

Giving Your Customer What He Wants

Become A Sales Expert On Thousands Of SKUs

BY PHIL SASSO

Q

Sometimes customers don't really know what they want. How do I help them figure that out?

A

You have a truck full of tools and catalogs with thousands more SKUs. But you'll find that the most powerful tools you have are questions.

Asking good questions can uncover tons of hidden sales.

"Ninety percent of a salesman's job is listening," says sales coach and leadership/management training consultant Orrin Rudolph of Vital-Life Communications (www.orrinrudolph.com). "You want your customer to say to himself, 'Hey this guy's listening to me. He's not just here to sell stuff. He's actually heard me. I'm not just another number on his list.'"

The key to asking good questions is to avoid closed questions. Closed questions are the kind a customer can

- What are the most common jobs you're getting lately?
- Is there a tool that would make those jobs easier?
- What tools have you read about lately that sounded interesting?
- Is there a tool you had to borrow from another tech recently?
- What's the most frustrating job you've done lately?
- Is there a tool that would have made that job easier?
- Is there a particular tool you'd like to see me demo?

Rudolph says your customer is thinking: "Hear me first. Solve my

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problem. Show me you can solve my problem." By listening and helping your customer solve his problems you'll figure out what he wants, earn his trust, and win his long-term business.

"You don't want to start selling from the beginning," says Rudolph. "Ask questions. Get them talking. Engage them in conversation. If you do this, they won't feel sold since they've done all the talking. They've sold themselves."

Q

Once in a while a customer asks me for an equipment recommendation. I carry thousands of SKUs. Sometimes I'm really not confident in recommending one product over another. What should I do?

A

In my humble opinion, you should rarely ever recommend anything.

That doesn't mean you shouldn't inform, steer or advise a customer. But, unless you've used the tool yourself, making a personal recommendation can be a big mistake. Even if you have used the tool, putting your name behind your recommendation can backfire -- especially on an expensive item. What happens if the product fails or doesn't meet your customer expectations?

This isn't such a big deal on a \$20 wrench that you're willing to take back. But it becomes a big deal on a big-ticket item like a code reader, a scanner, or a leak detector that you're not willing to take back.

You still want your customer to feel you're helping him and make him confident that he's making a good decision. So, what should you do? I suggest a three-point approach:

1.) INFORM. Let's say a customer is looking to buy an expensive piece of equipment.

First, determine if he wants to buy it today. If so, skip to Step 3. If not, help him narrow his choices. Ask him if there are several brands or models he is trying to decide between. Then pull or print literature for them -- or better yet, email him website links where he can look at specs, view videos and do some homework.

Notice you're not giving him your opinion. You're just giving him information.

2.) STEER. If he wants a brand you don't carry, you may want to gently steer him to a brand you do carry. Try something like "I don't carry that, but here are some of the solid products



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answer with a single word like "yes," "no," or "blue." Open questions require a longer answer and help your customer open up.

Here are some examples of good open questions you might try:



I do carry. Does that work for you? Or do you want me to look into that brand for you?"

If he's sold on a brand, you may be better off giving him what he wants than trying to change his mind. If something goes wrong, he may blame you either to your face or behind your back. But most customers aren't tied to a brand and are more than willing to look at what you carry.

Give him literature or email him websites for the popular brands/models you carry. Let the manufacturers sell their features and benefits. You focus on closing the deal.

Don't say these are brands that you like or recommend, just brands you carry.

3.) ADVISE. When it comes down to a final decision between two or three products, now your expertise comes into play. This is how you can help your customer without making a personal recommendation. Try one of these magic phrases:

"That's one of my best sellers."

"A lot of guys tell me they like that one."

"This one is an award winner."

(Go to www.vehicleservicepros.com/directory for *PTEN's* 2011 Innovation Award and the *PTEN* 2011 Top 100 Award winners, to find some different product examples.)

Notice you're not putting your neck on the line with these phrases. Most people find comfort in numbers. They believe "If others think this is a good, it must be good." (That's not always the case. But people like to have a reason to trust a product. Give

them a reason.)

If you can't honestly use one of these phrases, don't. In this case, maybe the best approach is to use another customer as a reference: "Joe down at Smith's Autoworks bought that one. He says he loves it." (Again, assuming that's true.)

This way, if your customer becomes unhappy with his purchase, he'll use Joe's name in vain -- not yours. (Sorry, Joe!) Seriously though, if your customer does need some support, Joe can become a valuable resource. (Thanks, Joe!)

By informing, steering and advising, you can help customers buy with more confidence. And you won't feel pressure to pretend to be an expert on every one of the thousands of tools you sell. ■

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