

# Selling 101: Back to Basics



The key to a good sales pitch is briefly presenting the product's benefits, not just its features.



**Restylers can learn from reviewing and refining their base sales techniques.**

*By Phil Sasso*

**O**ften the first thing we think of when we want to grow our restyling shop's sales is to find some hot new marketing technique. But sometimes the better approach is to spend a little time brushing up on the basics.

For instance, about a year ago, top golfer Tiger Woods dedicated nine months to revamping his golf swing. He hired respected trainer and coach Hank Haney to teach him how to improve his overall performance by relearning his basic approach.

If a pro like Tiger is willing to go back to basics, maybe we can all learn something from reviewing and refining our base techniques.

The six-step system I outline here is very basic. Although I include a few twists and new ideas that I've learned over the years, my goal is to help you focus on the basic core of successful salesmanship.

## **1.) Establish Rapport**

Take a moment to connect with your customer. Whether it's a new prospect or an

old friend, begin with a warm welcome.

Don't feel you need to spend a lot of time on small talk. Just a simple, "How's it going?" or "Hi" can serve the purpose in most cases. If you don't know the customer, introduce yourself. A simple "I'm Bill" can go a long way toward making the customer feel comfortable.

Ask if they need help. If they need help, help them. If they need a minute, give them a minute. Let them know you're available if they have any questions. Then give them some time and space. Your goal is to put them at ease, not force a conversation.

## **2.) Assess Needs**

A big reason sales are lost is because the salesperson doesn't ask good questions or listen to the customer's answers. Doing an informal *needs assessment* can help you better meet a customer's needs.

[Actually, a *wants assessment* might be a better label, since it's about his *wish list* and not just technical specifications.]

Last weekend my wife, Beth, and I

dropped by Sears on a quick errand. On the way out of the store, we stopped to look at some gas grills that were on sale.

A young salesman approached us. Beth and I were looking at two different grills. The salesman told me he liked the one I was standing near because it had a griddle accessory and he liked steak and eggs.

I really didn't care about his dietary preferences. I didn't expect to be making breakfast on my grill. I was more interested in understanding gas grills. My current grill is an old charcoal Weber. I wanted him to tell me why I'd want a gas model.

Since I was in a hurry, I asked the salesman for his card. He gave me a Sears *Discovery* form with his name on it. When I got home, I looked over the form. If he'd used this form, he would have asked better questions and been better equipped to sell me.

The form asked things like who would use the product, brand preference, timing, current product and new features desired. It was a good list of questions—brief yet thorough. Perhaps you could develop a similar list of questions to ask your customers.

### 3.) Demonstrate Benefits

Once you've asked a few key questions, you have the information you need to recommend a product for that customer. This is your chance to give your sales pitch. The key to a good sales pitch is briefly presenting the product's benefits, not just its features.

At a tradeshow last week, an exhibitor took a few moments to pitch his product to me. He told me it was made of T-304 stainless steel.

"Wow," I said. It was all I could say. I had no idea what made T-304 better than any other grade of stainless steel.

Now, if he had said it was made with T-304 stainless steel for maximum corrosion protection, I would have understood the benefit, even if I didn't know T-304 was a rugged aircraft-grade stainless steel.

Remember, customers buy benefits, not features. The better the benefits you present match their *wish list*, the more likely you are to win a sale.

*continued*



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**Take a moment to connect with your customer. Your goal is to make them feel at ease.**



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continued

## 4.) Ask For the Sale

Sales trainers will tell you that the most common reason for lost sales is the salesperson doesn't ask for the sale. Obviously, the biggest reason most salespeople don't ask is fear. They're afraid of rejection.

Ironically, most customers are also dealing with fear. They are afraid of making the wrong buying decision.

Customers need your help to feel confident they're making a good decision. So if you make them feel comfortable every step of the way, asking for the sale can be a breeze. Just be sure you're sincere.

I remember once going dress shopping with Beth. She came out of the dressing room and looked at her new outfit in the mirror, smoothing down the skirt as she turned to look at it from different angles.

"That dress looks good on you," the sales clerk said insincerely.

Then Beth looked at me for approval.

"It's nice," I said, "if you're trying to draw attention to your hips."

She didn't buy the dress. She didn't talk to me all night long, either. And she's never asked me to go dress shopping with her again.

But I was honest. On the other hand, the clerk was not sincere. It sounded like she said the same thing to every woman.

Being something between bluntly honest and insincere is best. She could have asked my wife how she felt, then affirm that with a phrase like, "that color does look good on you."

Once you sense your customer is ready to make a purchase, ask for the sale. There are probably hundreds of *closing techniques* taught by dozens of books and sales trainers.

Here's the easiest—start ringing up the sale. Seriously. No fancy gimmicks. No clever catchphrases. Just start the paperwork.

The *assumptive close*, as we call it, can also circumvent another result of customer fear: procrastination.

## 5.) Overcome Objections

You may have heard other sales experts say, "Selling begins when the customer says *no*." I agree. But only slightly.

First, if you often get the same objections, your sales pitch is missing something. For example, if most customers object to price, you should concentrate on justifying price more during your pitch. Tackling a common objection before your customer brings it up can make closing go smoother.

Secondly, a customer that flat out says *no* is different from a customer with a valid objection. A valid objection means a customer is ready to buy, but something is standing in the way.

Is price an issue? Justify your price more or offer him a cheaper alternative. Does he

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**6.) Evaluate Results**

Only a few sales trainers teach this as part of the selling process. But I think it's the core of growing as a salesperson. Take a moment to analyze your sale or lost sale.

What do you think was the pivotal point where the sale was won or lost? What did you do right? What would you do better next time?

**If you often get the same objections, your sales pitch is missing something.**

Once the customer walks out the door, take a minute to make a few quick notes in your *sales journal*. If you don't know what you could have done differently, ask someone else on staff what they would do. And don't beat yourself up over it.

Sometimes there is nothing you could have done to make the sale. Review your journal every week or two to refine your technique.

It seems the time Tiger spent revamping his golf swing has been working for him. He's still considered the best golfer in the world. And even if he doesn't win, he's almost always near the top.

In the same way, I believe a few moments spent going back to basics can help you and your staff get back into the swing of personal selling and grow your overall sales performance.

*Phil Sasso is the president of Sasso Marketing, an aftermarket advertising and public relations agency. Sasso is also a speaker, trainer and a consultant. And he now just smiles when his wife asks how a dress looks. Sign up for his free marketing tip e-mail at [philsasso.com/blog](mailto:philsasso.com/blog).* ©



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