinkedIn update or Twitter post. Change is constant, and it provides opportunities for you to add value.

Industry News

Perhaps you have some news they might not be aware of. Or, maybe they are aware of it, and you have something to help them take advantage of it. For example,

“Ms. Prospect, you probably are familiar with the new regulations regarding the reporting of waste disposal. We developed a way to make that less of a headache for companies in your situation, and I’d like to ask you a few questions to see how much of a problem you anticipate this being.”

New Policies at Your Company

If you change restrictive policies that would enable you to do business with people who didn’t qualify in the past, call them again. For example, if your minimum order size has been dropped, or, you’re now carrying a line that they asked for before and you didn’t have it, or you’ve lessened credit requirements. And with regular customers, calling with changes to their advantage is always welcome.

Promotions

Calling with the Deal of the Week is the lazy default for many salespeople.

While I don't suggest becoming known as the person who just calls with specials that your customers can cherry-pick, if you strategically call when there is a special on something you know your customer uses and might not be buying from you, that can turn into a bigger relationship.

Or, "Giving Away a Dollar Today to Get a Hundred Later" is a good strategy. I had an online service that I use call me and let me know I qualified for a better plan than the \$19 or whatever I was paying monthly, and drop it to \$14.

Crazy for them to do that right? Not so much, when I consider that I've had lots of opportunities to leave them, but always remember that gesture... from a few years ago.

New Regime at Your Company

This can be effective for those accounts you haven't been able to break because of legitimate, real objections they had. If, for example, new management has cleaned house and improved quality, decreased errors, etc., call again, since you're now selling a new company.

Also, these can be spun into reasons for calling existing accounts.

New Capability

If you have products or services that deliver results you weren't able to before, that is always a good reason to call.

Just be sure you are positioning them in terms of results to the listener. Not, “Hey, we have a new product and we think it is great.”

New You

Maybe you fell to pieces and self-destructed on a previous call. Since then you’ve acquired more skills and confidence.

Maybe you’ve come up with new ideas, or a new strategy.

Of course my examples here are fairly general. You need to make them specific for your calls. And here’s the best way I know for you personally to come up with great value-added reasons for calling:

ACTION STEP

Have a brainstorming session with your colleagues. Invite customer service, production, advertising, marketing, operations...anyone who knows your products and services. Make it a game or competition. The goal is to fill in the blank:

“The reason I’m calling is __.”

The main rule is that what goes in the blank must be perceived by the listener as something that they would view as valuable and interesting to them.

Believe me, I've done this many times with clients in training sessions and we come up with 20, 30 or more great ideas to use.

So get creative, get working, and you'll find yourself converting more of those prospects collecting dust in your follow-up file, and you'll provide more value and sell more to existing customers.

2. How To REALLY Set Yourself Apart and Build Value-Based Relationships

Do you want a fast, simple, cost effective and easy way to to stay in touch, build value and give yourself an edge with your customers and prospects?

Sound impossible? Not in the least.

One of the most effective ways to differentiate you and give yourself a competitive edge is a simple process that I call the VAA: Valued Added Article. It's a powerful strategy that works!

What is the VAA?

On a purely literal level, a 'value added article' is just that: an article, a special report, a white paper, a news clipping from a magazine, a website address, a journal..virtually anything that you provide to your prospect or client so they might derive benefit, pleasure, enjoyment, knowledge, interest, and ultimately value.

On a deeper, more subtle level, a VAA is the little something extra that you add to the relationship that shows you were thinking of your prospect or client. It's something that goes above and beyond the norm in terms of selling. It's something that positions you as unique and distinctive. It's something that is seen as a positive and often personable gesture that marks your character. It's something that helps get you remembered.

The 2 Types of VAA

The first type of VAA is business related. A business VAA is an article, journal, report etc. that relates to a product, a service, the industry or the marketplace that may be applicable to the client.

It might be something related specifically to your product or service such as a white paper but this approach has a somewhat self serving aspect to it. A more effective approach is to provide a third party or independent source of information that educates your client. This is seen as an extra bonus and something that the average run of the mill sales rep does not provide.

The second type of VAA is the personal VAA and there are two kinds. The first kind of personal VAA is something that reflects or relates to a hobby, a passion or an interest your client might have. For instance, suppose you learn that your Canadian client is a NASCAR fanatic. One day you see an article on a NASCAR event coming to Montreal. Clip it and send it off. Or suppose you discover your prospect is sending her daughter off to Notre Dame to earn a history degree. You search for an article on the web about the history faculty at ND and pass it on to your client.

Here's the real point: it shows that you listened and that you remembered. It shows you took the time. It shows the client that there is more to the relationship than just a set of transactions.

The other kind of personal VAA is something that reflects a hobby, passion or an interest that you might have and would like to share with the client. Suppose you're an avid BBQer. You might send your client a recipe of your favorite rub or an article on "10 Things Every Person Should Know About Smoking Ribs." It's a lighthearted gesture. It reveals a little about you and advances the relationship a step or two.

Either way, you are doing something that isn't typically done. And that usually gets remembered. It may not guarantee you a sale but it guarantees you an edge.

How to Build a VAA Library

The trick to making a VAA strategy work for you is to have a library of articles ready and available at your fingertips. From a business perspective, one way to do that is to scan industry trade journals, magazines, e-newsletters, web sites and the like. Look for and keep copies of articles or sites that relate to your market or business.

In effect, you become a clipping service for your client. Remember that most of your clients probably get the same magazines but most do NOT have the time to read the material. By doing so, you save them time and effort. You keep them apprised of events, ideas, trends and the like. At some level, the client realizes the value you create. (And as an added bonus your scanning keeps YOU on top of things in the industry. At some point, you become the "resident expert" and are seen as such. Nice edge!)

Relative to your passions and interests, keep a stack of your favorite recipes or articles or whatever handy so that you can use them if and when appropriate. Of course, your clients' interests or hobbies will vary from individual to individual. This means customizing your VAA. For example, if you hear something that might be of value to your client, note it, and the next time you read a newspaper or visit a bookstore or surf the web keep it in mind. You might stumble on something relevant and meaningful. Use it.

The Reactive Approach

The reactive approach occurs when you see something that might be of value to the client and you send it along with a little note. Use phrases like "Kathy, I thought of you when I read this article..." Or, "Janice, I remembered you said your daughter was going off to Notre Dame this semester and I thought I would pass along this link about freshmen at Notre Dame."

These are flattering statements that appeal to virtually anybody and everybody. This 'out of the blue' approach surprises and delights prospects and customers alike.

The Proactive Approach

The proactive approach is a little more calculated. There are 3 steps to implementing a proactive VAA strategy.

1. **Make a commitment to a VAA.** When an opportunity arises (for example, the client says something that goes 'click' in your mind and you think of a VAA) go out of your way to make a commitment. Be bold and say something like,

“Don, by the way, I saw an article regarding...that I’d like to send on to you.”

“Sarah, that reminds me, I have a website address that I’ll send to you that talks about...”

“Leah, let me send you a special report I just read...”

What’s important to remember here is that most of your clients have heard promises like this before but reps fails to send or transmit the article.

Now here’s the sad thing but the thing that makes the proactive approach so effective: the client didn’t really expect it to happen so he or she is not overly disappointed when it doesn’t occur. I don’t mean to be cynical but the fact of the matter is people break small promises and commitments every day in every walk of life. It is not that they bad people it just that their follow up is weak.

Having said that, when someone actually GETS the article, the link or whatever, he or she is bound to be surprised and delighted. They think, “Oh, he remembered.” At some level, your stock or equity with that client goes up a notch. At a conscious or subconscious level it registers that you kept your word! This resonates strongly with your clients. It suggests you will keep your word in all aspects of business.

2. Send the VAA within 2 days. Of course, the next step in making the proactive approach work is to keep your word and send the document within two days.

Not a week or two later. Attach a Post-It note to the article if you send it by mail. Write a note in the margin if you fax it. Write a few words if you are e-mailing it. Don't belabor the point. Simply state, "Leah, here's that special report I promised you." Let the VAA speak for itself.

3. **Leverage the VAA.** Don't be afraid to leverage your VAA. Use it to your advantage. That's the whole point. When you make a follow up call, don't hesitate to reference the VAA. For instance,

"Ken, I just wanted to give you a quick follow up call regarding that Cajun BBQ rub recipe I sent you. I don't know if you've had a chance to whip it up and try it but I thought I'd check and see."

Of course, this statement can simply be a pre-text to a business related matter but when you remind the client that you did a little 'extra' something powerful happens. It creates reciprocity. Reciprocity is the need for your client to do a favor or kind gesture in return for your VAA. This usually translates into giving you a little extra time on a call, listen a little more closely, provide you with better information, give more candid remarks etc. At this stage, you've got the edge you were seeking.

By no stretch of the imagination does a VAA guarantee you a sale but it does contribute to the overall value that clients see in you and your company. This is particularly true if you sell 'like' products and services. Sometimes the little extras are all the differentiation you need. Start your VAA today.

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3. Are You Providing Personalized, Customized, Tailored Value?

Humans talking to humans is THE most effective way to communicate.

It's not being on social media all day long, nor is it placing 200 calls a day saying the same thing to everyone in hopes of bumping into someone who will say they will talk to you.

There's not as much cream to be skimmed today. The cherry-picking and order-taking has dried up. Today, buyers are more informed and they're much more prudent with their buying decisions.

Yes, today, more than ever, the key is in selling value.

Selling value involves much more than a pep rally/sales meeting proclamation. It's a culture ... a mindset, a strategy. To do it well, you first need to be able to define it. The book **"Competing on Value"** (Hanan and Karp, Amacom Publishing) lists questions you should answer to help define your value.

Do you help customers reduce or avoid variable costs so that their prices can be lowered and margins improved? How?

Or do you help customers improve margins by adding new features and benefits to their products, services, and systems? How?

Or do you help expand market share by adding to productivity?

To truly add value and set yourself apart from the competition you need to know how to help your customers control one or more of their critical costs or exploit one or more of their critical revenue sources.

Ask yourself two key questions about what you sell, and your opportunities to add value to your customers:

1. Where is it possible to impact overall and long-term cost savings and productivity improvements with customers?

2. Where is it possible to help customers increase their sales and profit margins? **Know what value means** to all the levels you sell to. At the user level, value could mean making their life hassle-free. A middle manager derives value when you provide a profitable solution to a cost problem, or a revenue-generating opportunity. At the top level, the solution is less interesting than the potential added profits or improved productivity of corporate assets.

And here are other questions about your buyers that you should know the answers to.

How are they evaluated in their job?

What do they worry about?

What makes their job difficult?

What causes them delays?

What do they hate to hear?

What causes them to look bad in the eyes of their boss, peers, coworkers?

How is their job different today than it was a year ago?

I suggest a sales meeting where you brainstorm the answers to these questions, and then plan your strategy and tactics.

4. 10 Valid Business Reasons for Interrupting Them

By The Haley Marketing Team

No doubt, you have to continue to be aggressive about sales and marketing. But don't do what everyone else is doing. The current environment offers an ideal opportunity for you to truly differentiate your services. Instead of simply increasing the cold call numbers, consider the following:

Every time you make a cold call, write a letter, or send an email, you are interrupting the recipient's day. You are, in effect, saying "STOP! Put down whatever you're doing, and pay attention to me." And as we all know, unwanted interruptions are annoying.

Direct sales is all about building relationships. To be successful, put yourself in your prospect's shoes. If you're going to interrupt someone, make sure the interruptions are worthwhile—from the recipient's point of view. At Haley Marketing, we encourage our clients to create a "Valid Business Reason" for every interruption. Simply put, we want every communication to add value and enhance the relationship our clients are working to create.

What's a Valid Business Reason for interrupting someone's day? Consider these 10 ideas:

1. Solve a Problem

The best interruptions rarely have to do with the services you sell. Instead, share information that helps your prospects address their most important challenges. For example, you could offer:

- How to's on issues that matter to your customers (kind of like what you are reading right now!)
- Tips on leadership, management, hiring, motivation, productivity improvement, cost control, technology, and any other topics that are relevant to the recipient's job function.

2. Share Local and Industry News

- forward articles you see.
- share stories you find about companies that are in your clients' industries.
- share experiences and trends you're seeing in the market.

3. Provide Statistics

Publish data that would interest your prospects, such as industry trends, hiring costs, turnover costs, etc. For example, when I was in the staffing industry, we published a quarterly clerical and office salary guide showing the local pay rates (min, max and average) for about 20 different positions. We collected the data just by reading the classifieds each week and recording pay information in a spreadsheet.

4. Offer Access to Competitive Data

Do you have information about your prospect's competitors that they don't have? If so, offer to share it. For example, you may know the salaries and benefit programs other companies are offering to attract and retain top talent. By sharing that information, you become a valuable resource for planning hiring strategies.

5. Thank You's

People like to be appreciated. Taking the time to say "thank you" is a simple, but too often overlooked, way to nurture a relationship. There are lots of ways to do this... cards, gifts, calls.

6. Educate

Teach people how, when and why to use your services. Show people the types of problems you can solve, and how easy (and cost-effective) it is to use your services. This technique is especially important if you are selling to smaller companies who may not be sophisticated consumers of the various services that you offer.

7. Humor

A good joke can be a great relationship builder. Just keep it appropriate and don't over-do it. I had a friend who used to share some really funny e-mails with me, but when he began to send them daily, I quickly lost interest. Humor is best when used sparingly.

8. Case Studies

Show how real companies are solving real problems using the services you provide. People like to see case studies for two reasons:

- They prove the value you have to offer.
- They make people feel more comfortable that someone else has tried the solutions you're recommending.

9. Puzzles, Brain-Teasers and Trivia

While these may seem irrelevant, providing occasional "fun breaks" can be a great way to create involvement and get people to respond to you. Like humor, this type of information is best used with restraint. In the past, we've had good success by adding a brain-teaser to a reply card and by sending out an annual trivia challenge.

10. Training and Professional Development

Teach your clients and prospects relevant skills (e.g., how to hire) that help them become better consumers of your services. This can be done through seminars, direct mail, e-mail, webcasts or teleconferences. Through the process of teaching a skill, you build trust, you position yourself as an expert in that skill, and you get to spend considerable time with your prospects.

If you don't want to do the training, consider partnering with other firms who would—so long as there is no cost to you. This type of co-marketing adds value for your customers while demonstrating your caring, commitment, and understanding of the issues that are important to your customers.

Please note... There is ZERO sales literature on this list. That's because unless you're specifically asked for sales information, it rarely makes a worthwhile interruption. The exception? Limited time sales and new product announcements—most serious prospects will want to know when you have something special to offer.

The Value of Adding Value

So what does all this "Valid Business Reason" stuff do for you? It will turn cold calls into hot contacts! Here's how this kind of "high value content" helps:

1. It makes a great drop-off or direct mail piece that will get you past the gatekeepers. 2. It creates a strong first impression and positions you as an expert in your field. 3. It provides a reason for a follow-up call and acts as an ideal conversation starter. 4. It offers the shortest path to discussing real issues with decision makers. 5. It differentiates you from the cold callers.

The whole point of marketing is to make sales easier. Cold calling is hard and learning how to make cold calls the right way is difficult. Sharing high value content is easy. When account managers have something valuable to offer, achieving those daily contact goals becomes a simple task. By including high value content in your sales and marketing plan, you'll find it easier to get in touch with more people—and stay in contact with them more often.

And of course, that will make it easier to win more business! We hope you enjoyed our tips for cold calling!

(Haley Marketing specializes in marketing services for the staffing industry. HaleyMarketing.com)

5. How to Increase the Average Order Size of Every Sale

Perhaps the single most underutilized selling tactic is the cross-sell.

You know what I mean, right? I am referring to the classic "would you like fries with that" technique to help sell more products and services. Are you guilty? Do you forget, ignore or otherwise dismiss this little gem of a tactic?

If so you're not alone and it's a crying shame because the cross-sell not only benefits you and your company, but it benefits your clients and prospects. This article will explore the cross sell and help get you started down the road to bigger sales and better commissions.

What the Cross-Sell Does For You

In a nutshell, cross-selling puts money in your pocket.

Get this: cross-selling increases the average value of a sale by about 25%. In addition, research indicates that about one in every five clients will take advantage of a well-crafted cross sell. (That's a 20 % close rate ... not a bad return of effort). Do the math! It means you can increase your revenue volume by 25% on 20% of your sales. And you can do it in about 30 seconds or so.

So what does that mean to you?

- Increased sales and revenues
- A happier boss who treats you like a rock star
- Increased commissions and other perks
- Increases the odds of a referral (should you ask)
- A happier you who can act like a rock star

What the Cross-Sell Does for Your Clients

A well-implemented cross-sell also benefits your clients making it a truly win-win tactic. For instance, it:

- * Increases perceived value of the sale
- * Positions you as helpful and consultative
- * Educates and informs (and improves buying experience)
- * Avoids disappointment ("Why didn't my rep tell me about that item?!")
- * Increases odds of repeat sales

Why Inside Sales Reps Resist the Cross-Sell

Yet despite the benefits to both the rep and the client, there is still a general resistance to implement the tactic on a consistent basis. Here are the typical excuses given by reps (or worse, by their managers):

"It's too pushy." It's too pushy when you relentlessly persist. No one likes to be badgered. Use your common sense! A cross sell should be a soft sell. Treat it as such.

"Clients don't like it." Absolutely true. They don't like irrelevant products being foisted upon them. They don't like to be harangued when they say no. But ... they do like it when it is a good idea (relevant, helpful) delivered in a sincere and well-intentioned manner.

"It's tacky." Some reps associate cross selling with the hamburger joint mentality. In other words, they conjure up images of zombie-like reps who deliver a canned, monotone message. That's tacky. A well-crafted, relevant message specific to the purchased product, is not tacky. Delivered well it's powerful. So don't act like a zombie. **Act like a consultant.**

"If they wanted it, they would have asked for it." Wrong. Clients don't think about your peripheral products. That's your job. Clients think about the issue or need at hand. It is your job to solve, improve or enhance that issue or need. If an additional product or service makes sense, tell them.

How to Cross Sell in Four Simple Steps

Here's a simple, effective and customer focused process to cross sell.

1. **Handle the initial sale (whether inbound or outbound) first.** A good cross-sell is about timing. Typically, the best time to cross-sell is after the sale has been made. Begin by determining the client's needs and then present a solution that fits. When you satisfy those needs and the decision to purchase has been made, your client tends to be much more receptive to any suggestion you might have. It's so much easier to open up the wallet a little further. So get the bird in your hand before you go for the two in the bush.

2. Use a **verbal bridge**. This simple step is the difference between a 'pushy' cross sell and a 'value added' cross sell. Introduce your item with a colloquial verbal bridge such as,

"By the way, Kerri, while I have you..." or,

"Susan, before I let you go ..." or,

"Incidentally, Dr. Mike, did you know that ..."

The bridge is designed to get the client's attention and focus on your cross sell offer. By using your customer's name and by adding a casual 'bridging' phrase you alert the prospect that something else is forthcoming. As a result, they tune in and listen more closely.

3. **Present your offer**. Your cross sell offer should have two components. First, it should complement the initial purchase. For instance, a chiropractor buying electro medical devices might be offered a back brace, a gas station owner might be offered 10W30 after purchasing a case of crank case oil, a business person buying a laptop might be offered a carrying case.

Second, the item should be no more than 25% of the value of the initial purchase. (Why? Because a cross sell is quick, spontaneous sale that should not be perceived as a major purchase decision but rather a minor purchase decision.)

For example,

"Incidentally, Dr. Mike did you know that we also supply back braces for any of your patients who suffer from chronic back pain.

This is insurance billable and is only ..."

"Susan, before you go, do you need any 10W30 to go with the crank case order. I can throw it on the truck at no extra charge."

"By the way Kerri, before I let you go, I wanted to mention that we have carrying cases on sale that would go perfectly with your new laptop."

4. Close the Cross-Sell. There are two ways to close the cross-sell. The first is passive and it's simple. After you present your cross sell, pause. Don't say a word. Let the silence do the talking. The customer will mull it over and give you a yes or a no. The second way is assertive. It's just as simple and tends to have a bit better close rate than the passive. After you present your cross sell, ask,

"Would you like me to add that onto your order?" or "would you like to go ahead with that?" or whatever words you want to use.

And that's all there is to it. Simple and oh-so effective. Go out there and give it a good shot.

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6. Three Sales Follow-Up Strategies to Avoid "Just touching base."

Here's a question I got from a rep:

MARTY'S QUESTION: You often mention that it's bad to follow up with prospects by saying, "I'm just touching base." I'm struggling to find a decent alternative. What do you recommend?

MY ANSWER: It's more than just finding replacement phrases like "checking in." When you leave messages like this, your prospect deletes them in a nanosecond. Worse yet, they see you as just another pesky salesperson. Clearly, that's not good!

Here's the deal. To keep sales momentum alive, you need to provide value on every interaction -- even a quick follow-up call. That means you need to rethink your entire callback strategy. Here are three approaches that have worked for me:

1. Re-emphasize the Business Value

Your prospects will only change because of the impact you can have on their

organization. Reiterate it. Remind them of how you can help.

You might say: "Pat, in our previous conversation you mentioned how important it was to get going on this soon so you could realize the savings (eliminate redundancies, drive incremental growth) that you need by year end. Let's set up time to talk so we can get you moving forward."

2. Share Ideas & Insights

Your prospects want to work with someone who's constantly thinking about how they can improve their business. Be that person.

You might say: "Pat, I've been thinking more about how we can help you increase sales (reduce costs, speed up productivity). I thought you might be interested in what we did with XYZ organization when they were dealing with the same challenge. Do you have a few minutes for a quick conversation?"

3. Continue to Educate

Sometimes your prospects are still asking themselves, "Does it make sense to move forward or not?" From the outside, you won't know. But you can keep giving them more reasons to change!

You might say: "Pat, I know it's a big decision to change from the status quo. That's why I thought you might be interested in this article (ROI calculator, case study, webinar, ebook) on (relevant topic). Let's set up a time to talk through your questions."

See the difference? You're still providing value. Even though they said they were interested. Even though they told you to check back next week. Even though they told you it was a "slam dunk" and they just needed to get the paperwork done.

Drop the "touching base" and "checking in" mentality from your vocabulary entirely. When making follow up calls, become an asset in their decision process. That's when they'll really want to work with you!

(Jill Konrath, author of SNAP Selling, Selling to Big Companies, and her newest book, Agile Selling, helps sellers land bigger clients and speed up their sales cycle. To get her free Prospecting Tool Kit, visit www.jillkonrath.com/sales-resources.)

7. Your Prospect Doesn't Work There Anymore. Now What?

So you've beaten up pretty badly for the day.

Your prospecting yielded zilch, and you're gazing up at a quota number that seemingly appears helium-filled, floating a bit more out of your grasp every day.

Scrolling through your account list, looking for a member of the 20% club of your account base that represents 80% of your business, you're searching for a slam dunk that will book you some quick numbers so you can bob at least up to quota sea level.

"Ah-ha, here's one! My bud Kyle over at Quality Industries. He's always good for an order. Looks like it's time."

So you call Kyle's direct number.

And you get a recorded message saying that is not a valid number at Quality Industries.

You hit "0."

"Quality Industries, may I help you?"

"Yes," you respond confidently. "I'd like to speak with Kyle Johnson."

"I'm sorry, but Mr. Johnson is no longer with our company."

Your heart sinks faster than a dropping rollercoaster.

You're searching for an intelligent response. "Uhhhh," is the first sound you can muster. "What happened to him?"

"He's just no longer with the company." (Code words for being canned). Wonderful, here's a guy you had a great relationship with, who always had time to shoot the bull (maybe that's why he's no longer there), and regularly could be counted on for an order. He loved your products.

Now, gone.

Oh well, better find out who the new guy is. So you get the name of Jennifer Stevens. You hang up, and regroup.

Ever been in that situation? Most of us have. Here's what you don't want to do.

"Hi 'ya, Jennifer? Hey, I'm Dale Wilson with Complete Supply. I hear you took ol' Kyle Johnson's place. Well, Kyle used to buy all his fittings and bearings from me, and I know it's getting about time for you guys to reorder and I'm sure you'll want to do the same thing, so I'd like to talk with you a bit about the way he did things and get you going on your next order here."

That would only be funny if I hadn't heard it before.

Many times, actually.

Let's look at some better alternatives for working with new buyers.

1. Fact vs. Fiction About New Buyers

Fiction: New buyers come into an organization and simply pick up where the old buyers left off, maintaining the status quo.

Fact: Sure, until new buyers get settled in—which could be just a few days—they might not change things. But, the reality is that often buyers have their own relationships with other vendors—maybe even stronger than the one you had with the person he/she replaced. Coming across cocky is a lock to get you crossed off the list.

Solutions:

Approach the Account Like a New Prospect. You might have the business—now. But to KEEP the business you need to build a new relationship with this buyer. Start with that attitude and plan accordingly.

Send a Welcome Note or Card. When you learn the new person's name, hand-write a card—not an email—congratulating them on their position. DO NOT sell in the card. Mention you had worked with their predecessor, and now look forward to speaking with them. Sign it with your name, and your company's name. They won't get much mail personally addressed to them during their first few weeks on the job, so your gesture will be memorable.

2. Fact vs. Fiction About Why They'll Buy

Fiction: They'll buy for the same reasons as their predecessor.

Fact: Nothing could be further from the truth. Your previous customers might have bought from you because he/she liked you, or it was easier for him/her to give you the order as opposed to actually shopping the competition. New buyers, particularly young ones, are eager to make a difference. Perhaps their new position requires them to keep a keen eye on expenses. If you grew too comfortable with this account, living off the regular orders without regularly profiling the account for changes and evolving needs, you could, inadvertently, make the new buyer look stellar in his boss' eyes; he might point out how much the company had been overpaying in the past—by buying from YOU!

Solution: Learn about the new buyer. Of course study their LinkedIn profile thoroughly. Check out any social media they might engage in. You also might have allies in the department. Snoop around. Learn where the person came from, personal interests, what they've been doing in their first few days there. And continue that detective process in your conversations with the new buyer.

3. Fact vs. Fiction About Your First Contact

Fiction: You need to come on strong in the first call, establish the fact you had a strong relationship with the past buyer, that you've been selling to the company for years, and expect to continue to do so.

Fact: The newbie has enough people in her new organization telling her what to do; she sure doesn't need to take it from the one group she has power over: vendors. Part of her job is evaluating existing relationships, so she'll initially appreciate speaking with you. Seize the initiative. Just make sure you come on in a helping way, not an expectant one.

Solution: Add value from the beginning of the first contact. Here's where you need to make the best impression.

“Hi Jennifer, I’m Dale Wilson with Complete Supply. First, congratulations again on your new position with Quality Industries.(pause, chit chat) I’ve had the opportunity over the past several years to provide Quality with bearings and fittings that the engineering department says works superbly in your line of wheels and components. I know your plate is quite full there in your new position, and when you have some time, I’d like to discuss how you like to deal with vendors, your preferences, and anything that I can do to make your transition run smoothly and easy.”

Notice this approach is focused entirely on the new buyer, not on the caller. Granted, notice the caller is coming in with some status, that of a long-time vendor. But he’s not flaunting it and ramming it down the new buyer’s throat as that’s the way things have and will be done.

Bonus Point About Your Previous Buyer: Do find out where your old buyer went. If he’s taken a buying position at a different company and they’re not yet your customer, this should be a simple way to pick up a new account.

Buyers do change regularly. Be prepared for it and you’ll be certain to keep, and hopefully grow your business.

8. Following Up on a Promotion to Existing Customers

One of the tougher tasks in sales is calling existing customers, and saying something more inspiring than, “I was just calling to see if you need anything?” In order for them to be interested, and perceive you as more than just a salesperson, you must have something of value every time you call.

April Fischer is with Storz Ophthalmic, selling instruments and supplies. After a Smart Calling College she attended, she developed and submitted her opening statement for review. Let’s set the stage first.

April is working on calling customers (those who have ordered before) who have recently received her company’s new catalog. In the catalog is a coupon that entitles them to 20% off their first order (and 25% off orders over \$10,000). The ultimate goal here is to get them to place an order, or, as a secondary objective, generate leads for the field sales staff.

Here’s the opening April submitted: “Hi, this is ___ from Storz Ophthalmics. I’m calling today because we recently sent you a copy of our new Ophthalmic Instrument Catalog. If I’ve caught you at a good time, I’d like to talk a little about your situation and see if I can possibly help you save 20-25% on your next order.”

Recommendation

Overall, this is fairly straightforward. The benefit to them is the savings. The key is to get them talking about their situation so we can uncover any immediate needs, make the appropriate product recommendation, and help them save the money.

Since these are existing customers, there should be a record of what they've purchased in the past. If so, let's use that information to personalize the opening.

And, let's use the words "incentive," "bonus," or "promotion" to further enhance the perception of the offer. A revision with these changes would be,

"Hi, this is ____ from Storz Ophthalmics. I'm calling today because we recently sent you a copy of our new Ophthalmic Instrument Catalog. I see that we had the opportunity to provide you with your (items purchased) several months ago, and if I've caught you at a good time, I'd like to talk a little about your situation and discuss a special promotion we have that can give you a 20% off of your next order of ____, or anything in our catalog."

The goal of an effective opening is to put the listener in a positive, receptive frame of mind, and move him to the questioning part of the call, which this does nicely.

9. “How’s it going?” is NOT a Good Call Strategy

Sales 101 tells us that it is easier and more profitable to sell more to an existing customer than to try and get a new one, we should do whatever we can to nurture existing customers, and our good customers are our best source of referrals.

But so many sales reps either neglect their customers, or make lame, haphazard half-attempts at really servicing their customers and therefore building profitable relationships.

Case in point: The “How’s it going?” and “Just checking in...” calls.

What wastes of time. Worse, potentially damaging.

Here’s a personal example.

I had leased a vehicle from a local dealer. The young sales rep was enthusiastic, but didn’t do a particularly good job of selling. I was in no hurry to buy, but he was in a huge, seemingly desperate rush to sell.

As a result, he kept lowering his price, and finally hit a point that was too good to pass up.

Over the next several weeks I received a few calls on my cell phone voice mail from the relatively new sales rep, each one pretty much the same:

“Hey, just wanted to be sure everything is OK with the car. Give me a call.”

Well, to me that is a worthless call, and I felt there was another motive. If everything was not OK, I would certainly have let them know. I never did return the calls.

Finally, after a few more voice messages, I answered (I guess you can attribute it to persistence, or just wearing me down.)

The call went the same as the others:

“How’s everything going with the car?”

Just fine, I replied.

“OK. Know anyone else looking for a car?”, he then asked.

Not right now, I told him.

I did have a small issue though... they were to arrange to get my license plates to me and it was past the time they had promised. So I asked him,

“By the way, I still have not received my plates yet. Can you check on that?”

He assured me he would. He never did get back to me, and I handled it on my own.

Several sales points here:

1. Some people might say the “Want to be sure everything is OK”-call is good customer service. No, usually it is a thin disguise for a self-serving motive, which it was in this case: asking for a referral. I’m not saying don’t call. Do. But have something of value or interest as the reason. He had known the issue about the plates before, so he should have called with an update on them. Or some other news, or something of value like info on the free oil changes I was promised.

2. I’m all for asking for referrals. The best time to do it is when you have just been told how good you are, or how much someone enjoys your product.

3. If someone is going to make the effort to place a call to supposedly find out if “everything is going OK” and then is told it is not (no plates yet), shouldn’t they then follow through to give the appearance that they truly care that everything is OK? I believe so.

Of course calling existing customers is your best source of additional business and referrals. The key is making someone feel that every time they speak with you they had gained by doing so.

10. The Most Powerful Forms of Questioning

Do you,

- drive a 1993 Taurus,
- live in a pop-up trailer at a campground,
- wear clothes purchased exclusively from thrift stores, and,
- eat only Ramen noodles?

Didn't think so.

And you're like everyone else, including your prospects and customers. Which means that you just don't buy what you need to survive. You buy what you want. And an even stronger motivator is taking action based on what you value.

I've long taught that the best way to sell is to understand what motivates buyers, then help them experience those feelings in advance. This creates the desire to take action. Mediocre reps, on the other hand, approach calls with the intention of spraying their message out there, hoping they'll hit upon someone who will buy. And when resistance occurs, they fire back with objection rebuttals, which I call "Objection Headbuttals," because it's like butting your head against a brick wall when you use them.

You've probably experienced the frustration of selling just to needs. Think about the prospect you proved you could help save a bazillion dollars a year, increase market share by 75%, decrease turnover to virtually zero, and eliminate customer complaints, but still didn't buy. You sulked around, shaking your head in disbelief, emitting primal-like noises in frustration, muttering, "What an ignoramus this person is! I can't understand why he's not buying."

Probably because you talked about your reasons for buying, not his.

Wants-Based Questioning

After you've generated interest with your opening, asked your basic questions, and built rapport, you need to get into the real reasons they buy. Their wants. Use questions such as,

"What, ideally, do you want the end result to be?"

"How would you measure satisfaction after you've used it?"

"If you could design the ideal product, what would it include?"

"If budget were not a concern, what would you get?"

Values-Based Questioning

What do your prospects and customers value? What do you value?

Delve into someone's values, their core beliefs, and you'll know what really drives them.

Money isn't everything, and I enjoy it as much or more than the next guy, and often joke that it ranks right up there with food and oxygen as a priority. But over the years I have turned down many training projects because of many reasons...the dates conflicted with my kids' sporting events, a remote location would have required too much time in little planes and rental cars, I didn't think I'd have fun doing the project, and other reasons.

I need money. I want money. But what I really value, and all the feelings that go with it drives my decisions and behaviors. Values override needs and wants, for you, me, and your prospects and customers.

Once you've reached the comfort level with a prospect/customer where rapport and trust have been built, it's appropriate to ask questions that examine their innermost core beliefs, their values. For example,

"What's most important to you about this project?"

"What will getting this project done the way you want it mean to you?"

Then, listen for the answers, and layer more questions to gain further insight. For example, if they say, "Well, it'll mean I'll come in under budget," dig deeper:

"And what's important to you about that?"

Again, for questions like these to work, the rapport must be there. I chide sales reps constantly for asking—too early in an initial sales call— “So what’s important to you in a bathroom cleaning supplies vendor?” It typically gets a “Whaddya nuts or somethin?”-type answer, and deservedly so. It forces the prospect to think too much. As if the prospect places his bathroom cleaning supplies at the top of the things he lusts for daily. But, after the rapport is there, it’s not so awkward to ask,

“Bruno, I know this is just one of the many responsibilities you have, but I want to make sure I’m giving you the best recommendation possible. So tell me, what’s most important to you about the maintenance of your facilities?”

Make it a goal to question for, and to understand the wants and values of your buyers. You’ll build more trust, and have longer lasting customer relationships.

11. How to Be a Problem-Solver to Provide More Value to Your Customers

You'll sell more if you're a problem solver than if you're a sales person. And you'll build stronger customer relationships.

Here's a problem-solving model, adapted from a workshop given by Anne Antony.

Help Identify the Problem

"What is happening?"

"What is not happening?"

"What happens as a result of the problem?"

"Where does it happen?"

"Where does it not happen?"

"When does it happen?"

"When does it not happen?"

Investigating the Causes

"What are the possible causes?"

“What are the most probable causes?”

“What cause is most likely the real one?”

Envisioning the Desired Result

“What do you want things to be like?”

“What do you want to fix?”

“Are you after short- or long-term effects?”

Choosing a Course of Action

“What possible actions could be taken?”

“Which actions are most likely to lead to your vision of the solution?”

“Which course of action is the best?”

Take this model, and adapt the questions to your own selling situation. Apply them to the very real problems your prospects and customers experience, the ones you help solve.

12. How to Increase Your Sales By 50% This Year

What would you need to do in order to increase your sales volume by 50%. Think again if you said, "I need to get 50% more customers."

About 5% of your customers likely generate 50% of your current sales. So why not try to clone that 5%?

Take the top 5% of the customers you sold within the past year, those responsible for the bulk of your sales volume and income.

Ask yourself these questions:

How did you find them?

What do they have in common? (size, location, type of business, personality of decision maker)

What problems did you solve or needs did you fill that initially caused them to buy?

What else can you learn about these customers that can help you sell others just like them?

How can these existing customers help you find more customers just like them? (referrals)

Increasing your sales dramatically is probably not possible if you do the same thing over and over, because up to this point, even though you've been successful, you've spent time generating customers who don't contribute the bulk of your business. Not that those are bad customers, but to make the quantum leap, you need to replicate the larger ones.

13. Quick Tips for Moving the Relationship Forward

- If you like what you see in the sample, will you buy?
- Are you comfortable taking this to the boss with your recommendation that you go with it?
- So you will have those inventory figures prepared by the next time we speak, is that right?
- You're going to survey your staff and get their input on what features they'd like to see, and you'll have the information by our next call, correct?
- By when will you have had a chance to go through the material so we can speak again?
- Is this the program that you'd personally like to invest in?
- If you do decide to change vendors before my next call, will you call me?
- The next time you need supplies, would you buy them from me?
- When you send out your Request for Proposals, may I be included?
- Shall we get started?
- Would you like to buy it?
- Why don't I ship you one?
- May I sign you up?
- If the proposal contains all of these items, will you approve it and go with our plan?

14. Are You Pitching a Commodity or Do You Sell Real Value?

In today's challenging economic environment, a disturbing trend I've noticed is that many sales reps are getting desperate. That translates into calling existing customers (or infrequent buyers) and placing what I term "Anything on your desk/anything I can bid on?"-type calls. They are trying to "skim the cream," or pick the "low hanging fruit." Really, they're simply hoping they're in the right place at the right time. And that positions them as simply pitching a commodity.

For example, *"Hi Mike, it's Pat at National Services. I was wondering if you have anything on your desk I could bid on . . . any projects coming up, anything I can help you with?"*

"Skimming the cream" normally is associated with something good. Not here. All it refers to is finding a chance to play a game of futility. Because, in what situations do you think this approach has even a snowball's chance at generating some profitable sales activity?

You're right.

Only when there is an impending project staring at that prospect or customer at that precise moment, and the customer feels it couldn't hurt to get a few vendors involved so he can negotiate the best deal.

Then the caller is thrown in with several other competitors vying for this same business—other cream skimmers. Add the customer's regular, favored vendor to the mix and then what happens? Something akin to a World Wrestling Entertainment cage match: Everyone beats each other up—and their prices down—until a single competitor is left standing. However, by this point the victor(?) is pretty bloody himself, selling at close to break-even, or maybe even lower.

Symptoms of "Cream Skimming" Calls

Here are danger signs/symptoms of sales reps placing these "skim the cream/anything on your desk calls."

- Many short calls that simply inquire, "Anything going' on?" When there's not, the rep says, "Keep us in mind," and moves on.
- Reams of price quotes and proposals cranked out, but the close ratio is low.
- Optimistic sales projections that consistently fall short.
- Customers coming back after a price quote saying, "You've got to do better than that," followed by the rep's response of, "How much better?" followed by plenty of visits to the sales manager, begging him to drop price and give other concessions.
- Lots of attempted follow-up calls to the customer that never reach her. And, messages for return calls that are ignored.

- Follow-up calls that do reach the decision maker, starting out with the lame statement, "Well, I was just wondering how we did on the proposal?" Quite often answered with, "We gave the business to No-Margin Supply. They beat you by three-hundredths of a cent per unit."
- An estimating department that rolls its collective eyes when the rep rushes in with another, "I've got a potential big deal here." After awhile, they treat the sales rep like The Boy Who Cried Wolf.
- A crumb of a sale here or there that required plenty of effort by the rep, where the price was sliced to the bone, and often is more trouble than it is worth.
- A pattern of one-time sales, since the rep never really understood why the customer bought in the first place.

What to Do to Sell Value

OK so what should you do if you're deep in this trap? Easy. Don't make your objective for the call to simply skim the cream. That's not sales—it's simply getting in line during the cattle call to take part in an auction for the business. Do this and you're viewed as nothing more than a provider of a commodity . . . a pawn in their game of securing the best price.

Don't get me wrong; I'm not saying you shouldn't happily accept business that falls into your lap. You'll always have those anytime you're actively talking to prospects and customers. I'm suggesting that your sales strategy shouldn't be like the Salvation Army calling house-to-house asking, "Do you have any discards we can pick up?" Be selective about what you go after and work on, and most importantly, set yourself apart from cream skimmers. Position yourself as someone who adds value.

To do this, you need to understand the customer and his business. The big picture. Make a commitment to position yourself and your company as much more than a peddler of goods and services.

Specific Call Tactics to Deliver Value

Have a relationship-centered call objective. Don't begin a call simply looking for something to bid on. Aside from the fact you're then

viewed as a commodity-type salesperson, if they have nothing at that very moment, you have nowhere to go on the call. Instead, be prepared to uncover and create opportunities. A good opening would be,

"Mike the reason for the call is that last time we spoke you mentioned you were looking at expanding into new markets. I've come up with a few ideas that might be useful for you in that area...please tell me..."

Question more. If you're handed an opportunity to compete for a piece of business, fine, work it. But find out more about it. Why is the need present? Get more info:

"I'll be happy to give you a quote on that. Tell me more about the project."

You can only add value to a proposition if you know the reasons behind it. Maybe you can give suggestions for doing it easier, faster or slower, better, or less expensively using a different approach. For example, a printing salesperson preparing a price quote on a booklet for a client might be able to help the client save money on postage by suggesting different sizes and weights of paper, or give ideas on how to increase response rates if the booklet is being used as a marketing tool to generate leads. But he, like you, must know the details. Otherwise, you're just a bidder in the auction.

Sales reps who place phone calls hoping to randomly bump into business by being in the right place at the right time are viewed as vendors...someone to be used in the game of "Let's see who can give me the best price."

On the other hand, when you understand their business, and help them get what they really want—or want to avoid—you're respected as someone who delivers real value. Profitable sales and longer-term relationships are your reward.

15. Do You Sell a Commodity?

During a discussion of how to sell commodity products at a Smart Calling College, Kelly Steele shared that she was going to ask all of her outside sales reps why existing customers do business with them. She will then be able to use that information as possible differential advantages when seeking new business.

16. Stop Your Customers From Leaving With These Three Questions

By Craig Elias

Let's talk about the reasons your customers leave, and three questions you can ask to stop them from leaving.

The questions I'm about to share were originally created to help salespeople who just took over an account, or a territory, to keep and grow the biggest and best accounts they take over.

Recently I learned of statistic from a Chatham Partners report that said 28% of vendor switches are triggered by a change in account managers.

The Satisfaction Formula

Finding, keeping, and growing customers is all about meeting or exceeding their expectations.

When an incumbent vendor and their sales person's performance meets or exceeds a customer's expectations, satisfaction is the result and that decision maker tends to stick with the status quo.

The moment a decision-maker's expectations exceed a vendor's performance or a salesperson's performance or the performance of the product or service they use, they become dissatisfied, enter the Window of Dissatisfaction, and start thinking of changing.

Let me represent the above with a simple formula:

Performance > Expectations = Satisfaction
Expectations > Performance = Dissatisfaction

Just because there's misalignment between what customers want and what they're getting doesn't mean all is lost.

When you learn of this dissatisfaction, before your competition does, you have a chance to fix things before the competition even realizes there's an opportunity.

What Triggers Performance to Go Down?

The most common event that triggers a sales person's performance to go down is when a new salesperson takes over an account.

When a new salesperson takes over an account, they don't understand the expectations of the customer, so they are more likely to disappoint them and put the customer into the Window of Dissatisfaction. AND because the new salesperson does not have a strong or long-standing relationship, the customer is less likely to complain and more likely to switch vendors. What Triggers Expectations to Go Up?

On the other side of the equation, the most common event that triggers an increase in expectations of a decision-maker is when there is a change in decision makers. Keep in mind it's not just elevated expectations but sometimes completely different expectations.

The sooner you understand and meet or exceed these elevated expectations, the less likely you are to lose a key account and the more likely to find ways to displace the competition and grow your top accounts.

The Three Questions

1. What did my predecessor do that I need to keep doing?
2. What do my/our competitors do that we need to start doing?
3. What does nobody do that you wish everybody did?

It's important to realize that your customers' expectations are not just created by you. Often, their expectations are created by the experiences they have with your competition or even personal experiences outside of their day-to-day work activities.

Who Should You Ask?

Start at the top of the organization and work down to get an accurate understanding of satisfaction reading. Ask the C-suite first, followed by financial influencers, technical influencers, and eventually end-users.

I started asking the above questions to my new-to-me clients in the mid 90's, and one answer to question 3 kept coming up again and again: "When I send you an email with a request, send me an email letting me know you got my request and when I should expect a response."

At the time, email was just beginning to be used by some of my biggest and best accounts; it turns out that when my contacts at these accounts sent me emails but were unsure if they got through or if I took too long to respond, they would email the other people on their list. With everyone's spam filters turned up to eliminate as much spam as possible, I think this answer is as relevant today as it was 20 years ago.

By sending customers a quick response to let them know I received their email and was working on getting them an answer meant that, in many cases, my competitors did not learn of the opportunity and I was able to keep and grow my biggest and best customers.

In the last 20 years I've learned these three questions should also be asked when:

1. There is a new decision-maker at an account, or someone becomes the boss of your primary contact at an account. For example, a new CIO replaces your old CIO contact OR a new CIO joins a company where your primary contact is the VP of technology.
2. A decision-maker you know leaves and joins a different company. Read my October article to learn how this creates four separate high-value sales opportunities.
3. The incumbent vendor's salesperson moves on and there is a new salesperson on the account.

If you ask the questions early, during each of the four times mentioned (read the third sentence again if you only caught three), not only will you keep and grow your best customers, you'll create loyal, profitable customers who will gladly give you testimonials and, if you ask for them, referrals.

How to get the referrals that have a higher close rate is the topic next month. See you then!

(Craig Elias is the Creator of "Trigger Event Selling" and author of the award winning sales book "SHiFT!" You can reach Craig at Craig.Elias@ShiftSelling.com, or www.shiftselling.com)

17. How to Keep Your Best Customers from Going to the Competition

Out of the blue one of your best customers calls to say he or she has switched to your biggest competitor. What do you say?

Here's a six-step plan for handling this type of unexpected call from a big customer:

1. **Prevention.** Your first step should be to prevent the call from coming in the first place. Be in touch regularly with your best customers, but don't make those but useless "just checking in" calls. Make sure all your calls have value, such as letting the customer know about an upcoming special or that you've just received an interesting industry report that you'd like to share. Position yourself as a valuable partner and you'll reduce the likelihood of having to deal with such a call.

2. **Ask questions.** When prevention fails and the call comes in, your first goal should be to get as much information as possible about the decision to switch vendors. Sobczak says the first words out of his mouth would be, "Wow, let's talk about that. What's going on?" You need to figure out if there is something your company did that can be fixed or whether there's an offer you can counter.

3. Buy some time. If the situation is one you might be able to salvage, try to buy some time. Ask, “Can I get you to hold off on doing anything for one day?” That will give you time to think and react, whether that means gathering information, preparing to renegotiate the contract, or grabbing the company president and getting on a plane to meet with the client in person.

4. Salvage small pieces. If the situation is a done deal, then aim to keep at least part of the business. For instance, if you sell aircraft maintenance and handling services, acknowledge that, while the new contract for heavy maintenance is already signed, perhaps you could continue as the client’s fuel supplier.

5. Guide the customer’s transition. Whether you retain a small piece of the business or none at all, tell the client what to look for from the new vendor. Zero in on areas in which your company is superior to the competition, e.g., “We had a 100 percent on-time delivery record with you. I know how crucial on-time delivery is to your operation, so keep an eye out for that.”

6. Keep the door open. Ask the client, “If anything should happen with the new vendor, can we be first in line to earn the business back?” Also ask for permission to stay in touch. Then devise a strategy for getting your name in front of the customer on a regular basis in a way that adds value.

It’s important, not only to read through these steps, but also to role-play them so you will be ready to handle unexpected bad news from a big client with poise and professionalism.

18. Are Your Follow-Up's Accomplishments, Or Just Activities?

Do you really know where you stand with the customers and prospects in your follow-up files right now?

Come on, really now? I'm not trying to make you feel bad, but my experience is that many sales reps have no clue where they are in the sales process with a majority of the people they are following up with.

Yet, they continue to call, continue to leave voice mail messages ("Hey, I'm just checking in with you, wondering how it's going..."), send an endless stream of emails, and HOPE that something will happen.

It's like running on a treadmill. There's lots of activity, but you don't go anywhere.

And it can exhaust you. (Actually, the treadmill is better since at least you are accomplishing something physically-more people should do it. I digress.)

Although some reps argue that at least they are making contact and "touching" their prospects through their messages, I say, bull. Here's why:

1. Repeated messages with no value puts you in a position where you're viewed as a vendor...a salesperson whose goal is to sell them something. The more you call to "just check in," the more the image of the "stalker salesperson" is solidified in their mind.

2. You waste time, and money, on a couple of levels. First, let me make the assumption that many of these "prospects" never will do anything with you. Therefore, you are throwing away time—which translates into money—by continuing to call them. Not only are you wasting the time when you actually DO reach them, but factor in all of the attempts and messages you leave.

And then add the prep time for each call (You are doing pre-call planning, right?)

OK, so what should we be doing?

Let's zoom in to a call. We need to gauge the temperature of the prospect and get a snapshot of precisely where we are with them. I've found that it's always best to let the prospect tell you their perception of the progression of the sales cycle and what the next steps should be.

For example, when you reach the point where you feel things have moved sufficiently, ask,

"So, where are we right now?"

"Where do we sit right now?"

"How far do you feel we have progressed to this point?"

"How close are we to making this happen?"

"What are the next steps?"

"What next?"

"What needs to happen on your end to move forward?"

"How do you see us proceeding?"

And then...?

Assuming you've done this, received good information, and the person truly is a good prospect, then what?

Well, let's use a real situation posed to me by a reader. Donald Holbrook with Stanford Keene asked,

"I manage three guys that are on the phone every day and talking to the top executives in companies worldwide. I am continuously working on my verbal communication as well as theirs. As you can imagine, we have to "follow up" with our contacts and have found that it is common for these guys to say that they are calling back to "touch base" or "when is a good time for me to get back in contact to touch base and see how things have progressed?" What suggestions would you have to replace these words?

Recommendation To tie this into what I have covered earlier, I always say the success of the follow up is in direct relation to the success of the previous call, and what is to happen next.

It involves getting a commitment that they (the prospect) will do something and you'll do something as a result of the call.

Then you can follow up with,

"I'm calling to continue our conversation of last week where we had discussed ____ and you were going to review the statistics I sent you. I'd like to go through those with you and I have some additional information I believe you'll find beneficial."

On your follow-up calls it's important to remember that your prospects are likely not doing pre-call planning like you. Therefore, you can't assume they are in the same frame of mind as you when your call arrives. Actually, you should assume they might not even remember you. Then you'll make it a point to briefly review where you left the previous conversation:

"The last time we spoke you had shown interest in..."

"I'm calling to continue our conversation from last week where we had discussed ____ and you were going to..."

Remember, activity is not accomplishment.

Worse, it could be costly. Use these ideas to move your prospects forward, and your sales higher.

19. How to Turn Around an Under-Performing Territory

It's fairly common for superior sales performers to be rewarded by being transferred to an underperforming territory. Rarely is the sales rep happy about it, and it's probably happened to a large percentage of you reading this. If it hasn't happened to you yet, get ready, for it may. This is about how a really great rep got a lemon and made lemonade out of it.

I worked with Gordon at a software development tools company, and saw him take control of what had been a terrible territory, work it, and make it one of the best territories in the company within a very few months. Here's what he did:

The Turnaround Strategy

First, he wanted to know which companies weren't buying our tools, and why, so he made a list of the biggest companies in all of the states in his new territory.

In his first week in the territory, he made a telephone call blitz, and found that there were two types of non-buying prospects: those in which upper management (e.g. VPs of Engineering) made the decisions against us, and those where upper management didn't care, but instead had empowered Project Managers and Developers to make their own decisions and select their own tools.

Not surprisingly, he found that many of his prospects had never been called, or hadn't been called in months. Gordon started making extensive charts of the types of software development projects that these companies were working on, and became an expert in project knowledge. Gordon was a great salesperson, but he was non-technical. All he wanted to know was what they were building, who would buy the finished product, and what types of tools the engineers used. So he ended up with two charts (today, you'd call them spreadsheets): "Nonbuyer Reasons and Personnel," and "Project Classifications." Then he really went to work.

He had inherited several decent customers, called high, and found that there were many projects starting at those companies for which development tools had not been selected. He leveraged his VP contact, and sold a lot of new product to those companies (within 6 months, he'd doubled the previous year's sales on current customers alone). He also uncovered many opportunities at companies that hadn't been called in awhile. They were now in his sales pipeline, after less than one month in the new territory. But there were still some companies that wouldn't buy, because they didn't like our company. He was able to determine that the VP of Engineering at a huge prospect company had a sister, and she was married to the Director of Sales at one of our competitors.

That company had standardized on our competition, and Gordon knew he'd never get a sale there as long as upper management stayed the same. At other companies, Gordon found that individual engineers and project managers had prejudices against our development tools (too bad, because our tools were superior), and would work to ensure our tools were never placed.

In his new territory, many development teams were in a state of flux. Some companies were downsizing their departments, and engineers were getting laid off, and having a challenging time finding work. By this time, he knew about different engineers levels of expertise, and he also knew how they felt about our products. So here's what he did: since he was calling all over the territory anyway, he started asking if they were hiring engineers.

If they were, Gordon would check his list. If an engineer looking for work loved our products, Gordon found him or her work at companies were he wanted to get more business. He got advocates at new companies that way. And if engineers didn't like our products, he found them positions at that big company with the VP whose sister was married to his competition. Gordon figured if he had engineers in his territory that didn't like our solutions, it was best having them all work in one place, in a company that for political reasons would never buy our development tools anyway.

In essence, Gordon played his territory like a chessboard, shifting the pieces from one square to another. He was able to do this because he probably called more people in the territory than anyone had before, asked great questions, took good notes, and plotted things on charts. He turned two of the states in this underperforming territory into two of the most profitable in our company in under a year.

Lessons to Learn

So what can be learned from Gordon?

- 1) An underperforming territory can be an opportunity waiting to flourish.

- 2) Call high, and ask great questions to determine why people aren't buying.
- 3) Ensure that you're providing as many solutions as possible to companies that are already your customers.
- 4) Know your prospect's business, so you can figure out how your product can help your prospect to make money faster, or stop losing money.
- 5) Make enough calls that you can be considered a territory expert.
- 6) Develop your own analyses tools and charts to understand what's happening (or happened) over time, not just what happened today.
- 7) Think out of the box. In Gordon's case, he improved the lives of his advocates, and they remembered the favor he did for them.

As Gordon would tell you, you have to work hard, but you also have to work smart. Add Gordon's techniques to your Best Practices Playbook for selling successfully to an underperforming territory.

(Geoff Alexander left the world of sales training to pursue his passion of writing and traveling. You can see that at <http://www.geoffalexander.com/>)

20. Increase Sales to Current Customers

Do your customers buy everything that you sell? I'll go out on a limb and say, probably not.

Do your customers, even some of your best ones, buy some of the very same things you sell from someone else?

Again, I'll stretch here and say, umm, yeah. Why, in both cases?

Perhaps because you're not asking them. I'm talking about asking them questions about those items, and then asking to buy those from you.

Pretty simple concept. However, sales reps get comfortable selling the same things to customers, getting used to that regular income stream from the customer, not wanting to rock the boat and risk talking about something else.

Kind of crazy when you think about it. You're actually doing them a disservice by not asking about other items or services. Think about it: if they're buying from you now, obviously they're pleased on several levels. So multiply that pleasure. From this minute forward, look at every account you call. Analyze what they're getting from you. List several complementary products or services they are not getting from you, but probably get somewhere. Prepare questions about those items, questions designed to uncover the need or problem that product/service addresses. Then be prepared to recommend how yours can help them, as well as the advantages over the competition. And then, of course, ASK for the sale!

21. Putting the Personal Touch Back Into Sales

I've given a few keynote presentations on the personal aspect of sales, and how in our high-tech, supposedly more-connected-than-ever environment, we are actually LESS connected to people. And that underscores the importance of the personal touch in sales, because it is becoming more rare. I asked my readers for examples of what they do for their own personal touch and received lots of great replies. Here is a sample of them.

Lots of respondents suggested one of the most valuable and effective ways to add the personal touch, which is sending handwritten notes and cards. Marina Shelton, a Foreign Exchange Trader with Cambridge Mercantile Group said that customers do business with people they like. To get people to like you, she says, in addition to being genuine, honest and displaying integrity, she sends birthday cards to her clients. A handwritten note goes much further than an email and it sets her apart from every other sales person out there wanting their business. It's a small kindness that's genuinely sent and it establishes a relationship based on mutual desire to succeed, and, best of all, it takes the 'price' totally off the table!

Tony Ruggeri, Account Development Manager with C&H Distributors, LLC "snail mails" a hand written "Thank You" card to each person he gets an order from THE SAME DAY. He includes two business cards (one for a referral) and a sincere note looking forward to the next time he can help.

He gets responses like “Wow, thanks for the card. I didn’t know people still knew how to write”! “I’ll pass your business card to a colleague”.

Michael Anntila is the sales manager for McKesson. His staff sells to high-level Hospital Administrators or Doctors who handle finance products. After they prospect into them, and more than likely get sent to voicemail by their Admin, their reps send a personalized follow up email with an attachment or link that can be tracked through Salesforce to see if they opened it. But more importantly, they send the decision maker a large yellow hand addressed envelope with one high quality glossy paper “What we do” type sell sheet with 3 highlighted sentences, and one specific case study from a customer just like them from their city. He says the best part is that the reps include a handwritten double size sticky pad with a note AND a Tootsie Roll.

Why a tootsie roll you ask? Well, because Tootsie Rolls are usually what is passed out when medical sales reps perform an in-service on their drug or product at the nursing stations after the hospital has bought product. Many high level Healthcare officials have had experience in the early days of their careers interacting on a clinical, non salsey, true advisor relationship with a Healthcare vendor.

They have found it’s very effective at getting the decision maker to lower their shield just a bit, think back to their greener days, and see them as that same colleague and advisor, and not an unknown sales entity, just trying to get in.

Brandon Zisk, an account manager with Techni-Tool often will ask about the family of his customers. When someone talks about their kids or grandkids, Brandon sends an email after the call with photos of his two daughters, ages four and two. Customers love those photos and especially remember Brandon.

Jason Pearson, a Senior Sales Manager with PC Connection Sales Corporation always asks customers/prospects how long they've been with their company. This almost always leads to a discussion about their job, responsibilities and what they like or don't like about their organization. Sometimes he finds issues they're having that his IT solutions can help with.

A sales trainer in the lumber and building products industry, Bill Lee, has made it a habit to collect hundreds of useful articles from trade magazines in his industry. These articles cover virtually every sales and operational aspect of managing a business that operates in his industry.

When he hears a client or prospect mention that they are challenged in any area of their business, he digs through the files and always is able to come up with at least two or three helpful articles. Making sure that his contact information is included on the face of the article, he either scans the articles and email them or drop them by the next time he sees the manager.

Over the years, he says he has gotten a lot of mileage from this practice.

Although one would like to believe that prompt response and follow-up is the norm, most of us know it is not. But when it is followed, it has major impact. Hanna Vogt, Aftermarket Supervisor with Met-Pro Environmental Air Solutions, knows it works. When she gets a Request for Quote, it is her policy to respond within 24 hours. When she sends the quote to a customer, she follows up to get the order or find out why not. When she receives an order, her standard operating procedure is to acknowledge it. Once the order is shipped, she follows up to make sure the customer is satisfied and then probes for future requirements.

John Wilcox, Account Manager with Gruber says that when he asks someone “How are you”, he means it and listens to their reply. Occasionally they open up, like Kandi, a customer of his from Portland, OR.

One day this past year she expressed her anxiety being on a transplant list for a kidney for the past seven months. John told her that he and his wife would put her in their prayers. They have become friends over the past few months since she shared her concern and it has strengthened their business relationship as well as given Kandi some comfort knowing others cared for her.

Ian Moore, Client Management Representative with Carnegie Learning, Inc. sells to schools. He stays current with what is going on in the school districts he serves. He then asks opinions about what he reads. You would be surprised (or maybe you wouldn't) how that opens people up to a great conversation. Once you are engaged in conversation you have broken the barrier. Now he's no longer a sales guy, but a colleague which makes a big difference in the education industry. This works for gatekeepers as well as main contacts.

Find out about a hobby they enjoy, suggests Dave Tegmeyer, Sales Manager with Indy Imaging. When you can relate to what someone is passionate about, the conversation and relationship soars to an entirely new level.

Frank Napier from Toronto scours the morning news with a focus on an area of the country where he'll be calling. He always uses positive comments. During baseball season when speaking with a guy in Washington he mentioned that the Nationals were playing well and what a game last night! He became his best friend.

Last year a prospect had made a comment about Frank's home town Toronto Maple Leaf NHL team, which was playing very poorly. He expected Frank to follow along and he did. Frank mentioned how lucky he was to have gone to school with George Armstrong's (an ex-Toronto player) son and how the family was so good to him. The prospect went on and on about himself for about 30 minutes, giving Frank a good picture of opportunity.

22. Little Things You Can Do That Have Huge Impact and Keep Customers Buying

Not to be overlooked is how to continue building and strengthening our relationships with customers.

After all, our best and cheapest source of new business is from our customer base. And you can bet that your competitors are trying to romance them. If the extent of your relationship with them is solely handling orders and transactions, you can be sure that they will wander elsewhere if they see a better deal.

Don't let that happen.

What your customers can't get elsewhere is YOU. Businesses don't buy from businesses. People buy from people. Go out of your way to do the little things that form a personal connection that is unique to you.

Kim Andersen, a sales manager, asked for ideas from her group about what they do to keep customers happy and strengthen relationships. Here are some of the ideas from her reps.

Send Out Magazine Subscriptions Pertaining to a Customer's Favorite Hobby. For \$15.00 my name rings in that customers head every month when he receives that magazine.

Give Away Books to Customers. I remember getting a great book on management from a placement service I once used in my inside sales manager days. It was titled *Managing to Have Fun*. To this day I remember who I got that book from.

A Smokin' Idea. In the lobby of one of my customers I saw a Thompson Cigar catalogue with the owner's name as the addressee. Since he was a very busy man and never seemed to have time to see me, I needed a way to get his attention. Since there were several issues of that catalogue lying there, I felt they would not miss one. I called Thompson Cigar Company and gave them his ID code on the back of the magazine. They were able to tell me exactly what brand he had ordered regularly. I sent him a box of his favorite cigars that Christmas. From that point forward he thought I was the most resourceful salesperson around.

Memberships are Remembered. In my territory, fishing, hunting and the shooting sports are very big. I recently sponsored a customer into a "fish and game" club that I belong to. The customer also enrolled his son. They will spend hundreds of hours together doing what they love—and our company will be remembered for it.

Focus on Spouses. For example, Joe Customer is a sports fan and rarely takes his wife out. Joe's wife enjoys Broadway shows and fine dinners, not ballpark hot dogs. At the beginning of the local theater season I gave Joe a copy of the theater show schedule and asked him to pick out a show that he and his wife would enjoy. Dinner at a nice restaurant and a great Broadway show, Joe's wife was in heaven. Keep in mind, if Joe's wife is not happy, Joe is not happy. It also gives me more opportunity to get close to Joe and see what makes him tick. Often a customer does not let his guard down in his office but might relax in a more casual situation.

Don't Forget the Kids. Finding out what your customer's kids enjoy also can pay relationship dividends. Whether it is sports, fishing, music, and figure out a way to impact the relationship between your customer and his kids. One of my customers had a child over five years ago, when the child was born I bought a US savings bond in the name of the child. Guess what, that customer is still a customer.

Send an Anniversary Card. Send it one year after they have placed their first order. This works well if the relationship has developed over the year. It forces them to think back and usually be surprised how far things have come in just 1 years time, and remember all you have done. It's also a reminder that you still value their business and that you haven't forgotten how it used to be. It shows you don't take their business for granted.

Sell Healthy. When calling, if they had a bad cold, or I could tell they were sick, I would send a can of chicken noodle soup and/or roll of vitamin C tablets. Enclosed a note saying "Always looking for ways to make things better for you."

Send “Thank You” Notes! For first orders, large orders, unusual orders, for tours on plant visits, or time spent during a meeting. They are very quick and easy to do, but gets your name in front of them again, associated with a nice sentiment. Be sure to be sincere! Fake or form written thank you’s can cause opposite reactions.

The key to relationship building is to find out what your customer and his/her family is passionate about. Then make an impact and be thoughtful.

23. A "Personal" Personal Touch Story

Cindi Tuttle, a rep with one of my regular monthly coaching clients, Headsets.com, shared her personal touch story. Headsets.com gets some of their new orders through a partnership with amazon.com. The reps follow up on those orders to welcome them, and learn how they can further help the new customers. Cindi first sent a handwritten thank you card to a new customer, and then followed up by phone. The person who received the headset, and the card, was not the main decision maker, but the user. But what she did was—with great excitement—show that card to her IT person, who IS the decision maker. In the meantime, Cindi was unable to reach the customer by phone, since the healthcare company she works for had a very secure phone system that required an ID input to reach someone internally. Fast forward three months to the present, and Cindi received a call from the customer, who thanked her for the card, shared the story about the IT buyer, who had told her that they need to order from Headsets.com from now on. And she then placed an order for five more headsets. And provided her direct number to call in the future.

There you go. Lots of repeat business as a result of something that cost less than a dollar, and a few minutes of time. The little things.

24. Little Things Lead to BIG Sales

The little things mean a lot. A small personal touch can have an economic impact.

Early last year in my Smart Calling Blog I gave out my second Art of Selling award. This very exclusive and totally not-on-a-regular-schedule distinction is given out to someone in a traditionally non-sales role, who does something spectacular in sales. The recipient was my dentist, Dr. Mitchell Cooper. You can see that entire article here: <http://smartcalling.com/newsit...>

To summarize, Dr. Cooper called me at home, at night, after a procedure, just to make sure everything was OK. Fast forward to now. I was watching a ballgame with a cold one, later on a weeknight, when my cell phone rang. I didn't recognize the local number, but answered anyway. "Art, Mitchell Cooper here." It took me a couple of seconds of silence to connect the name to my dentist. "Oh, hi Dr. Cooper, how are ya?" At this point I'm thinking I was actually due for a cleaning, and my gosh, he's calling people himself?

"Great," he replied. "Hey, I was just going through some older emails and I came across what you had sent me about that article last year, and I know I mentioned something when you were in the office last, but wow, this is really really cool and I want to thank you again." So now I am blown away. Again. He took the time, at night, to pick up the phone simply to THANK me for something I had done over 18 months ago. Which he already thanked me for.

We chatted for a minute or two and then ended cordially. Without him mentioning a word about coming in to the office for my cleaning. Of course he wasn't calling for that. He called because he genuinely was thankful. He called previously after the procedure because he genuinely cared.

And in my estimation, that's a major reason why he's successful and a patient has to schedule almost two months in advance to get in for a routine visit. That's why he gets tons of referrals. That's why I've written about him twice and tens of thousands of people have read about him. And perhaps some in the local Phoenix area are now going to him.

And yes, I did call to schedule my cleaning after that.

25. How Little Things Can Mean Everything

A good friend of mine, Tom Kroll, is an executive with an ownership group of 15 auto dealers.

Many of the sales calls to the dealerships are routed to him. He has an important piece of advice regarding how little things can mean everything. Tom says,

"One of my ways of qualifying/disqualifying a new rep/vendor who wants to pitch something is that I ask them to send me their contact info so I can load it into Outlook and at least have their correct name, number, company etc. the measure I look for is how QUICKLY they do this.

"If I get it soon, (within an hour) I am impressed as it tells me that if they do become a vendor, and should crap hit the fan, 'this person' is checking emails or is responsive. If I get it when they decide to follow up at night or the next day...they are dead to me.

"Call me a jerk, but I have learned that when I need something NOW, price is not an issue, addressing the problem or acknowledging the problem is what I am looking for and people who can not get back to me immediately end up making me look bad when the owners wonder why issue is still open with no reply."

Great advice. Keep this in mind the next time you remotely consider putting something off.

26. How to Create and Build Client Relationships

Everyone in inside sales (and field sales too) knows the importance of having a "relationship" with a customer. Relationships imply understanding, trust, value and ultimately, sales and revenues.

But while many telephone reps may want one, precious few know how to establish a value-added relationship. Simply calling on a regular basis and pitching the latest offer doesn't make a relationship. Relationships take time, effort and above all, planning and implementation. This article provides you with seven easy steps that can help kick start a solid relationship with your customers.

Step 1: Choose Your Clients

It would be nice to have strong healthy relationships with ALL your clients. But usually that's tough to do if only because you have a dozen or two other responsibilities and tasks. You only have so much time therefore, create a criteria, e.g., biggest accounts, biggest potential, up and coming etc., and choose wisely. If you're just getting started with a client base and you really don't have an account history, then take each account one by one. It'll take time but the effort is worth it.

Step 2: Tell Your Client You Want a Relationship

There is nothing wrong with laying your cards on the table. Tell your clients that you want to establish a relationship and why. Make it formal. Send an email or a letter. Explain that you'd like to better understand their company, their business and their needs. You can even tell them that you have no hidden agenda, no special offer, and no pitch up your sleeve. This call is about them not you and your needs.

Explain the benefits of the relationship to them and precisely why they should take the time to speak with you. Conclude by telling them you will call to set up an appointment. Follow up your email or letter within one day of anticipated receipt. Review the letter and ask for a specific date and time to follow up.

Step 3: Prepare and Make the Call

Before you make your call sit down with your manager or with experienced reps and plan your call. Grab a sheet of paper and draw a vertical line down the middle. On the left side write "information I would like to know" and on the right side write "the question I need to ask."

The information you list on the left gets you to think. What do you want to know? Other products? Other markets? Quantities? Buying patterns? Decision makers? Anything is fair game. Write it down. The questions on the right force you to develop a question that helps elicit information in the best possible way. It helps you ensure you use open ended questions AND close ended questions when appropriate. It helps you keep focus and avoid interrogating the client. Oh, by the way--and this is important, vital, critical-- have personal questions prepared as well.

Be subtle and use them when appropriate but part of a good relationship is getting to know your client on a personal level. Ask how long they've been with the company? How did they get started? If appropriate, learn as much as you can. But be careful, people react differently to personal questions. If you sense discomfort, move on. The real point here is that you are trying to get a small wedge in the door on the personal side of things. Subsequent calls can continue the process.

Step 4: Thank the Client

After your call do this: send a handwritten thank you card. Buy personal thank you cards (as opposed to company cards that blast their logo all over the place and spout marketing messages - the thank you card is about THEM and NOT your company or it's products). Put it in an envelope, hand write the address and put a real stamp on it. Simply thank your prospect for the time. Tell them it was a pleasure. Leave it at that. Don't pitch or advertise a thing. This simple, old-time gesture still means a lot because it shows you took the time. More significantly, the vast majority of your competitors won't do this.

Step 5: Nurture and Groom

Okay...here's where it gets interesting. You've got the wedge in the door, now exploit it. After you send a thank you card, think of at least five (5) proactive ways to "touch" the client over the next 3 months or so. These are value added touches that go beyond your typical calls to sell. Ask yourself, "What did I learn about this client on a business and personal level that I can nurture and groom?"

Maybe you learned that they went to Notre Dame. Notre Dame just beat Michigan State. Could you find something on the internet and send it down with a little note that says, "Matt, I thought of you when I saw this article..." Maybe the decision maker is a foodie: send a recipe! Maybe it's something more corporate like sending them the latest book summary on sales, or innovation, or technology (Visit: www.getabstract.com to get an idea of how this might work).

On the business side of the relationship, analyze the information the customer has given you.

Can you put a succinct package of material together to send to the client? Is there someone in your company who could call your client to give perspective (a technie? A floor manager? Whoever?)? Maybe it's an industry article that you clipped from a magazine or newspaper. THINK! What can you do that will make you distinctive and memorable? What will create value?

THINK! By doing this you differentiate yourself from the vast majority of vendors. Sometimes it's tough but that's the price you pay.

Every three months, come up with five more actions you can take or implement to create value and nurture the relationship. Your objective here is to position yourself as someone more than just a sales rep looking to make a buck. Your objective is to create substance, to become a resource, to become more likeable and memorable.

Step 6: Build a SIT Library

You can make nurturing and grooming easier and faster by creating a SIT--Stay in Touch--library.

A SIT library is your own private collection of value added actions that you can use over and over again with various clients. For example, a good chocolate chip recipe is timeless and can be used over and over again. Chipping tips from Phil Mickelson never lose their luster with golfing fanatics. Famous quotes by Winston Churchill work well. Links to websites that improve productivity or offer time management tips are welcomed.

Mix your mediums too! Use e-mail because it's fast and convenient but don't get stuck on it.

Send an article by regular mail every now and then. Send a fax from time to time. They've become so rare in some industries that people look at them like antique cars: with fervent interest. The point is to be distinctive and cut through the clutter. Combined with your business related grooming and nurturing, you have a powerful 1-2 punch on creating and maintaining a solid relationship.

Step 7: Stick to the SIT

Relationships are bred over time and experience. Don't expect miracles just because you send a few items. Typically, it takes a client about three months to recognize that you're not just a flash in the pan. Others have tried to groom them and have given up when there was nothing in the short term. Relationships are long term. By six months, they begin to recognize you are the real deal.

That seems to be when things really start to kick in. So don't pack it in. Stick to the Stay in Touch program.

Of course, not every client will respond to your overtures for a relationship. That's to be expected.

But many of them will. If you look to the long term you'll find this approach is highly effective. At some point, it all comes together and you start to see bigger sales and more sustained revenues.

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27. Don't Lose Interest After the Sale

With relentless pressure to produce, place more calls, beat quota, etc., it's a tendency for sales reps to get a sale, then forget about the customer and press on to the next conquest. If this describes you, you're missing some very valuable opportunities. Consider that although you got what you wanted (the sale), and your interest in that contact waned, THEIR interest is highest right after the purchase, and then into the implementation phase. You have an opportunity now to reinforce their decision, build goodwill, perhaps get referrals, and maybe even upsell or cross-sell. Make a point to call new customers. But please make it more than a "*Just checking in call.*" Bring something of value. Tell them,

"Calling to make sure everything is going OK, and I have some additional information that can help you during your implementation."

Make this information non-salesy, but clearly, do be on the lookout for more opportunities.

28. A Tale of Two Banks

After my mom's death a few years ago, as her only child I of course had a number of financial details to take care of. I think Mom saved every statement she ever received, so there was lots of wading through piles of paper!

I consolidated and closed several of her bank accounts and had interesting transactions at two different banks.

At the first one, there were several certificates of deposit and a checking account. I told the personal banker I wanted to withdraw the funds from the CD's. He said, "No problem," and came back minutes later with a cashier's check. This was not an insignificant amount, probably what this guy might make in a year. And he just hands me the check and says, anything else?" He made NO offer to keep the money at his bank! So I took it to the next bank.

At this institution, where there were also a couple of accounts with a fair amount of funds, I told the personal banker I needed to set up a temporary checking account to handle some of the estate matters. I deposited the check from the other bank, and while inputting the account data she noticed the cash in the other accounts as well, and asked a number of questions about what I planned on doing with the money, and offered to have me meet with an in-house investment advisor. I told her that would not be necessary. Undeterred, she then asked what I did for a living, found out that I owned a business, and engaged me in a conversation about my business banking, and actually asked for my business! I declined, but she did ask if she could stay in touch, and I agreed.

I wonder which bank is doing better?

Just like in these situations, everyone has possible business there for the taking. What does that look like in your world, and what are you, or can you do to seize the opportunities?

29. Avoid Just Touching Base

Donald Holbrook posed the following question.

"I manage three guys that are on the phone everyday and talking to the top executives in companies worldwide. I am continuously working on my verbal communication as well as theirs. As you can imagine, we have to "follow up" with our contacts and have found that it is common for these guys to say that they are calling back to "touch base" or "when is a good time for me to get back in contact to touch base and see how things have progressed?" What suggestions would you have to replace these words? To me, "touch base" is a game that you may have played when you were younger on the playground at recess and they may be losing their prospect's attention when the prospect realizes that they are just touching base."

Art's Recommendation

I always say the success of the follow up is in direct relation to the success of the previous call, and what is to happen next. It involves getting a commitment that they (the prospect) will do something and you'll do something as a result of the call. Then you can follow up with

"I'm calling to continue our conversation of last week where we had discussed ____ and you were going to review the statistics I sent you. I'd like to go through those with you and I have some additional information I believe you'll find beneficial."

On your follow-up calls it's important to remember that your prospects are likely not doing pre-call planning like you. Therefore, you can't assume they are in the same frame of mind as you when your call arrives. Actually, you should assume they might not even remember you. Then you'll make it a point to briefly review where you left the previous conversation:

“The last time we spoke you had shown interest in ...”

“I'm calling to continue our conversation from last week where we had discussed ____ and you were going to ...”

30. Learning From a Mishandled \$8000 Pizza Order Call

I'm a self-taught cook, and probably own as many cookbooks as sales books. I watch the Food Network every chance I get. For a few years my barbeque cooking team traveled all over to competitions, and we even won a few championships. It's tough to order at many restaurants, since I sometimes struggle to find something I couldn't make better myself.

However, there's still nothing better for my palate than a great slice of pizza. I particularly like thin crust, New York style. Could eat it every day. Normally I don't go more than a few days without a pizza-fix.

When I was living in Omaha I was a bit limited in my choices of places to get exceptional pizza. One day, lusting for a slice and wanted to try something different, so I went online and was reminded of a place not far from my home. I had tried it a couple of years ago, was not impressed, so they fell off my radar.

However, I read some of the recent favorable reviews and thought I'd give them another shot. After all, right down the street...if they've improved, this could become a spot I'd be dropping lots of cash in the future.

So I called, intending to order a pie. After about eight rings, the out-of-breath voice answered—with chaos in the background—and greeted me with, "Can you hold?"

(I'm intentionally leaving out the name of the place—she did say it when she answered.)

Reluctantly, I agreed.

She did NOT put me on hold. She just put the phone down.

So now I'm hearing the banter of the kitchen staff, and occasionally her voice. One minute passes.

I'm getting restless.

Two minutes, I'm annoyed.

Watching the clock on the computer screen tick away, three minutes. Now I'm pissed. The kitchen staff continues whooping it up.

Trying to put it all in perspective and remind myself that in the whole scheme of things this is not worth getting upset about, I decide to give them one more minute. Sure, I could have hung up and called back, but the devilish side of me wanted to see just how long this customer service train wreck would continue. Plus, I thought I had the makings of a weekly tip.

And I really didn't feel like driving any further than a few blocks to get pizza.

At the five-minute mark, I FINALLY hear someone pick up the phone, and...hang it up. "Call Ended" flashes on my cell phone.

At that moment I decide to provide the owner with some unsolicited phone sales training.

While I was simmering, waiting, I was online, reading about the history of the joint, and about the owner who had come here from Chicago a few years ago. I remembered seeing him the last time I was there, working the counter and the kitchen. Chances are he was there and I was going to tell him about my experience.

Certainly as an astute business owner he would welcome feedback and offer to make things right.

I called back.

Busy signal. Hit redial. Busy signal again. Undoubtedly someone else was told to hold, but then forgotten about.

THREE more times I tried back, hearing the busy signal each time.

Finally I heard a ringing sound. A male answered, and said "This is___," giving his name. It was the owner.

I said, "Yes, I called there about 10 minutes ago. I was going to get a pizza from you. I was asked to hold, was forgotten about for exactly FIVE minutes, and then was hung up on. I wanted you to know this personally since you might be losing customers because of how calls are handled."

"Sorry about that," he said in a tone that contradicted his words.

That was it. No attempt to recover. Nothing like, "Wow, that certainly is not the way we do things, let me make it up to you..."

"Sorry?", I repeated, after he was silent for a few seconds, giving him a chance to say more.

"Yeah, sorry, he repeated with an attitude that I read as, "Look, I'm busy here."

I remained silent—and a bit stunned—for a few seconds, thinking he might come to his senses as a business owner and do the right thing.

Silence.

I was not an a-hole about this by any means, but I finally matter-of-factly said, "Well, you just lost a sale and more importantly, a customer."

That, I thought, might cause him to realize he could still fix this. Instead, I heard, "Sorry to hear that."

He was one of the sorriest guys I've ever heard.

So I found another place, a few miles from my house, that answered on the first ring, did not put me on hold, repeated back my order, made an upsell suggestion for a salad, which I took advantage of, and told me precisely when my order would be ready. THEY will be getting a lot more of my money in the future.

Now, you might be thinking that from the first pizza joint's perspective, so what, big deal, they lost a sale, under \$20 in revenue.

Wrong.

A number of years ago a marketing exec with Dominos spoke right before me at a national sales meeting. He talked about the value of a customer, something many people do not keep at the forefront of their mind. He said their research indicated that a customer would spend—I don't remember the exact number, but this is close—in the neighborhood of \$8000 with Dominos in their lifetime.

They would emphasize that to their employees who answered the phone, and anyone who had contact with customers. It wasn't a one-pizza transaction, you were talking to an \$8,000 customer.

One of my business mentors, Dan Kennedy, stresses the importance of "future bank" vs. "present bank." Future bank is what your customer means to you over their lifetime, and yours. That's why smart marketers often take a loss in acquiring a customer, knowing that the real profit is in keeping them over time.

Let's try to stitch this back together to some relevance for you: What do YOU do to ensure that you make it easy for people to become customers?

Are there any deterrents that make it difficult for people to become customers...like saying, "Can you hold?", when someone WANTS to buy from you, now?

Do you know your own "future bank" number? If not, figure it out, and be sure EVERYONE who has customer contact knows it.

What are you doing so that when your competition calls your customers—and you know they will—your customers say, "I'm happy with who I'm buying from."

31. Your Four Keys to Building Rapport With Prospects and Customers

By Mike Schultz

Everybody's brain has two different processing centers: emotional and rational. The emotional brain is old. It developed millions of years ago, first with raw instincts—like fight or flight—that all animals have, and then into more complex emotions for us humans like anger, aggression, desire, fear, hatred, passion, love, disgust, sympathy, and so on.

Then there's the rational side. This developed more like tens of thousands of years ago rather than millions. This part of the brain is more deliberate, analyzing and studying, and thinking about the future consequences of various possible actions.

What psychologists know about decision making is that when the rational and the emotional side are working together, it's a very powerful motivator for action. When the emotional and rational sides are at odds, however, the emotional side typically wins.

The consequences for selling are profound, and it all starts with building rapport. The fundamental question of whether someone likes you or doesn't like you drives a significant portion of how your selling process and the buyers' decision process will go.

Building rapport leads to some very important outcomes:

- People talk to people they like
- People share information with people they like
- People buy from people they like
- People feel loyalty to people they like
- People introduce people they like

A poll we once saw that we at RAIN Group have also fielded, asked people "What percent of people are trustworthy?"

The average response? 30%

Then the question changes ever so slightly, asking a different set of people, "What percent of people that you know are trustworthy?"

The average response? 70%

Simply knowing leads to trust. We all know intuitively how important trust is when selling. Basic familiarity makes a difference in building trust. Knowing and liking...well that's that much more powerful, setting the stage for all selling success that comes after.

Rapport Principle 1: Empathy

Question: What gives your brain as much pleasure as food and money?

Answer: Talking about yourself.

Harvard neuroscientists Diana Tamir and Jason Mitchell have conducted a series of behavioral experiments, pointing to the fact that talking about yourself feels so rewarding, right down to brain cells and synapse, that people can't help sharing details about themselves.

If you can get people talking about themselves, you've made some progress. If you can show them that you actually listened to them, they'll be strongly inclined to like you.

What you develop then, is rapport principle number one: empathy. This is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. If you want to understand another person, a) get them talking about themselves, and b) demonstrate that you are listening.

Rapport Principle 2: Authenticity

While most people like a listener, few people like a faker. Anyone who comes across as fake or phony immediately might as well open up the other person's brain and press the "dislike button." Which brings us to Rapport Principle 2: Authenticity. "Be Real."

People like people who are genuine. Research and practice give us quite a bit to go on when it comes to being authentic.

1. Smile slower. There's actual research from the Journal of Nonverbal Behavior that says when you smile slower, and seem to ease your way into it, it develops the sense of authenticity.

2. Mostly, don't overdo it. Overfriendliness and saccharin-sweetness often seem like obvious ploys to connect, and fall flat.

Rapport Principle 3: Similarity

People like people who are like them.

Which brings us to Rapport Principle 3: Similarity. The more you can find common ground, the more likely you are to develop genuine rapport and like each other.

Various psychological studies show people like names better when they're similar to theirs. They prefer brands when they share their initials. They prefer that people move the way they move.

What can you do to apply the similarity principle?

1. Find interests and background in common with the other person and you can make and deepen connections. Anyone who has shared a favorite TV show with someone—especially if it's not very popular—a favorite author, a favorite sport, a favorite activity, kids the same age, hobbies, and so on knows what it feels like to have a connection with someone just because of that one similarity.

2. Another way to practice the similarity principle is to mirror buyers' basic behaviors. If they speak slowly, they'd probably prefer people who do. If they speak quickly, the same. They lean forward, you lean forward. And so on.

The idea here is not to outright mimic. That would seem odd. However, interact in ways they like to interact, and interact like them, and you'll develop better connection and rapport.

Rapport Principle 4: Shared Experience

Everyone likes intestinal meat, right? I mean, it's so popular, it's springing up on menus in all the hippest restaurants, and kids are just begging for it.

Well, maybe not, but Rapport Principle #4 might just be able to make it happen.

One of the founders of organizational psychology, Kurt Lewin, set up a psychology study in the 1940s with two groups of homemakers. His team lectured the first group about all the reasons for, and benefits of, eating intestinal meats. They also applied social pressure and played on the homemakers' senses of patriotism ("You'll help the war effort") to persuade them. They even brought in others to talk about how much they loved intestinal meat, and gave the homemakers recipes to try.

The second group participated in a facilitated discussion. Study leaders asked the homemakers about how they might persuade other homemakers to bring the benefits of intestinal meat to their families. They talked it out, role played conversations, and shared ideas.

The results were astounding:

32% of the collaborative discussion group went on to serve intestinal meat to their families at home only 3%(!) of the first group did

People who are talked at don't feel connected to the speaker. People who are involved in a process and who actively interact develop a stronger liking for the people who are interacting with them and, at the same time, develop a sense of psychological ownership over whatever they're working on.

Which brings us to Rapport Principle 4: Shared Experience.

If you're selling, and you can create shared experience and interact with people in the business process, for example:

Defining a problem

Crafting a solution

Devising a strategy to present the solution

Work collaboratively to come to the right agreement and terms

When you do, not only will they like you more, they'll be much more likely to take action on whatever it is you want them to do.

It's also true that if you simply spend time with people—dinner, coffee, events, and so on—your affinity for one another will rise.

So, if you want to build rapport and increase your influence with buyers, interact with them. Create shared experience.

Rapport is the foundation for building relationships. Few people would argue that sales people, professionals, and leaders who have great relationships tend to have great success. As you're building rapport, think of it less as a mechanical part about how you should lead a meeting, and more as an investment in building a relationship.

To invest in relationships, make sure you attend to the 4 Principles of Rapport:

1. Empathy: Be curious. Listen. Care.

2. Authenticity: Be real.

3. Similarity: Find common ground.

4. Shared Experience: Interact.

Mike Schultz is the President of RAIN Group, and world-renowned as a consultant and sales expert. He is co-author of several books including the Wall Street Journal bestseller Rainmaking Conversations: How to Influence, Persuade, and Sell in Any Situation <http://www.rainsalestraining.c...>

32. Using Small Talk to Build Rapport

When we're in face-to-face selling situations we spend only about 20% of our time actually talking about business. The remainder is filled with small talk that is designed to ease tension and build relationships.

However, on the phone the percentages are inversed. We spend about 80% of the time on business. The phone is more of a formal tool. But, that doesn't diminish the need to diffuse initial resistance. Here are some ideas to help you use small talk more effectively:

1. **Use yourself to start conversations.** When someone asks how you are, reply with an out-of-the-ordinary "I'm just doing as well as can be," or, "Today has just been unbelievable!"

This prompts attention and curiosity, leading to conversation.

2. **Develop a list of topics.** Start your day by skimming the relevant national news headlines, and also keep up to date on topics that interest you (and perhaps a few that do not).

If you call into a specific territory pull up the local news and weather for that area so that you can make a comment about something they're familiar with.

3. Look at their LinkedIn profile and any social media they engage in. This can provide a variety of topics you might be able to touch on.

4. Know when to transition. Don't let it get out of control. When you need to shift to business, look for a logical break in the conversation and say something like, "Speaking of business..."

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