

Breaking Down Barriers With Service

by Phil Sasso



My defenses were up as I walked into the new car dealership. I was fresh out of college and knew I was an easy mark for a fast-talking car salesman.

Mike walked up and meekly introduced himself. He was soft-spoken and laid back. He showed me several cars and gave short, simple answers to my questions. Once I decided on a car and took a test drive, he asked me back to his office to talk.

He wasn't as aggressive as I expected. I felt bad for him as we passed other offices with dozens of sales awards. I imagined his bare walls. When we got to his office I was stunned. His walls were filled floor-to-ceiling and wall-to-wall with awards—more than any office we'd passed.

In his office, he reviewed a short list of options, gave me his price and asked for the sale. I declined. He asked why I chose this automaker over all the others. As I explained, I convinced myself this was the make and model I really wanted. He tried to close again. I said no. Then he surprised me. He handed me the worksheet and his card. "Sleep on it. It's a big decision," he said. "Mind if I keep in touch?"

Heading home, I passed another dealership and stopped. An energetic salesman quickly met me at the door. He showed me the same model and rattled off a long list of features. At one point he pounded his fist on the driver's door to demonstrate the rugged construction. I was amazed at the difference in salespeople. I didn't want to walk away from this guy—I wanted to run. He trig-

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gered my defenses. He was too slick. Too pushy.

Mike is what I call a Servant Salesperson. It worked for him. It can work for you.

You may not like the name Servant Salesperson. I do because it turns the idea of aggressive salesmanship on its head. It's like Servant Leadership—leadership by serving vs. dominating.

As a Servant Salesperson you don't dominate the sales transaction. The customer is in charge. But you're in control. You're a facilitator guiding your customer. This subtle difference makes your customer feel you're on his side, not like he's being railroaded.


I instinctively react to pushy salespeople. My defenses go up like a barbed wire fence. Each time he pushes, I pull back. But, as a Servant Salesperson, you're persistent without being pushy. You're on top of things without being over-the-top. You don't raise a customer's defenses. And you avoid letting sales slip away.

Don't let the name fool you. A Servant Salesperson isn't a wimp. You shouldn't allow yourself to be used or kicked around. You're a professional and a respected expert.

If your customer is the pilot, you're the navigator. Your job is to give the pilot the directions he needs to get

where you're going. But you map the course you want him to travel. He may be steering, but you direct where he steers. You are in control—without being controlling.

Mike wasn't pushy, but he was persistent. He tried to close the sale twice before letting me leave. He didn't use gimmicks or tricks. He just listened and answered questions. That helped build my respect and trust instead of building a barrier between us.

Mike called me the day after my visit and asked for the sale. Then he gathered more information to have a reason to call back. And he kept calling me back until I bought a car—from him. 

Phil Sasso is the president of Sasso Marketing (www.sassomarketing.com), an aftermarket advertising and public relations agency. Sasso is also a speaker and a consultant. And he totaled that first new car. Sign up for his free marketing tips on his blog: www.philsasso.blogspot.com.



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