

The Art of Sales



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Foreword

Lloyd F. Pugh and Associates has been a proud member of the Hearth Products business for more than fifty years. My father, Lloyd, who founded our company, is, sadly, no longer with us. The legacy of his knowledge, wisdom, irrepressible good humor and devotion to the industry that served him so well, however, lives on to this day. It is in his honor that we have made industry service a cornerstone of our business plan.

A few years back, I was privileged to make “*Blueprint for Success*” available as a business guide for all hearth retailers. I am humbled and gratified by the overwhelmingly positive response I continue to get whenever the course is offered. If you are one of the many folks who have expressed their appreciation to me for *Blueprint*, let me take this opportunity to set the record straight. It is I who have you to thank for not only the wonderful sentiment, but even more for taking the concepts to heart and making your business and our industry stronger and more professional.

The articles in this publication first appeared in *Hearth and Home* magazine in 2008 and 2009. All five were written by my friend and colleague, Bill Lentz. I was happy to contribute introductions and accompanying sidebars to most of the pieces. You can read more about Bill and how we first got together just by reading the articles. But we are not the important ones here. You, your staff and your sales team play a critical role in the success or failure of your business. Let the information contained in these pages assist you in your professional efforts. Take the time to understand the concepts. Practice the techniques. Build on your successes by sharing them with those you work with. As your competence and success grow, I am confident that our industry will look to you for support and leadership. When the time comes, I hope you will do your part and contribute in any way you can.

We want to thank Richard Wright and Susan Salls from *Hearth & Home* magazine for their editorial assistance and talents involved in the publishing of nearly 40 articles over the past 10 years in their magazine. It is rare to find an industry magazine that is willing to allow it's writers the freedom to discuss controversial topics. *Hearth & Home* makes the hearth industry better.

We all owe a debt of gratitude to the Industrial Chimney Company, manufacturer of Excel Chimney, RSF Fireplaces, and Renaissance Fireplaces for their substantial contributions. Over the past 10 years ICC has spent in excess of \$100,000 of their marketing funds to publish and promote *Blueprint for Success*, *Fireplace Design*, *Surviving the Storm*, and *The Art of Sales* NFI accredited educational programs throughout North America. Their rationale is quite simple. ICC is only as strong as their partner specialty hearth retailers. If their partners are financially healthy, and armed with the training and knowledge required to succeed; then their investment is well spent. We want to thank them for their support and assistance.

Tom Pugh

Excel Chimney's



The Art of Sales

Tom Pugh & Bill Lentz

⌘ Introduction

⌘ Importance of Sales

⌘ Importance of Training and Experience

⌘ Purpose of the Seminar

Create a video that Specialty Hearth Retailers can use as a sales training tool

Convince Specialty Hearth Retailers to institute a sales training program within their organization

What you can expect...

⌘ Empowerment through a clearer understanding of the selling process and how to capitalize on your strengths.

⌘ What key factors are present whenever a sale takes place and how you can influence them.

⌘ Learn how customers make up their minds.

⌘ The most important sales skills you can develop and how you can sell more now!

New definitions...

- ‡ Sale: The transfer of ownership from one party to another of a good, service, or idea.
- ‡ Salesperson: Anyone who facilitates the transfer of ownership.
- ‡ Customer: Anyone seeking to acquire goods, services, or ideas to increase pleasure or eliminate pain.
- ‡ Business of any kind: A sales organization.

Course review...

- ‡ The foundation of sales
- ‡ The anatomy of the sales process
- ‡ Sales techniques: 3rd party recommendations – analogies – future pacing – body language
- ‡ Learning the technique to overcoming objections
 - Overcoming pricing objections
 - Writing up the sale
 - Understanding and correcting your biases and judgments
 - Putting it all together

The Foundation of Sales

Why we make ownership decisions...

DESIRE: the positive expectation that a good, service, or idea will bring about the emotional experience of joy, freedom, safety, excitement, happiness, relaxation, peace, or approval.



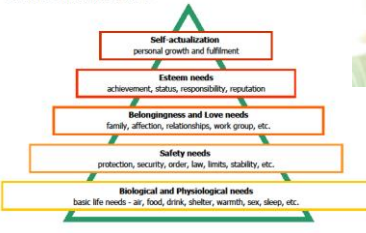
FEAR: the negative expectation that a failure to acquire a good, service, or idea will result in increased or additional pain and emotional suffering.



Desire

Desire is the **emotional experience** the customer wants to achieve or to avoid with their purchase. In a few moments, we'll show you how to ignite and build desire.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Fear

Fear in one form or another is always present in a selling situation. Your job is to **remove it as an obstacle to your customer's ownership decision** and to avoid behaviors that might cause your customer's fear level to increase. We'll discuss how to effectively deal with fear in our section on "Overcoming Objections."



Fear

- ▶ **Fear of Loss** – loss of money, time, status quo
- ▶ **Fear of Embarrassment or Humiliation** – being “suckered”, buying a “lemon”
- ▶ **Fear of Losing Control** – too much complexity, way out of one’s normal comfort zone
- Why in-house consultations work**
- ▶ **Fear of Physical Pain or Emotional Suffering** – Potential danger or injury from product or service
- ▶ **Fear of Disapproval** – criticism from friends or family

Why money back guarantees work



People buy in order to deliver positive emotional experiences and to avoid negative emotional experiences.

Joy, peace, happiness, excitement, fun, freedom, belonging, status, success, accomplishment, respect, safety, ease.



Fear, anger, frustration, boredom, loneliness, shame, guilt, embarrassment, worry, disapproval, loss.



Some examples...

BUSINESS	WHAT THEY ARE SELLING
McDonald's	Nourishment, value, comfort, fun. Avoiding hunger, loneliness, boredom.
Car Dealership	Status, freedom, entertainment (fun). Avoiding shame, frustration, self-doubt.
PTA	Belonging, purpose, contribution. Avoiding guilt, shame, fear and uncertainty.
HPBA Retailer	Fun, status, value, safety, peace of mind. Avoiding fear, shame, boredom, loneliness.

Kohler

Volvo

The Role of the Salesperson

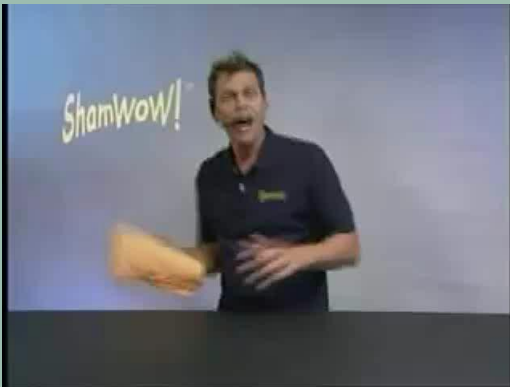
■ You are the guide for your client's ownership journey. Your responsibility is to effectively translate your products and services into the desire fulfillment they seek. Along the way you will also help them navigate through their minefield of fear and anxiety (objections).



■ This process requires that you understand their emotional needs and compassionately work with your client to build the excitement of their pending purchase while reducing their anxiety.

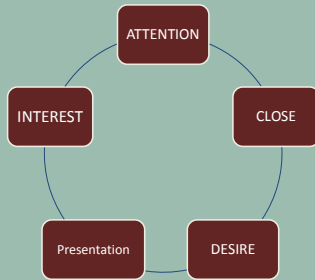
The Anatomy of the Sales Process





Elements common to every sale

- Attention
- Close
- Desire
- Presentation
- Interest



ATTENTION...

Customers will not make ownership decisions while distracted or preoccupied. It's up to the salesperson to be aware of these situations and resolve them effectively before proceeding.



What are two common distractions that occur regularly in retail situations? How do you deal with them?

KIDS

CELL PHONES

What other factors cause customers' attention to be drawn away?





Kiddy Cage

Interest...

Help your customer formulate their desire by asking questions. Find out what they are trying to achieve with their purchase.

Imagine you are a doctor charged with diagnosing your patient.

Use open-ended questions to determine their goals, likes, dislikes, and potential obstacles.



- “Have you ever owned a _____ before?”
 - If you could improve upon your _____, how would it be different?
 - What did you like about it?
- “Are you looking primarily for yourself or are there others involved you are trying to please?”
- “Have you been shopping?”
 - What have you seen that you liked?
 - What do think is the main reason that you haven’t already made up your mind?
- “How do you see this _____ fitting in with your floor plan, décor, family, living situation, etc.?”

Presentation

Communicate how the product features will supply the benefits that will specifically address the customer’s emotional desires.

1. **Feature:** Any aspect, physical feature, or quality of a product or service that can be sensed or imagined by a customer.
2. **Benefit:** How the feature will translate into the emotional well-being desired by the customer.
3. **Confirmation:** Ask the customer for their acceptance and agreement that the product can deliver the benefits they are seeking.

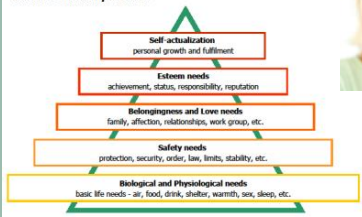
Some examples...

Feature	Benefit	Confirmation
Woodstove features an air wash for the glass.	Clean glass means uninterrupted viewing pleasure without having to suffer the fuss and mess of cleaning the glass.	Your time is better spent enjoying your new woodstove; not cleaning it, eh? (Canadian version)
Patio table is round and seats eight people.	Family and friends will be able to share hours of fun and outdoor dining.	Surrounding yourself with good company is a joy, wouldn't you agree?
Installation crew is NFI certified.	Worry-free, professional installation backed by local retailer.	Guaranteed safety and attention to detail are hard to find these days. Agreed?
Excel chimney provides warranty protection against chimney fire and corrosion.	The security of knowing your chimney was built to withstand the harshest conditions.	When it comes to protecting your home and family, it's important to own the safest chimney out there, right?

Desire

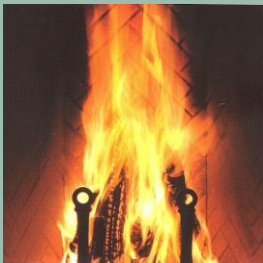
Desire is the **emotional experience** the customer wants to achieve or to avoid with their purchase.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Building Desire

In-Store Burning Display creates WOW factor



Building Desire – Solving the Renaissance Outside Store Presentation Problem

Outside Store: Brochures Video Disks





Completion – Closing the Sale

If you've gotten your customer's attention,
successfully narrowed down their specific
interest, boosted their desire, overcome their
fears, communicated how your product or
service will deliver the benefits they seek,

YOU HAVE EARNED THE RIGHT TO ASK FOR THE SALE!!!

DO IT!

Easy ways to ask for the sale...

1. You seem to agree that the _____ is what you're looking for.
If you went ahead, would you prefer _____ or _____?
(Fill in the last two blanks with smaller decisions such as "easy-to-clean enamel or traditional black", "legs or pedestal", "delivered or cash-and-carry", etc.)
2. Is there any reason not to start enjoying your new _____ today?
(Flush out any lingering objections.)
3. Let's take a look at the schedule and see when the most convenient time would be available for your installation.
(Assume the decision has already been made and all that's left is to pick a date.)



No salesperson has ever been shot, stabbed, or clubbed by a customer just because they asked for the sale.

SALES TECHNIQUES

3rd Party Testimonials

Analogies

Future Pacing

Incorporating Body Language

3RD Party Testimonials

Customers are reassured by the positive experiences of others **like them**.

They're great! I LOVE 'em.

Gather happy customer stories and feature them prominently in your store. Customer testimonials and anecdotes should be classified by the primary area of customer concern that they address.




Using testimonials

Customer: "Is this the best ____ money can buy?"

Unskilled salesperson: "You bet! I guarantee it!"

Skilled salesperson: "I might be a little biased myself, but I will tell you what Mr. and Mrs. Happy told me about **THEIR** ____." (Then show their letter or relate their positive experience.)

Store Testimonials



MOUNTAIN STOVE WORKS
Fireplace & Stove Shop

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE THE RIGHT FIREPLACE & STOVE RETAILER

WANTED!!

Customers that demand excellence! Mountain Stove Works has the most comprehensive warranty program in the industry with our unconditional 10 year parts & labor warranty, if we install your Mountain Stove Work purchase. Complimented by our certified professional staff.

Thank You for visiting our award winning showroom.

Take a look inside and see for yourself how easy it is.

Testimonials

Harry Hoop _____ P.O. Box 2000

Dillon, CO 80435
Mr. Troy Hyppes
Mountain Stove Works
P.O. Box 1190
Silverthorne, CO 80488

July 30, 1993

Dear Sir:

Now that my fireplace insert is installed and running, I felt it necessary to make a few observations about my purchase.

I am very surprised that the other Summit County businesses have not run you out of town. Your installers showed up on the day they were scheduled, at a reasonable hour and with all the tools and equipment needed to complete the job in one day. You are probably not aware that this is against the rules in Summit county. I have lived here for 20 years and for most of that time have refused from doing business with Summit County vendors because of the above. It was both refreshing and pleasant to once again see a company run in an efficient manner.

Your installers (I can't remember their names) were courteous, professional, well trained and went out of their way to see that the installation met my approval. Please pass my thanks along to them.

I am extremely happy with the service I received and want you to be aware of that. Feel free to use me as a reference if the need ever comes up. I would be happy to show anyone an in-home installation with a field notice.

Sincerely,

Harry Hoop

3rd Renaissance



Clean Air Excellence Award

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recognizes

Renaissance Fireplaces

and the Renaissance Roundtop 1,000 for outstanding, innovative efforts in improving air quality through Clean Air Technology. This exceptional achievement demonstrates a true commitment to obtaining cleaner air and protecting the environment.

We wish you continued success in achieving environmental excellence.

May 12, 2009




JEFF JONES
PA Administrator

3rd Party Testimonials

RSF Fireplaces – Popular Science Choice



Analogies

An **analogy** is a more vivid and emotional method of describing the performance or characteristics of any product. Analogies are word pictures that transform abstract or complicated concepts into more familiar and concrete experiences.



An analogy is the switch that turns the light on, the “jumper wire” that completes the circuit, or the movement that transforms sitting on a bench into a roller coaster ride!

Analogies

Rather than tell a prospect that a stove’s input is 30,000 BTU’s and it’s efficiency is 78%, try:

1. “This stove is like a heat wave in your own home.”
2. “At its maximum setting this stove is the equivalent of most central heating systems in homes today.”
3. Or, as one effective salesperson says:
“Come over here and stand in front this stove and let me turn on the fan for you. You can close your eyes and imagine that you’re driving your Harley through Death Valley at high noon.”



Analogies – RSF Brochure

Just like Sunday dinner doesn't come out of a can and fine wine doesn't come out of a box, a real fire doesn't come out of a pipeline.

If it's a real fire...it's wood. And if it's a clean burning efficient wood fire... it's probably an RSF fireplace.



Future Pacing

Every purchase decision we make is based on the assumption or expectation that our purchase will deliver the desired emotional benefits.

Consequently, every purchase decision also evokes the possibility that our expectations may not be met and that the result will be disappointment and frustration.



If only we could see into the future...

Future-pacing

Future-pacing is derived from NLP (Neuro Linguistic Programming). In our context, it is a selling technique used to place your customer mentally into the future experiencing the positive emotional benefits of the product or service they are seeking.



As the salesperson, you are providing the cues that will assist your customer in visualizing and feeling successful as a result of their purchase decision.



Incorporating Body Language

To calm customer's anxieties and fears



Become a Client Whisperer

Learning the Technique to Overcoming Objections

Overcoming Objection Technique

Once you've completed the sales process and have asked your closing question, the customer will either say "yes" or "no".

If it's a "yes" you write up the sale; if it's a "no" you pause, and if the customer is still standing there you proceed to working with the customer to discover their objections.

This is where the selling fun really begins!

Overcoming Objection Technique "You don't start selling until they say no"

Lloyd Pugh

1. **Understanding** – When customers voice their objections, they are telling you they are interested in what you are selling, but still have fear (emotional resistance) associated with taking ownership.
2. **Compassion** – Fears associated with the changes ownership may bring are a natural, predictable part of every sale. It is exaggerated whenever the degree of change or cost is perceived to be high.
3. **Determination** – **Unknown** or **unexpressed** objections **cannot be resolved**. Only you can help your customer overcome emotional resistance by flushing it out when you ask for the sale.

Handling an Objection - Technique

1. **Find common ground (cushion)**...agree with the **desire behind the objection** without supporting the "fight or flight" action that would kill the sale.
2. **(Reframe) the "problem"** in a way that allows the possibility of a solution **now**, rather than later.



Handling an Objection



Complete the process:

- ✓ Review the top two Feature/Benefits that met the customer's need and confirm again
- ✓ Introduce a new Feature/Benefit that you had withheld from your presentation & confirm
- ✓ Ask another closing question or suggest alternative commitment

Repeat this process until sale is completed or customer gives up and leaves.

Handling Objections - Need to shop

Customer says, "This is my first stop. I really need to shop before before making a decision."

Common ground (cushion): "It's important to make a choice that you will enjoy for years to come."

Reframe: "If you could feel confident that your wishes were being met at a competitive price, you'd probably prefer to spend your time in other ways, wouldn't you?"

If they answer yes, we continue.

Handling Objections - Need to shop

Using Third Party Confirmations

"We try to keep a recent copy of the ads our competitors run. Let me show you how they compare."

OR

"Many customers like to know what's available. Let me show you a couple of notes we've received from folks just like you."

Closing on a Smaller Decision

"You seem to really like the warmth and beauty of the RSF Opal fireplace. Why don't we schedule an in-home visit next week to make sure that it will work in your home?"

HANDLING AN OBJECTION – Up Front



- Common objections are best handled **DURING** the presentation – **NOT AT THE END!**
- Identify the top two or three objections you and your co-workers are likely to hear.

Use third-party testimonials, analogies and future-pacing to diffuse the objections before they have a chance to solidify.

Overcoming Pricing Objections

Overcoming Pricing Objection – Reestablishing Value

Customer Expresses Surprise at the Cost



"I have experienced sticker shock myself (cushion). I know how important it is to get the best value for your money (reframe)."

"May I ask you a question?" (Wait for agreement)

"When you say the price is higher than you expected, is it because the patio set we're looking at isn't worth the price we're asking, or would you say that it's just more money than you had budgeted?"

If it's a value issue, provide more support to establish the value.
If it's a budget issue, offer financing, cut back on optional equipment, or show a lower priced alternative.

Overcoming Pricing Objection – Reestablishing Value

Wood Stove Chimney Sticker Shock

"While it is important to get the most value for your money (cushion), you wouldn't trade your family's safety for a few dollars (reframe)."

"Your chimney is the most important safety and performance component of your wood stove installation. We use Excel Chimney exclusively because it is the only chimney tested to withstand a 30 minute chimney fire – that is 3 times longer than any other brand."

"If you are not home and your family experiences a chimney fire, imagine how secure you will feel knowing you selected the best chimney available (future pacing)."

Overcoming Pricing Objection – How to Handle the Discounting Client

Avoid entering into a negotiation over your profit margin.



1. Stay patient and don't become defensive.
2. Offer an option that has minimal cost to you, such as "90 days same as cash" financing, 2% credit card fee.
3. You may be able to negotiate the delivery charge, installation date, or "throw in" a \$75.00 gift certificate.
4. Use customer testimonials to establish the added value your professional operation brings to the deal.

Overcoming Pricing Objection – How to Handle the Discounting Client

Take a trip to the Clearance Corral (where margins go up to 50%)

Some customers value low price over quality. Try to snag this mass merchant client in your Clearance Corral. If they are really interested in your core product, they will return to the showroom expecting to pay more. If not,

let them walk.



Writing Up the Sale

Writing Up the Sale – Remembering the Add-Ons

- ❖ While clients focus on the appliance, in many cases the fireplace facing, hearth pads, blowers, andirons, trim or chimney can be more than appliance.
- ❖ According to hearth pad manufacturers only 25% of wood stove purchases are sold with hearth protection. Yet clients are looking for one stop, convenient shopping. It is easy to be so concerned about potential pricing objections that we back away from adding the add-ons.
- ❖ Try using an assumption sell when writing up the sale for the hearth pad. Simply tell the client, **“Now we have to pick out your hearth pad.”**

Writing Up the Sale – Selling RSF Fireplaces

- ❖ RSF Fireplaces can be priced either as a simple fireplace installation, or as a whole-house heating system incorporating fans, registers, and thermostats.
- ❖ Experienced RSF salespersons use the process of writing up the sale to enhance the total sales ticket.
- ❖ These add-ons can always be removed or delayed depending on the customer's budget, but they will never be sold unless they are offered.

Writing Up the Sale – Getting the Deposit

Requiring customers to provide a relatively small refundable deposit psychologically turns them from a customer to an owner. Their attention shifts from shopping for a product to defending their purchase. If they do change their mind, you have a second chance to re-sell them, or, finally, to impress them with your easy willingness to refund their deposit.

Writing Up the Sale – Buyer's Remorse

Immediately following a purchase decision, your customer may quite naturally experience a moment of self-doubt. Here are a few suggestions for offering some timely support.

Congratulate them on making an excellent choice they, their family and their friends are sure to enjoy for many years to come.

Reassure them the particular features they most desired will make an impressive design statement in their home.

Getting Out of the Way of Your Biases and Judgments

Understanding your Biases and Judgments

- We all have biases and judgments about ourselves and others.
- Successful sales people understand their biases and judgments and are capable of discarding them as they have no place in the transfer of goods or services process.

Understanding Your Biases and Judgments Getting Out of Your Own Way

- Selling high end products to the wealthy, selling esteem, love and belonging.
 - a. Understanding the wealthy buyer
 - b. Understanding their hot buttons
- Introspectively solving a sales slump
 - a. Allowing your personal life to interfere with sales
 - b. Allowing your financial position to interfere with sales

Putting It All To Work

Putting It ALL To Work



1. **Clarify the objective** – Actually “see” the outcomes you are trying to achieve. Add sales elements that help achieve the objective and eliminate or minimize those that don’t.
2. **What resources do you have?** – Product displays, P.O.S. materials, brochures, financing instruments, customer testimonials, product knowledge, USP’s, Plan B (when all else fails)
3. **Support team** – Manufacturers, distributors, sales reps, family, co-workers. This is anyone who has a stake in your success and the positive support they can bring to your efforts. Ask for their assistance.
4. **Put your oar in the water** – Start using your new knowledge and skills and keep at it until you are comfortable with the techniques and find yourself ready to move on to the next level.

Putting It ALL To Work

“If you want to sell more furniture, don’t talk about the furniture.”

- Sales is an art form that is never perfected and takes a lifetime to learn.
- Understanding emotional needs that drive consumer buying decisions will help you make more sales.

Don’t Forget...

HAVE FUN!!!

There is something magical about skillfully guiding your customers to a purchase decision that will satisfy their needs.



The Art of Sales

Forward by Tom Pugh

Selling is the single most important ingredient in determining the success of a big ticket, home improvement retail store. Whether it's an Outdoor Room filled with patio furniture and a barbecue, a hot tub or a fireplace, getting a customer to move from shopper to buyer will determine the profitability of the enterprise. Unlike many hardware stores or mass merchants, where merchandising and advertising are the keys to success (and sales personnel are generally poorly paid), big ticket specialty home improvement retailers will succeed or fail on the effectiveness of their sales staff.

Despite this fact, it's shocking how little effort is made by many retailers to develop good salespeople, and how poorly their employees are trained. Some buy into the myth that good salespeople are "born" or have a "natural" gift. Just hire the right person, they believe, and sales will reach the desired level. Far too many managers are not great salespeople themselves and don't fully comprehend the sales process. How can they be expected to hire and train the optimum sales employee?

Selling is an art form. Just like any art form, it can be taught, and the best artists study and practice their craft for a lifetime. While having a likeable, extroverted personality is a good starting point, almost anyone inspired to learn and practice can be a great salesperson. The problem is, how

do we learn the art of sales?

I'm flattered that many of my contemporaries consider me a good salesman. They are shocked to hear that I was an introverted child born to a great salesman (so much for genetics being the answer). While I saw first-hand how a great salesman sold, I wasn't taught sales. In truth, much of how Lloyd Pugh sold made little sense to me. He rarely talked about the product, preferring to talk about the profit. We frequently kidded him that he really didn't know what he was selling, he just sold it. It was only later that I understood the brilliance of his method.

My sales training consisted of Lloyd's giving me a briefcase and saying, "Go sell." He knew that I would figure it out after making enough calls. That is how he learned, and this hit or miss system really hasn't changed much in the past 50 years. I was fortunate to have had a great role model; most aren't as lucky.

After selling for several years, I connected with a new distributorship in New Mexico run by general/sales manager Bill Lentz. I spent a couple of weeks each year trav-

Salesman Cliff Hounsell of Energysavers in Meredith, New Hampshire talking with customers.

eling with Bill, selling chimneys in the Rocky Mountains. Bill shared with me his sales philosophy and what the sales process was all about. The weeks I spent with Bill were exhilarating as I started to understand the art of sales.

Bill's company was bought out and we didn't travel together again, but the lessons I learned took me to a higher sales level. When I had the chance I hired Bill, and I have asked him to write a group of sales articles for *Hearth & Home*. I want to share with you the sales insights that resulted from our conversations. These are not your typical sales articles focusing on sales techniques. There are thousands of books that cover that terrain.

The Art of Sales: An Introductory Primer focuses on the sales process. What are the mental processes that a customer experiences in order to buy a product or service? How does a salesperson connect with that customer to bring the sale to closure? What are the new sales frontiers that retailers will need to conquer? Understanding the basics of the sales process is the prerequisite to understanding which technique to implement, and when to do so.

These articles teaching the fundamentals of the sales process are intended for both new and experienced sales personnel. With this knowledge in hand, salespeople can improve their performance of this art.

Closing the Sale

by Bill Lentz

In all my years as a salesman (which is most of my life) and as a sales trainer (about 15 years, give or take), I have never known a topic to rival "Closing" for getting a strong reaction from salespeople. Whether positive or negative, their fervent reactions imply to me that this simple concept strikes at the core of what we do.

Other sales-related topics such as merchandising, product knowledge, selling techniques and approaches, cold calling, follow-up, etc., all fall into the category I refer to as "before lunch." If you bring them up after lunch, you had better enjoy the sound of snoring. It isn't that they're unimportant subjects to the sales professional; it's just that they engage the mind of the salesperson, while Closing is highly emotional. It's a visceral thing. Closing is about success and failure. It's about the size of paychecks. It's what keeps a business "in business." It's what we really do for a living.

My goal in this piece is to clarify and demystify the closing process in sales. I want you to understand how closing came to be such a hot potato that it spawned a whole new classification of specialized salespeople called "closers." Mostly, I would like to give you a roadmap to navigate your way through whatever roadblocks you may have experienced up until now in your efforts to close more sales.

Selling: What It Is & Isn't

Selling is the process of transferring ownership from one entity to another. Usually we are referring to the transfer of goods or services. However, the def-

inition can be expanded to include the transfer of intangibles, such as ideas or opinions. This occurs when you convince your boss to increase your pay, when your special someone consents to join you for dinner and a movie, or when your teenager sees the light and cleans up his or her room!

The key here is that transfer of ownership must occur for the activity to be called "selling." Even though we may dress like salespeople and talk like salespeople, we are not actually selling anything until that ownership transfer occurs. I realize that a few eyebrows are rising here, but I ask you to bear with me and see how you're feeling when we're done. Remember, I said that the topic of closing a sales transaction would touch a few nerves.

I would like to point out that we are only talking about the legal transfer of ownership. There's a whole subclass of individuals who transfer ownership illegally, and I prefer to refer to them as crooks rather than salespeople. When a buyer transfers ownership illegally, it's theft. And when the seller does it, it's fraud. Both activities tend to land one behind bars instead of in the bar being toasted for outstanding sales performance.

It does not matter if your job title is Sales Representative, Account Executive, Warehouse Manager, Installer or Receptionist. You are selling when you are facilitating the transfer of ownership from the business owner to your customer. I know a very energetic and hard-working bookkeeper in Santa Fe who, after falling in love with the wood stove she bought for her family, got over half of the families in her small New Mexico commu-

nity to buy the same one. Hmm.

Does that make her a bookkeeping salesperson or a selling bookkeeper? Either way, it makes her an exceptionally valuable employee.

The Selling Cycle

Five elements are present whenever a successful transaction occurs. No two salespersons' strengths are identical, and so their attention to and proficiency with these elements varies widely. You don't even have to be consciously aware of them to complete a transaction. However, they are always present if the transaction is successfully concluded. You can flounder for 60 minutes, but if in the 61st minute all of the elements are there, you score a touchdown. Doesn't it make sense that your selling skill and proficiency will grow as you become more aware of which elements are present and which are still needed?

Attention:

It stands to reason that your customers are not going to become the new owners of your goods or services if their attention is consumed by their children, their cell phones, the siren screaming by your store, the food particle stuck to your front tooth, or the five or six brochures that you've already handed them. You will facilitate their attention being where you want it if you practice a few simple skills.

First, stay focused and flexible yourself, and attend to distractions.

Check in regularly with your customer to see if you are addressing their needs





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clearly and concisely.

Pare down the choices yourself and offer your customer just one or two simple options.

All of our attention spans are short (and getting shorter). Serve up your presentation in small bites that are attractive, tasty and easy to digest.

Interest:

We tend to assume a reasonably high level of interest on the part of our customers. Why else would they have ended up in our store? Well, maybe their child is roller-skating next door and they arrived 20 minutes early. Perhaps they were ordered to come in by an authority figure (i.e., spouse) and they would much rather be skydiving. We have all dealt with the customer who is thinking of buying a house or adding a patio and is just looking for some ideas. Whatever the case, unless your name is Carnac the Magnificent, you just won't know unless you ask. Do not assume. Once you've assessed their level of interest, you'll know better how to proceed.

Information:

Here's the part that everyone thinks of as "selling." Unfortunately, too often we make this a complicated, confusing, rational and frankly boring "anti-selling" process. Product knowledge is important but highly overrated. Often, the presentation of features, facts and figures is a comfort zone or safe haven for the salesperson. As long as we can ramble on about specs, we don't have to deal with the messy, scary and unpredictable emotional aspects of every sale ever made to a human being. And the bigger the dollars, the deeper the emotional currents. Our goal in imparting information is to demonstrate how the product is going to fulfill the customer's needs and then to elicit their agreement. That is all.

Desire:

Your customers' desire to fulfill their needs through your product supplies the power or energy that propels them beyond their fears and concerns relating to ownership. This is such a critical element of every sale that it's astounding that it is so often ignored. Desire is the sole reason that working

display models are such a premium on your showroom floor. It's why more heating products are sold when the weather turns cold, and why more patio products are sold when temperatures begin to rise.

It is precisely in this area that the most successful sales professionals shine. It takes a little courage. It's scary to interact with customers' emotional selves. But come on in, the water's fine. And here's the payoff: become proficient in evoking your customers' powerful desires and the dreaded closing follows effortlessly.

Close:

Well, we finally made it! Here it is, the culmination of all our efforts. "Closing the sale" reminds me of my ninth grade English teacher, Mrs. Rudolph. I loved her for how she could always bring out the best in me, but I hated the fact that I could never get by with just a mediocre effort. You don't have to be in sales to know that trying to close (or complete) a sale has a greater likelihood of failure than success. That's right. The odds are that, even though you've done your job well and all of the Selling Cycle elements are present, you will fail more often than you succeed.

It's what one of my first sales managers called "successful failure." Ted Williams, baseball's all-time best hitter, had a lifetime batting average of .344. That means he failed to get a hit more than six times out of every 10 tries. It must have been tough stepping up to the plate knowing that the odds were that he would fail. And yet we celebrate Ted Williams for his outstanding success. You'll never know if you're a Hall of Famer unless you, too, are willing to accept failure as a likely outcome.

If you commit the Selling Cycle to memory, it will serve as a kind of scorecard for evaluating each selling experience. It will point you in the direction you need to be going to increase the likelihood of getting a hit whenever you get up to bat. You will soon come to welcome your sales "failures" as a neces-

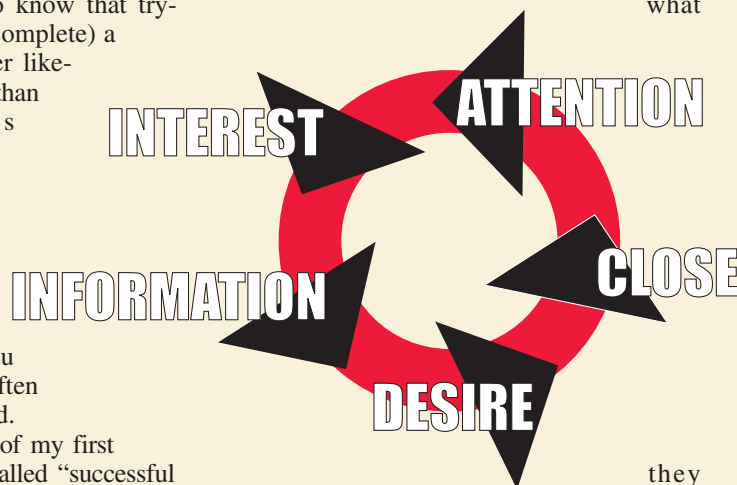
sary part of your career success.

Remember, the Selling Cycle is not a linear process. It is a group of elements that a customer has to resolve before a sale is made. It is the responsibility of the salesperson to help the customer resolve those elements. In that sense, selling and closing are synonymous.

Buyer or Seller?

In every transaction there is a Buyer and a Seller. That's right, there are no exceptions to this little maxim. Whether or not your customer leaves your store as the proud owner of a new gizmo, one of you can now be identified as a Seller and the other as a Buyer. It's time now to be reminded that a sale is defined as the transfer of ownership of a good, a service, an idea or an opinion.

We have all been customers ourselves, and we each have a favorite line for convincing a salesperson that now is definitely not the right time for us to purchase what



they are selling. Of course, none of us has ever managed to purchase anything "in the future." For every purchase ever made, the buying decision has always been made now, in the present moment. So when salespeople are convinced that a purchase decision cannot be made now, they are, in that moment, assuming the role of the Buyer. They are "buying" the idea that the customer is "selling," and temporarily abandoning their role as the salesperson or "the one who facilitates the transfer of ownership."

Since we're the ones being paid to perform the function of the salesperson, it is really up to us to see that this embarrassing role reversal is minimized. Many of you are already thinking of the many really good reasons you've

A Tale of Two Retailers

I'm frequently asked, "What is the best way to sell?" The sales techniques you use depend on the customers you want to pursue. In some environments the hard sell is required. In other cases, the soft sell is better. In either event, all elements of the Selling Cycle have to be fulfilled in order to achieve the sale.

The best example of this dichotomy

professionals' holy land. Thousands of consumers in one location wanting to spend thousands of dollars on big-ticket home improvements. They are visiting the fair with attention, interest, information, and desire pre-primed. Hot tub companies assemble their "Dream Teams" to close consumers who have waited all year to take advantage of the "Fair Specials." If you want to see

their selling system is designed for them: a state-of-the-art showroom with every fireplace beautifully displayed with a variety of design motifs.

The in-store salesperson assists them in narrowing their design and equipment preferences. The goal is not to "close" a sale, but rather to schedule an in-home appointment so that Allan, the installation and customer service expert, can inspect every site to make sure that the equipment is suitable for the project. Only after this attention to detail is fulfilled will Allan give a written estimate, schedule an appropriate time to start the installation and, of course, get the deposit. The close at The Fireplace Company is a natural progression after the elements of the Selling Cycle have been completed; it occurs in the safety and tranquility of customers' homes.

If they can get an in-home appointment, retailers report a closing rate of over 75 percent. Consumers are at



Rich's for the Home.

is the differing styles of Rich's for the Home, a four-store hearth, patio, barbecue and hot tub retailer located in western Washington, and The Fireplace Company serving Aspen, Colorado. They are both highly successful retail companies employing very different selling systems.

Rich's serves a three million person urban population base. Their big event is the Western Washington State Fair that runs for three weeks in September. In 21 days, Rich's will sell 250 to 350 hearth products at a large booth that costs them nearly \$150,000 to set up and man. They are closing an average of 15 hearth sales per day in a booth at a state fair. During these three weeks in September, Rich's changes from your typical hearth retailer to a crazed selling machine.

I can't tell you what would possess customers to pay admission to a fair, and in between looking at the piglets, seeing a 400-pound pumpkin, flying through the air on a ride known as "The Drop of Doom," and consuming those famous fair burgers and elephant ears, determine that this is the time to buy a big-ticket fireplace, hot tub, organ, hearing aid, vacuum that will purify the air in their home, or vita-mixer that will improve their family's health.

While bizarre, this is the sales pro-

the art of sales performed at its highest level, then listen to the vita-mix pitch or inquire about a hot tub for your own backyard.

These customers want to buy something at the fair, and Rich's wants to turn their expectations into a reality. That is why Rich's invests the money it costs to work the fair, and why they attract the veteran sales professional required to turn that investment into profit. It is why Rich's is reputed to have one of the best retail sales teams in the state. In order for that to happen, they have to take the customer through the Selling Cycle elements.

This is not an environment for the timid or for those salespeople who are satisfied with the "be backs." While there is a potential for unethical companies to prey on these consumers, Rich's is a reputable firm that has been targeting this market for years. I'm convinced that the vast majority of their customers enjoy this environment and are just as happy with their purchases after the sale as any other customer.

"Clients" at The Fireplace Company in Aspen, Colorado, are the polar opposite of Rich's fair customers. After all, even the fixer-uppers in Aspen are worth \$1 million. Allan and Patricia Blick understand this customer, and



The Fireplace Company of Aspen, CO.

ease in the comfort of their own homes; it lowers their fears. They can better visualize products in their homes, which bolsters their desire. It's often easier to fulfill the Selling Cycle in a customer's home than in a retail establishment.

So, what is the best way to sell? That answer depends on your customers. If you tried to "soft sell" at the fair you wouldn't be successful. Likewise, if you tried to "hard sell" in a small market such as Aspen, you would alienate consumers and endanger your reputation. Professional salespeople tailor their sales techniques for the customers they wish to serve. There is no right or wrong way to sell – just what works in your market.

— Tom Pugh



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heard from your customers. But if we each submitted our top 10 “absolutely real” reasons, we would find that rarely would any two lists be the same. It just boils down to what you believe to be “true” or “real” yourself.

One salesperson believes that no decision can be made without having both spouses in agreement, another believes that it’s important to shop extensively before making a purchase decision, while a third is convinced that only the cheapest product should be purchased. Consequently, whenever a customer utters these magic words, we find ourselves transformed from Seller to Buyer. Amazing, isn’t it?

What if all of these “reasons” were actually encoded messages that meant something else entirely? Imagine for the moment that all customers speak a foreign language that we’ll call “customer-eze.”

What if the words, “I need to bring my wife (or husband) in to make the decision,” were really code for “You haven’t yet overcome my anxiety of disappointing my spouse.”

Or if the words, “I’ve only started shopping and I never buy anything on my first stop,” were really customer-eze for “I don’t yet trust what you are telling me and I need you to treat me with respect.”

I suspect your reaction to those words would be much different. In any event, the words would no longer trigger your transformation from Seller to Buyer. You would probably proceed to address the customer’s needs and move on to the eventual close.

“I Don’t Want To Be Pushy”

“Pushy” is the description given to the “high pressure” sales approach commonly associated with the sale of used cars or vacuum cleaners. Well, I don’t want to be pushy either. “Pushy” describes an unskilled or unethical salesperson. A pushy salesperson is often a frightened salesperson, or an arrogant one, who sees the customer as an adversary and attempts to manipulate the customer’s decision through fear and intimidation.

By the way, a lot of pushy salespeople out there are earning high incomes. Being pushy doesn’t mean that you aren’t getting results. However, this strategy can easily give rise to a number of unsatisfactory outcomes as well. Perhaps the worst consequence is that it solidifies the

salesperson’s fears and encourages compensating behaviors that are often further isolating and self-destructive.

Don’t confuse pushiness with perseverance. Sometimes it’s tough for your customers to convince themselves to make a purchase decision now. It’s almost always easier to put it off until some later time. They often need you to persevere, to maintain your professionalism and keep doing your job.

If your goal were improved health

ments of the Selling Cycle have been addressed, and then ask for the sale.

That being said, let me relate one of my early experiences selling a nationally-acclaimed personal development course. I had made an appointment with my prospect to meet in his office to make my presentation. I came prepared for the usual 20-30 minutes that it took to deliver my “pitch” and enroll my prospect in a class of his choosing for around \$800. Two hours later, he was still skipping



(Left) Ray Porcell, co-owner of Energysavers, helps with a customer's question.

and your doctor recommended that you go on a diet and add exercise to your daily regimen, do you really want him to cave just because you tell him your schedule is already full and all the restaurant food you eat makes dieting impossible? Not if you really want to improve your health and reduce your risk of heart disease. You want him to be persistent and to use his education, skill and experience to help you change your mind. If he gives up and lets you off the hook, you’ll just be forced to seek out a more skillful doctor who won’t forget who’s the doctor and who’s the (slightly overweight) patient.

When Is The Right Time To Close The Sale?

Close (complete) the sale when you have earned the right to do so. You earn the right to ask your customers to make a purchase decision when you have addressed their stated needs and secured their agreement that the benefits derived from your product or service will meet those needs. In other words, make sure that all of the ele-

ments of the Selling Cycle have been addressed, and then ask for the sale. I had not uttered one syllable of my presentation and was ready to give up and go home. As I packed up my materials and prepared to leave, I decided I had nothing to lose and blurted out: “So do you want to take this class or not?” A brief, stunned silence was followed by his directing his bookkeeper to write out a check. The moral of the story is: Sometimes you earn the right to close just by sitting around for two hours.

Small children make great “closers.” They seldom waste any time with elaborate presentations. They just tell you what they want and never relent. Parents know that even threats of physical pain are no match for their persistence when it comes to getting what they want. I guess they’re not worried about being perceived as “pushy.”

Getting Past “No”

When your customers respond positively to your close, you march directly to the cash register and proceed to seal the deal with their monetary commitment. We’re

all pretty good at this one so I won't waste your time making it sound any more difficult than it is. Just don't make the mistake of leaving things at the level of a verbal commitment. Deposits are good; payment in full is better. Many a decision has been reversed because a salesperson was satisfied with a verbal "yes." The purpose of a financial commitment is not greed, but rather the psychological movement from "shopper" to "owner" that is experienced when the monetary exchange occurs.

It's the customer's negative response to our close that tends to knock us off our stride. To remedy this we'll have to go back into our Customer-eze to English Translation Dictionary. I'm not going to try to tell you that "no" means "yes." I will submit, however, that "no" may mean that your customers' real needs have not yet been addressed and that their fear of moving forward still outweighs their desire to own your product or service.

As long as there's a chance that those needs will be discovered and met, customers tend to exhibit an amazing amount of patience. They will choose to leave only when they become convinced that you simply lack the ability to show them how to get what they want. So when you ask for the sale and are told no, it's time to roll up your sleeves and earn your pay. Some even say it's when the fun really begins.

Somebody once told me that I have two ears and one mouth to remind me to use them proportionately. It's not

easy to be a good listener, but it's vital to probing emotional issues that lie beneath the surface. I'm not talking about serial killers here – just your ordinary, everyday customers. You will assist them in overcoming their own resistances by making them feel safe enough to talk about their concerns without feeling judged.

Most of us carry around fears or concerns that a particular choice we make may result in some form of pain or suffering. Generally you will have nothing more to do here than probe, listen and provide reassurance in one form or another. Once the customer's resistance is given voice, it loses much of its charge. What's left for you to do at this point is to recap briefly how the benefits of the product will meet their needs and ask another closing question.

The Magic Words

All right, there aren't any magic words. But there is something magical about skillfully guiding your customers to a purchase decision that will satisfy their needs. Remember, I'm the guy who blurted out, "Are you going to take this class or not?" What really separates the pros from the amateurs is their commitment to their customers and employers to steward the process of ownership transfer to the very end. In this pursuit, there is no compromise. No one has to like you any more than they have to like the doctor who will not compromise their health or his professional-

ism simply to avoid their disapproval.

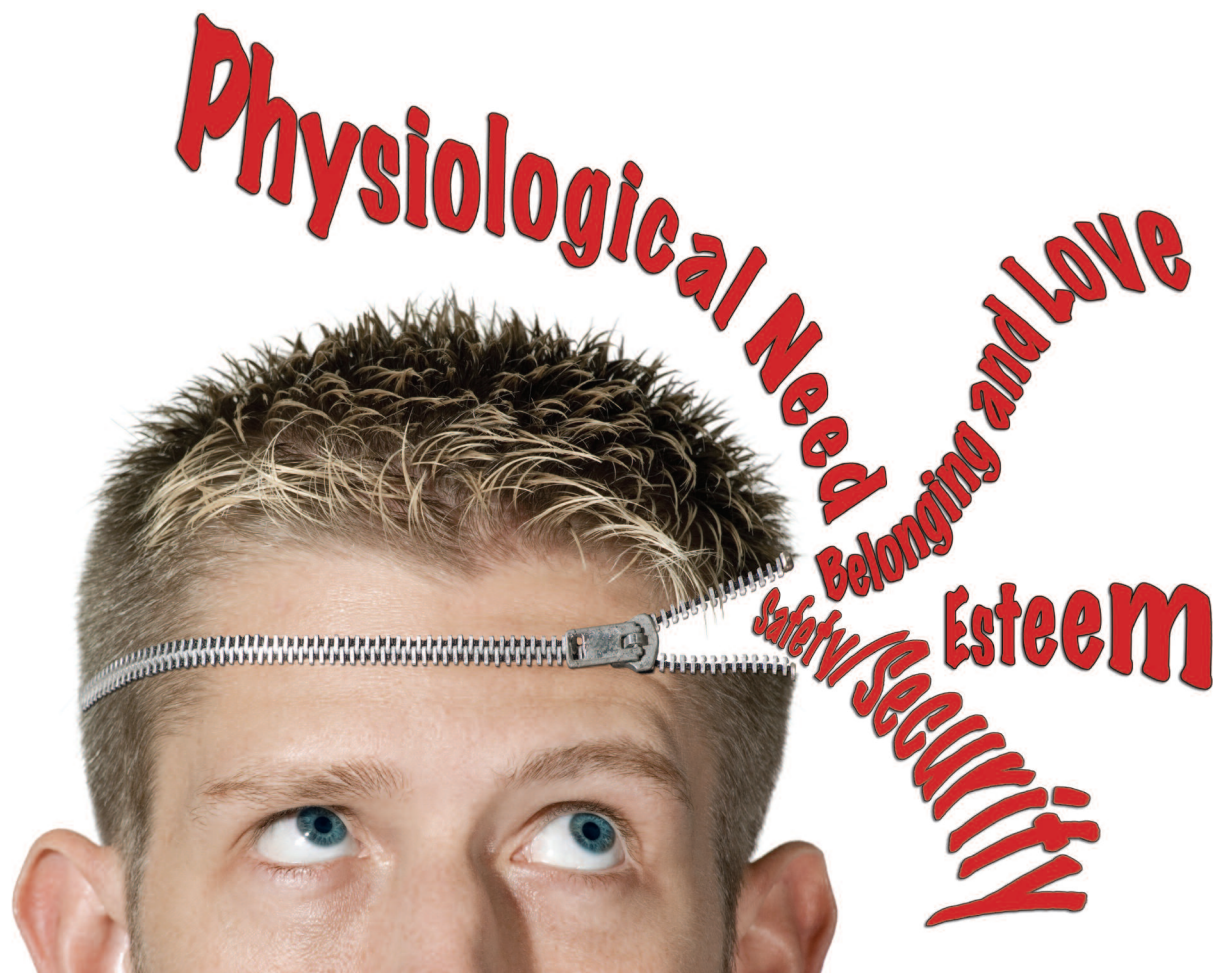
I like to say that selling without closing is like telling jokes without the punch lines. Who really benefits? By leaving off the punch line, you avoid potential disappointment, but you make the laughter all but impossible. I know your job is tough. I know that selling is not a skill that many are willing to give the acknowledgement it deserves. And I also know that immeasurable rewards and satisfaction await you when you facilitate a win-win transaction between your customer and your owner that would not have happened without you. I honor your commitment and wish you, "Good Selling!"

This is Part 1 of a three-part series.

About the Authors

Bill Lentz received a Bachelor of Arts degree from UC Santa Cruz in 1969 and a Masters of Business Administration degree from the Anderson School of Management at UCLA in 1971. He has a wealth of sales experience. He sold Dale Carnegie Improvement Classes in New Mexico, worked retail sales for four years in a specialty hearth store, was general/sales manager for Firebird Distributing in Santa Fe for seven years, spent another seven years as Regency's Rocky Mountain sales manager and has worked at Lloyd Pugh & Associates since March 2006.

Tom Pugh is president of Lloyd Pugh & Associates, a manufacturer's representative firm, and is a frequent contributor to Hearth & Home magazine.



“In sales, it’s about people, not things.”

Forward by Tom Pugh

This simple, yet profound sentence is found in the conclusion to Bill Lentz’s “Selling in the Ultimate Showroom” article. This is the secret that distinguishes the *great* salesperson from the *good* or sometimes *bad* salesperson.

I recently spoke with a new hearth retail saleswoman who came from the furniture business. She was hired because the owner of the store was impressed with how much furniture his spouse bought from her. When she started her furniture sales career she was taught a simple sales maxim, “If you want to sell more furniture, don’t talk about the furniture.”

Unfortunately, in our industry too many salespeople *talk* about the *furniture*. They choose to focus on presenting information, stressing their technical expertise.

For years we kidded Lloyd Pugh that, during a sales presentation, we weren’t sure he even knew about the products he was selling. We were mystified that he just continued to sell them. It was only after riding with Bill Lentz during our Rocky Mountain sales trips that I started

to comprehend what sales was all about. It wasn’t that I was a terrible salesperson; I just wasn’t great. It was then that I understood what made Lloyd’s approach so effective.

“Selling in the Ultimate Showroom” focuses on the Desire and Fear elements of the selling cycle. Lentz doesn’t just confront the desires and fears customers experience when making a major purchase, he dissects them. This is the most controversial, and important, article in this three-part series. When I sent this article out to be previewed, it received drastically differing responses. The *great* salespeople whom I know loved it and thought it was “a must read for anyone who wants to sell.” The non-salespeople thought it was “tedious and didn’t make sense.”

If you are in sales and it doesn’t make complete sense, then put it down and read it again in six months. During that time, I think you will begin to see the lessons from this article cropping up in dealings with your customers. They will slowly start to make more sense, and your understanding of sales will begin to blossom.

Selling in the Ultimate Showroom

by Bill Lentz

In my lifetime I have had the opportunity to conduct retail business in a wide range of environments. I began outdoors on the front lawn behind a cardboard lemonade stand and progressed more recently to a beautiful, professionally designed, award-winning hearth showroom in Santa Fe, New Mexico. As a factory representative, I have visited hundreds of retail establishments and witnessed a dramatic transformation in the level of showroom sophistication in our industry. A great deal of time, money and creative energy is expended in the search for the retail version of the Holy Grail – “the *Ultimate Showroom*.”

We have all heard of brilliantly designed, state-of-the-art retail stores that have failed financially. Conversely, just about every factory rep out there is aware of at least one retail operation that is thriving despite what might be described as the “anti-showroom.”

It makes sense when a retailer with a variety of attractive displays in a clean, upscale setting outsells another retailer without those advantages. But how do we explain a plain, messy, more difficult to find retail location outperforming the much more attractive competition? This article should shed a little light on these seeming contradictions and help you find your path to success in the *Ultimate Showroom*.

In my selling seminars I always ask participants where most of their sales take place. The retail showroom is a popular response, but a surprising number also cite the customer's home as the best place to close the sale. (To date, no one has told me that many sales are made on the telephone, but that doesn't seem to stop hundreds of folks from trying!) In fact, this is my version of a trick question. I don't really want to know where most of the sales take place. I want to find out who's aware of where ALL of the sales take place!

The answer is fairly obvious if I change the question a bit and ask: Where do all of your customers' buying decisions take place? They take place inside their minds, of course. Every aspect of a customer's physical environment may influence that decision either positively or negatively. Obviously we cannot ignore these outside influences. We can learn, however, to get the most out of any external factors when we, as salespeople, step up to the challenges of navigating effectively in the *Ultimate Showroom* – the human mind.

To some this may sound threatening or silly or even crazy. But if you'll stick with me, I think you will find that you are already familiar with most of what we'll discuss, even though you may not have thought of it in quite these terms or in quite this context. To begin, we'll need to go back to some of the selling concepts we introduced in an earlier article. For brevity's sake I'll just list them, but if you need further clarification you can, hopefully, dig up your old issue (*Hearth & Home*, February 2008).

1. Selling is the transfer of ownership of goods, services and ideas from one party (seller) to another (buyer).
2. A salesperson is anyone who directly facilitates this transfer of ownership.
3. A sale is most likely to occur when the perceived benefit of ownership is high and the perceived cost of ownership is low.
4. Desire, in the form of emotion, is the motivator behind all purchases.
5. Fear, in its many forms, either real or perceived, is what stifles desire and exaggerates cost. This is widely referred to as “objections” in sales lingo.

So now we're ready for our get-acquainted tour of the *Ultimate Showroom*.



First Stop: Desire

Remember, Desire is the emotional proponent that drives our prospect to call us or drop by our store. Desire arises from a variety of sources, and it is important to uncover what that source is in each selling situation. We create unnecessary obstacles for ourselves when we *assume* our customer's motivation. Psychologist Abraham Maslow in “A Theory of Human Motivation” categorized man's basic motivations in a way that we can readily adapt for our purposes. The hierarchy of relevant needs that motivate purchases is listed below:

1. **Physiological Need:** bodily comfort, freedom from pain, shelter, etc.
2. **Safety/Security:** averting danger.
3. **Belonging and Love:** socializing with others, being accepted.
4. **Esteem:** achieving respect, self-worth and autonomy.

What brings you into our store today?





I know of only one way to zero in on this vital information: You have to ask. Regardless of your customer's speech pattern, eye movement, body posture or style of dress, you can only find out what they are truly seeking by asking questions and listening to their responses. Keep this exploration low-key and informal – no cross-examinations!

Whatever your customer's response, avoid the tendency to judge, advise or jump to conclusions. The more you learn now, the easier your task will be later. I recommend starting with broad, general, open-ended questions and then narrowing them down as necessary.

Preliminary questions include:
"What brings you into our store today?"

"Have you ever owned _____ before?" If so, "What did you most enjoy about your _____?"

"What features would you want to see added to, improved or removed from your new _____?"

Later, more pointed, questions might include:

"Once you decide on your new _____ and install it in your home or backyard, which family members do you see enjoying it the most?"

"In your shopping to date, have you seen any _____ that you think you might like? If so, which features in particular?"

"What do you think kept you from going ahead and getting a _____ before now?"

Obviously I have not asked my customer to tell me directly if they are motivated by a desire to relieve their arthritis pain. I haven't suggested that they might be here in an attempt to keep up with the next-door neighbor's new spa or backyard kitchen. And I certainly have refrained from asking them if their feelings of low self-esteem are contriving to elicit jealous oohs and aahs from guests who will be invited over to enjoy their new luxury fireplace.

I'm just listening carefully to determine which of the four basic human

desires is dominant in my customer's mind. Now, enlightened by this information, let's proceed.

Say your customer is suffering from physical pain and that your spa or exercise equipment or wood stove might offer relief in the form of massage, stretching, strengthening or warmth. The features and benefits you target for your customer should directly address that specific need. Who cares that the spa is a great family activity? What difference does it make that your wood stove provides independence from gas and electric utilities? A customer motivated by the first of our hierarchy of needs wants to know how and to what degree and for how long he/she will get relief from pain. That's fairly simple, correct?

Now let's look at another example. You find out that your customer has a family and places their safety, security and happiness above his/her own. When you present your gas fireplace insert to them, which features/benefits are you going to emphasize?

- Perhaps you will begin with the safety features such as thermocouples, safety shutoff snap discs, and your certified professional installation team. Is there any need to bring up efficiencies and fan speeds?
- You might refer your customer to a third party testimonial that highlights your company's professionalism and integrity.
- Finally, you might employ a powerful technique called *future-pacing*: having your customer picture in his/her mind the family feeling happy and safe during a lengthy power outage that disables the central heating system. As everyone sits comfortably around the kitchen table playing board games and laughing, Dad (or Mom) thinks back to similar times in the past when the temperature dropped below freezing and everyone had to stay bundled up against the cold.

Now, with a mixture of pride and relief, he is pleased that he purchased the gas insert in time to avoid more discomfort to his loved ones. Oh, and he never regretted adding to his piece of mind by purchasing the childproof safety screen.

In both examples we are using our skills to uncover our customer's motivational Desire and then to enhance that

Desire. It's like blowing on embers to get the fire burning. Assuming that your customer's motivation is the same as your own, or anyone else's for that matter, is like blowing randomly around your living room to get your fire to ignite from the embers. You might be successful, but chances aren't good. And even if you do start a fire, you won't know which breath effectively accomplished your goal. Maybe this lack of focus is why some salespeople are thought of as "blowhards."

Before our journey through the *Ultimate Showroom* continues, let me address any budding concerns you may have regarding sales techniques. When you seek to coerce others into decisions that are either detrimental or against their wishes, the process is a manipulation. Manipulations take advantage of fear and/or ignorance to achieve their ends.

The sales techniques we offer here are intended to facilitate ownership decisions that are in harmony with our prospect's Desire. We want to promote informed, positive choices through our skill and understanding of the inner processes that drive us all. Just as a skilled surgeon cannot stand outside the operating room and advise his patient in the performance of his own appendectomy, the trained professional salesperson does not expect his customers to do all of the work themselves. He *gets his hands dirty* when necessary to fan the flame of Desire and loosen the grip of Fear. In my experience most customers appreciate the help.

The 400-Pound Gorilla Called Fear

If making purchase decisions were easy, there wouldn't be any salespeople. We all have some level of Fear to overcome every time we choose to give up one thing in order to get something else. Generally speaking, the more we have to give up, the greater our resistance to committing to the new choice. That's why professional salespeople are required for big-ticket items.

At times, even restaurant menus with their array of tempting choices seem to render customers unable to make a decision. In a moment, you will be able to detect the variety of Fears at play in even these simplest of situations.

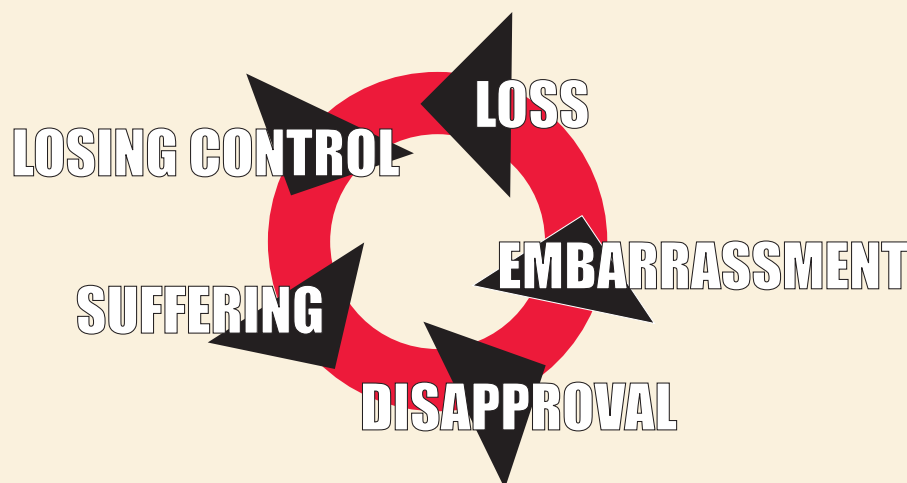
Fear is the name given to psychological resistance. It is natural and normal, and its presence must be acknowledged



in each sales situation if you're going to have a chance to deal with it effectively. As salespeople, we have learned that customers often have *objections* we must overcome to make the sale. And yet the very act of *overcoming objections* can easily lead to greater resistance. A customer can dig in and become highly resistant if he/she senses that their under-

reality and generally take for granted day after day. We gain a sense of security and pride from our ability to exert a kind of control over our life situations.

In fact, most of us spend a great deal of time and energy in securing a level of routine and predictability when our lives may be anything but that. Is it any wonder that we develop a Fear of loss? We all know it's bound to occur. So how does this translate into an ordinary purchase decision?



lying Fear is being met with force or indifference from the salesperson.

We are all familiar with parents who use threats or punishment to overcome their children's objections. As a parent myself, I can understand that sometimes you just have to do what you have to do. But your customer is not your child. Think of them more as clients who have entrusted themselves and their decision-making process to you. Their presence in your store is a gift to you, and their trust in you is an honor. View your customers in this way and earn their trust by respecting their Fears, no matter how trivial or commonplace they may seem.

Here are five categories of Fear that you will encounter.

1. Fear of loss.
2. Fear of embarrassment or humiliation.
3. Fear of disapproval.
4. Fear of physical pain or suffering.
5. Fear of losing control.

Fear of Loss

There is precious little permanence in human life. Everything is constantly changing. New revelations in Quantum Physics reveal inner and outer worlds in constant flux that our incredible minds somehow organize into the sights, sounds, smells and textures that we label *our*

- The first loss your customers may encounter is the simple loss of comfort and familiarity of their own homes when they finally decide to brave the traffic and visit your showroom.
- Next, there's the cost of the product or service in question.
- Finally, there's the loss of the status quo of the situation that existed prior to the new purchase. How many times does a wood stove salesperson have to deal with the beloved memory of the old, cherished, family wood-burner? The Franklin or Ashley is more like a treasured family member than an outdated metal heating appliance. And woe to the salesperson who disrespects such an old friend by calling it inefficient, space-hogging or unsightly!

We not only confront Fear of loss before we make a new purchase, but after as well. Things break or malfunction. Technological advances make obsolescence inevitable. Some electronics are outdated even before they leave a showroom. Almost anything we purchase today will be something that we lose in the future. Ahead, we will examine how we, as salespeople, can mitigate the Fear of loss without denying its existence.

Fear of Embarrassment or Humiliation

Nobody wants to get "taken." No one wants to be the one who buys the lemon. We all want value for our money and the reasonable assurance that we won't soon be regretting our purchase decision.

Have you ever been in a showroom where a couple of salespeople are enjoying a private joke and wondered if they were talking about you? Well, I have. Even the most brashly confident-appearing customer belies an all-too-human phobia of being the butt of a joke. Often irrational, this Fear can paralyze a customer whether they are agonizing over a new barbecue selection or simply trying to order dinner at a restaurant.

Fear of Disapproval

Every choice we make opens us to the judgments and criticisms of others. We don't care what many people say, but inevitably we do value the opinions of some. We Desire their approval and seek to avoid their disapproval.

Parents historically have displayed the power to push the buttons of their children on every decision they make, from the way they dress to their choice of spouses. For many of us, we are our most severe critic. The inner critic stands ready to undermine any decision with diabolical precision.

Knowing that your customer is risking such disapproval should evoke your compassion. In our next section we will discuss how compassion can trump any sales technique when it comes to dealing with the Fear of disapproval.

Fear of Physical Pain or Suffering

Fear of pain is universal and generally thought of as obvious to everyone. However, let's examine it a bit more closely to see how it might be concealed within an otherwise standard selling situation.

- First of all, your store location can trigger this Fear. Is the neighborhood safe and well lit? Are traffic patterns and traffic control systems conducive to your customers' safety?



You may be comfortable swinging across two lanes of speeding traffic and executing a perfect skidding stop in your abbreviated parking lot, but your customer is probably weighing the alternatives.



Steve Dumais, co-owner of Energysavers in Meredith, New Hampshire, with his dog Daisy.

- I've seen friendly dogs allowed to wander around showrooms. Are you sure they're still friendly when junior decides to tweak their nose?
- What about the products you sell? I think you can still purchase a book or CD without an Underwriters Laboratory seal of approval, but just about everything else is perceived as a potential safety threat. Your customers probably won't admit that they have reservations about appliances featuring open fires, hot water heated by electricity and potentially poison exhaust fumes.

It's up to you to address their unspoken Fears and ensure that the Fear of physical pain doesn't overwhelm the Desire to enjoy the benefits of your appliances.

Fear of Losing Control

When life offers new and unfamiliar options, or when we find ourselves in the position of having to make too many decisions in too little time with insufficient information, we feel that we may spiral out of control. Outwardly we may respond with confusion, anger

or a kind of stubborn withdrawal that every experienced salesperson has witnessed. Inwardly we are feeling the compelling urge to slow the process down, to take a deep breath and regroup, and to perhaps return to an earlier position of relative peace and security.

Divorce, career change, moving a residence, death and even speaking in front of large groups all evoke the Fear of losing control. Still, sweeping change is not always necessary to put us in touch with this Fear. It's more a function of accumulated stress together with the unfamiliarity of the territory into which we have ventured.

Sometimes choosing the right pellet stove requires so much technical knowledge and entails so many decisions regarding options, fuel procurement, battery backup, etc., that a fog of confusion settles in. At this point, the predictability and familiarity of the old home without the new appliance or service looks mighty tempting. Oh, well, what is one more year of high utility bills and extra layers of clothing?

Making Friends with Fear

Now that we've become acquainted with Fear in its many manifestations, it's time to develop a strategy for dealing with it. This gets a little tricky, but if you'll keep an open mind and persevere, the rewards can be enormous.

The first thing to do is acknowledge our own Fears and, equally importantly, our judgments around those fears. There



For many customers understanding hearth products is a complicated task.

is no escaping from Fear. Escape is nothing more than denial and only serves to feed the fear. If you want to dissolve the Fear, simply invite it out of its hiding place and make it a welcome guest at your table.

Much of the powerful emotional resistance caused by Fear is relieved when it is no longer suppressed. Many Fears your customer experiences are baseless and even irrational. The intention behind most Fears is simply to keep us safe from harm. Therefore, let your primary approach toward a customer or prospect be to mean no harm.

How does one go about *meaning no harm*? How do you *not do* something? This is such a profoundly simple concept that salespeople are tempted to ignore it. This is part of the true ethics of selling. Yes, I said ethics and selling in the same sentence.

Harmlessness demands a core intention on our part as sales professionals to truly serve our customers and our employers. No one's individual need takes precedence over another's — no matter how easy, convenient or profitable it may seem at the moment. This is a personal commitment and, in the end, you will be the only judge that matters. There is no place to hide behind company policies, demanding bosses or pressing personal financial needs. From this non-threatening place of service, all transactions become win-win. And incidentally, from this place you become invulnerable to fear and selling becomes a joy.

When you resolve to engage customers, employers, family members and even strangers with a sincere desire to be of service and to assist them in getting what they want, you no longer stir up Fear (or resistance) unnecessarily. Your customers begin to feel at ease in your presence. You become a partner in the buying decision, not an adversary. They have nothing to worry about because your manner and words communicate you're there to help and you're not planning any surprise attacks or manipulations.

If Fear does arise in the course of the sale, you acknowledge it, address it (if necessary) and continue. For example, you may find that after a typical sales presentation your customer seems to become anxious, distracted and appears to lose interest.

- First, do a quick self-check to become aware of any of your own Fears the customer's behavior may have trig-



gered. Allow yourself to return to your conscious intention to *mean no harm* and to *be of service*.

- Rather than just trying to push them past their resistance, you acknowledge they've hit a snag. You readily shift gears and go into Fear (or objection) resolution mode.

You may need to probe or you may need to simply reassure. Internally, your customer's Desire has been temporarily compromised by an increase in Fear as a decision point is approached. This is normal and to be expected by the sales professional.

The most common mistake made at this point is to take the customer's temporary emotional state as an excuse to

either back off to avoid appearing pushy or, conversely, to bring out the heavy artillery and start blasting away. This fight-or-flight response is best reserved for life-threatening circumstances – not your everyday purchase decision. Don't shortchange your customer, your employer and yourself. Go the extra mile to help your customer overcome their resistance and achieve the ownership decision they came in to make.

The Ethics of Sales

Great salespeople have a fundamental insight into human psychology. By understanding the desires and fears of their customers, they also understand how to influence human decision-making. By engaging customers' desires and damping their fears, they simplify the buying decision. These are the fundamentals of the art of persuasion.

Surprisingly, this is the same skill set that allows a con man to set up and take down their marks. The ability to appeal to people's greed (desire to make money) is accompanied by the ability to lessen their fear of loss (it's a sure thing), and the con man hopes the fear of humility (I don't want to look stupid) prevents them from reporting him to the appropriate authorities.

We often refer to someone who has mastered the art of sales as having the ability to *sell ice to the Eskimos*. While widely viewed as a compliment, it infers that they can sell something that has no value. In a derogatory sense, we refer to some salespeople as *used car* or *snake oil* salesmen. So what distinguishes the great salesperson from the con man?

Sales is sales. It has no intrinsic ethical value. Whether the skill set is used for good or evil is determined by the character of the person employing it. Once you have mastered the art of persuasion, you will be confronted with an ethical challenge. As your skill level evolves you move from *can* I sell someone something that he/she doesn't need, to *should* I sell someone something that he/she doesn't need.

Ethics is essentially an individual situational decision. Philosophers have been examining ethics for cen-

turies and I have no new insight into this forum. I have come to one conclusion, however. In wholesale sales, it is in my long-term interest to *serve my customer*, meaning I have to be sure that my customer's interests are served by the sale of my product.

If a product line is not right, or if my customers would be better served by another product, I don't sell it to them. While I might achieve a short-term sale, if my customer doesn't make money on the product line over time, we all lose. Financially, I don't make money in the short run. My initial sales efforts cost more than the commissions. I have to be committed to our mutual long-term success.

This financial maxim doesn't govern just wholesale sales. Is there such an endless stream of retail customers in large metropolitan markets that you don't have a long-term interest to protect? Mastering the art of sales may mean that you can sell ice to the Eskimos, but will they come back to you when they run out of ice?

If you sell customers a product that doesn't meet their needs, they will eventually become disenchanted. You can't always be around to stoke their desires and dampen their fears. That is why, if you are interested in a long-term retail business model, it is in your interest to *serve your customer*. Your long-term interests are served as these customers become repeat customers and tell their friends about their experience.

So what distinguishes the *great* salesperson from the con man? The con man has to leave town after the sale. The great salesperson can stay and enjoy a long-lasting, profitable and rewarding career.

— Tom Pugh

Conquering a Sales Slump

All veteran salespeople go through a sales slump. They are just not as proficient at closing (completing) the sale as they were the month before. Salespeople often report they face the same type of objection (or Fear) over and over. What's going on here?

Is the product or service being offered really too expensive? Are its features and performance lacking when compared to the competition? Is the customer pool from which you draw actually poisoned by poverty, indecision and the dreaded *just looking* virus? Is your showroom outdated? Are its displays so unappealing as to actually smother your customers' Desire? Doubtful, don't you think?

What's more likely is that the salesperson is in the throes of an unconscious Fear that their customers sense and simply reflect back to them. This is why new salespeople often have more difficulty than veterans when it comes to closing sales. But even veteran salespeople periodically have to deal with their own emotional resistances.

- Maybe you just recently had a painful argument with a spouse over a new purchase and you are reluctant to close any sale without overt permission from both members of a couple.
- Perhaps your financial position does not allow you to splurge on expensive, high quality consumer goods. Unconsciously, you may be communicating to prospective customers that it's foolish to waste money on anything beyond fulfilling their most basic needs.

When you see yourself (or fellow salespeople) running into a consistent pattern of customer objections, take the time to inventory your own (or their) feelings and opinions. Should you find yourself getting in your own way like this, give your-



the art of sales: an introductory primer - part II

self a little space. Avoid self-recriminations; they're worthless. Be honest with yourself. Remember what I said about inviting the Fear out into the open? You can tell your customer the following:

"I personally can't afford a _____, but if I could, I wouldn't hesitate to own a _____ for the following reasons...."

They won't be offended by your honesty. On the contrary, they will appreciate it and most likely feel empowered to satisfy their own Desire without remorse or guilt. In the end, it all boils down to this basic truth: In your capacity as a salesperson, **You Are Never the Customer!**

In fact, for many of the products you represent, you may never find yourself in the income category to which those particular items are designed to appeal. The company doesn't need you to buy the product; they need you to sell it! When you impose your own opinions and biases on others, you are, in effect, becoming a customer.

Here's an analogy. Imagine you are flying on a commercial airliner and a mechanical malfunction sends the plane into a spiraling dive. You and the rest of the passengers would be scared, right? Of course you would.

But if the pilot allowed himself to

indulge his own Fears for even a brief moment and became a passenger himself, what are his chances of quickly and accurately assessing the situation and taking corrective action? He'd be too busy screaming and digging around for a parachute to notice a hydraulic leak and switch to a backup system. The plane would continue to spiral out of control and the fate of everyone aboard would be sealed.

If your pilot remained a pilot, however, and kept his head, your chances of survival would be a whole lot better. Just as you need your pilot to remain a clear-headed, well-trained professional, your customers will be best served by a salesperson unhampered by personal fears, judgments and other biases.

The Power of Compassion

What, you're probably asking yourself, does compassion have to do with selling? If you've made it this far, though, I would be shortchanging you not to share one of the greatest secrets to successful selling.

Our journey so far has led us into the *Ultimate Showroom* of the human mind. We've defined our role as facilitators of the transfer of ownership from one party to another. By understanding Desire and how it motivates a buyer, we can highlight qualities of our product that may satisfy that Desire. Through our willingness to get to know and embrace our own Fears and resistances, we can better address our customers' concerns and weaken the ability of their objections to kill their Desire.

Compassion arises when we see ourselves in the others we serve. Don't we all want our needs met? Don't we all want to feel supported in our efforts to bring safety, security, fun, joy, pride and respect to our families and ourselves? Your empathy with your customers' deeper intentions and your willingness to address their fears as you do your own will make your sales career as deeply satisfying as it is successful.

When a customer is perceived with compassion, he ceases to be an object to be manipulated. Likewise, his resistance can no longer be interpreted as a threat to the salesperson. His objections represent his Fears. Your compassion for your customer's very human predicament is a source of strength and objectivity for you.

Compassion doesn't cause you to

buy into your customer's inner reality. On the contrary, it frees you to remain firmly and powerfully in your role of facilitator. The bad news is you will probably never fully master the skill of compassion. The good news is, as your skill and competency grow, your sales and your family of happy customers will grow as well.

Having What It Takes


Designing the ideal retail showroom environment is as elusive as the aforementioned Holy Grail. It's important to see it through your customers' eyes and to do what you can to make it inviting, comfortable and inspiring while minimizing confusion and anxiety. Beyond that, a salesperson proficient at navigating through the *Ultimate Showroom* is equipped to succeed in any environment.

In sales, it's about people, not things. Develop the skill and courage to enter into your customers' inner world and truly assist them in the process of becoming owners. To be effective, you will need to get to know yourself along the way. In doing so, you transcend the physical limitations of any retail showroom.

You already have what it takes to be a successful salesperson. All of the lessons and information you need are within you. Each new customer you meet represents your personal invitation to grow and learn at a special school called the *Ultimate Showroom*.

About the Authors

Bill Lentz received a Bachelor of Arts degree from UC Santa Cruz in 1969 and a Masters of Business Administration degree from the Anderson School of Management at UCLA in 1971. He has a wealth of sales experience both selling and training. He sold Dale Carnegie Improvement Classes in New Mexico, worked retail sales for four years in a specialty hearth store, was general/sales manager for Firebird Distributing in Santa Fe for seven years, spent another seven years as Regency's Rocky Mountain sales manager, and has worked at Lloyd Pugh & Associates since March 2006.

*Tom Pugh is President of Lloyd Pugh & Associates, a manufacturer's representative firm, and a frequent contributor to *Hearth & Home* magazine.* 



A man on a shopping mission.



“Good customer service is an indispensable sales tool.”

Forward by Tom Pugh

I recently purchased a \$100 tie from Nordstrom. About a week later I received a handwritten thank you note from the sales clerk who helped me. It got me thinking. Why can Nordstrom send me a handwritten thank you note for making a \$100 sale, when many hearth retailers don't send a thank you note for making a \$3,000 sale?

Customer service is no longer something you are compelled to do after a sale is made. But for retailers in small markets and/or retailers dependent on recurring relationships (such

as with builders), customer service is the reason you made the sale; it's the reason you're in business. Whether a consumer was recommended by a satisfied customer, or has had a previously satisfying experience with your store, knowing that you provide great customer service lowers their fear of loss (i.e., that they won't be happy with the purchase) and their fear of losing control (e.g., disruptive installations that seem to go on forever). By definition this is the sales process.

“Customer Service: The New Sales

Frontier” will provide you with a means to evaluate your current customer service efforts and give you a step-by-step plan to implement an effective customer service system for your retail business. The real value of a potential buyer to your business is the *goodwill* or *ongoing business* that can be expected in the future. That is the reason the Nordstrom sales clerk sends a thank you note following the purchase of a tie. For those of you not sending thank you notes – this article is for you!

Custom Service: The New Sales Frontier



by Bill Lentz

Salespeople, by nature, are always looking for the next sale. This is a good thing, and we encourage your continued aggressiveness and optimism in this pursuit. We think it is important, however, to broaden the definition of the pool of potential customers from which you are able to draw. First, let's take a look at some realities of today's highly competitive retail business environment.

Product Convergence

Over a longer period of time, retail products tend to become more alike than different. New trends and innovations get absorbed and emulated faster and faster. The hearth and patio industries are no different in this regard. A *bona fide* new idea comes along only rarely. When it does, competitors are waiting in the wings with increasingly competent R&D (Research and Duplicate) departments to eliminate any competitive advantage that briefly existed.

Consumer Indifference

I can actually remember a time when free hot dogs or popcorn could attract a crowd. Now it only attracts hungry people. A SALE could generate excitement years ago. Now we live in a world of continuous sales and customers who expect to always have the opportunity to benefit from sale pricing.

Successful advertising campaigns are now measured in terms of the number of times the prospective customer can be assailed with a particular message. Everyone is competing for the attention of consumers by ever more sophisticated means. And as the individual in your company responsible for paying the bills will attest, businesses are paying more for fewer results.

Increasing Costs

Let's face it, it's tough to make a buck these days. With costs of doing business continually rising, the pressure is on to increase sales just to avoid going backward. With today's higher fixed costs, what was a bad sales quarter several years ago could spell financial disaster if it were to occur again in the present quarter. The life-blood of any business enterprise is its customers, and we cannot afford to squander this precious resource.

The New Paradigm

Sometimes old ideas die hard. It's not unusual to think of sales and customer service as two separate functions. Selling is historically the way we generate income, and customer service is commonly regarded as all the other stuff we have to deal with after the sale. Sometimes the two functions are actually handled by different people or even different departments.

Getting your top salespeople to handle customer service issues that don't directly relate to an immediate sale can be as difficult as getting a star running back to block, or a top offensive scorer to play defense. It just doesn't seem to make headlines. And yet these efforts are essential to team success.

Customer service in today's marketplace is an acknowledgement that we are in an ongoing relationship with each person who has purchased our goods and services. Customer service encompasses all of the ways we affect that relationship, whether positively or negatively.

In this article our goals are to clarify what we ideally want our customer

relationships to look like, and to develop a strategy for making them happen. We've also included a customer service survey to further assist you in focusing on the areas that are in most need of attention.

Just as in personal relationships, objective self-assessment is humbling at best. Remember, the objective is to enjoy stable growth in sales and profits, as well as happier customers. Improving even a little bit will pay sizeable dividends for years to come.

Why Customer Service?

When Bill Clinton first campaigned for the presidency, his manager, James Carville, was fond of encapsulating their winning strategy with the phrase, "It's the *economy*, stupid!" Since I'm not an outspoken politician, let me just say that we endorse customer service for economic reasons, as well.

It is estimated that *up to 80 percent* of a company's future business will derive directly from existing customers, the company's customer service-based reputation, and positive media

and word-of-mouth endorsements.

Only a relatively small portion of overall sales will be achieved by attracting new customers through advertising, promotions or the like.

What other motivation is needed? Customer service is not designed to be some

*May I have
customer service,
please?*



warm and fuzzy added expense to business. Rather, it is aimed at growing and nurturing the primary income source for all future business.

What happens when customer service goes wanting, and either a new customer or an existing customer gets a negative impression of your business? Do they march into the manager's office and sound off? They do, but only if you're lucky.



For every customer complaint you hear about, there are five or 10 more that you don't. Whoever said, "Good news travels fast," was never in retail. Bad news is epidemic! Every upset or disgruntled customer (who didn't bother to complain to you in person) is having a field day sharing his/her negative experience with anyone who will listen.

One study revealed that customers who had a negative experience surrounding the purchase of a big-ticket item told 16 other people about their dissatisfaction. By comparison, the same study revealed that this customer group passed on positive experiences to only eight people. How many advertising dollars are invested to generate one new customer? Multiply that by the 16 prospects lost due to one unhappy customer, and you'll gain a whole new appreciation of the cost of poor customer service.

A Sensible Approach

If you've been in retail a while, you're thinking that it's not humanly possible to make every customer happy all the

time. Thankfully, that is not our goal. Instead, let the purpose of your customer service effort be to realize sensible, achievable results.

First, state the plan in terms of activities rather than outcomes. Here are some examples:

1. Treat each customer with kindness and respect (especially when that is difficult to do).
2. Make yourself available to customers with problems.
3. Seek to resolve the conflict rather than to assess the blame.
4. Resolve a conflict immediately whenever possible.
5. Follow up with dissatisfied customers to ensure that the resolution was satisfactory.
6. Open communication lines with all customers to encourage constructive feedback.
7. Thank customers who give you the opportunity to address their needs.
8. Provide training to staff to strengthen customer service skills.
9. Make customer service an integral part of your employee performance reviews and compensation program.

Accept the fact that, even as your skills increase along the lines stated above, not everyone will be happy. But you and your sales staff can be happy in the knowledge that you have made a sincere effort to address your customers' concerns in a professional and practical manner. Below is a sampling of the attitudes and personal qualities from which excel-

lent customer service arises:

For many of us, these qualities are self-evident, and yet we may be reluctant to embrace them for fear of appearing weak. So let's put the whole *weakness* or *doormat* thing to bed right now. Customer service does not imply giving customers whatever they want. Remember, our efforts here are designed to address real customer concerns, not necessarily to make the customer happy.

You simply can't replace every malfunctioning product and repair every perceived deficiency and expect to stay in business. On the other hand, when your customers are making average purchases in the \$2,000 to \$4,000 range, how much sense does it make to argue over who has pay for a \$25 repair part or a \$20 UPS shipping charge? If a customer is upset with how long they have to wait to be served in your establishment, doesn't it make sense to set up an appointment for them or at least to buy them a soda while they wait?

Sure, some customers are more demanding than others. And I agree that more customers today seem to feel entitled to special service. But wouldn't you rather it be you handling their business than your competition? For the most part, customer service issues are handled effectively with a minimum of cost and disruption. By addressing issues sooner rather than later, you eliminate the fuel they need to grow from sparks into blazes. Keep that in mind the next time you're tempted to avoid a disgruntled customer.

Getting Started

Customer service is a team effort. No small business can afford to work around any employee who is not aware of and trained in his/her customer service responsibilities. Warehouse people, bookkeepers, part-time salespeople, receptionists, delivery/installation crews, owners and star salespeople alike are all essential elements in the delivery of first-class customer service.

This chain is only as strong as its proverbial weakest link. The reason is that customer issues can arise at any time, anywhere and for whatever reason. As a customer, nothing is worse than hearing that the person who can solve your problem is on vacation for three weeks (or just out to lunch). Following proper training and establishment of guidelines, owners and managers must entrust front-line employees with

Compassion

Honesty

Empathy

Thoughtfulness

Trustworthiness

Courtesy

Integrity

Gratitude

Patience

the necessary authority to resolve customer disputes on the spot. Employees who successfully resolve these disputes need to be recognized at employee meetings and at bonus time.

When well-intended customer service efforts go awry, owners and managers need to keep calm heads and use the opportunity for instruction and improvement. Remember, nobody's perfect in this arena. Just as it is with any other skill, it takes practice and good coaching to develop effectiveness in customer service.

I recently had the good fortune to travel with a couple of "old pros" in the hearth and patio business. While at an airport awaiting our flight, a member of our group reviewed his e-mail and commented that a customer was leaving increasingly angry and threatening messages because he had not received the product ordered when expected. (We had been out of the country for over a week where cell phones didn't work.) By the time the third or fourth insistent e-mail had been read, both of my companions' responses could best be characterized as defensive, judgmental and retaliatory.

You all know how this goes:



"The customer is being unreasonable."
 "The customer is a jerk."
 "I did everything I was supposed to do."

"Let him try to cancel his order; I've already cashed the check."

And so on. Thankfully, the customer's last e-mail was read where he announced he had received his product in good condition, was very happy with its performance and would highly recommend the supplier to others. What a perfect lesson. It highlights the real obstacle we all face when we truly embrace the customer service challenge: **ourselves.**

Who among us would not feel threatened and defensive in the face of an angry customer's assault? I certainly would. But if we are going to effectively compete in the emerging arena of customer service, it's time we learned to rise above our immediate fight-or-flight response.

As illustrated by the above example, most customers' angst is not personal. They may try to make it personal, but for the most part they are simply giving voice to an unmet expectation, real or imagined. Our job is to listen patiently, accept personal responsibility for resolving the issue, and take appropriate action. There is no real benefit to be gained through criticism or blame. In the end, no customer has ever been handled effectively by *putting him in his place.*

An interesting phenomenon I have witnessed over the past 15 years as a dealer rep in the hearth and patio industries is what I call The Other Guy Syndrome. The *other guy* is your competitor(s) down the street or in the next town. I have yet to meet a retailer who hasn't commented on how much he/she benefits from the poor customer service offered by *the other guy.*

Now, I realize that every business loses customers who feel their needs may be better met elsewhere. But isn't it interesting that the beneficiary of this customer defection is obviously willing and able to better meet the needs of the customer *without getting defensive or placing blame!* Because it's the other guy's deficiency that supposedly created the original problem, we don't become defensive or judgmental and are magically free to respond to the customer's needs with compassion, patience, courtesy and empathy.

Now why do you suppose this is so difficult to do when the customer starts out at your store and develops

a customer service issue? The only real difference between the two situations is **the** person or store the customer is identifying as the problem! When we allow the issue to reside with the customer rather than with ourselves, and see ourselves as part of the solution rather than part of the problem, we multiply our customer service effectiveness exponentially.

Moving Forward

At every level of business, establishing, maintaining and expanding customer relationships is essential to bottom line profitability. It's too easy in today's marketplace to find alternatives when you're a customer. The winners in this game are the businesses and individuals who recognize that fact and willingly devote their resources to becoming skilled practitioners in development of solid customer relationships. And just because you did well last year doesn't mean you can let up now.

Customer service is a year-round job. National corporations, realizing this, are increasingly devoting the lion's share of employee and financial resources to develop outstanding customer service. What has been referred to as our *service economy* is probably better described as a *customer service economy.*

Here are the steps that you as a company or individual can take to become more competitive in your customer service effort:

- 1. Take stock** – Evaluate your present situation. Survey your customers and employees to shape an objective picture of your present strengths and weaknesses. Ask what you need to do to improve, not how you're currently doing. Formalize the feedback/suggestion process to support positive change on an ongoing basis. You can use the Customer Service Survey accompanying this article to help clarify and set priorities.
- 2. Develop a bottom-up plan of action** – Beginning with your front-line employees with the most customer exposure, develop a list of priorities to be addressed. It's important to start small and implement changes slowly. The objective is to eventually involve all personnel in this endeavor, but first it's important to demonstrate a commitment to the goal as well as measurable

Selling Your Customer Service Advantage

Customer service is an investment in your business. It takes time and money to ensure that your customers are happy and highly satisfied with your service. While many retailers make the necessary investment, I am shocked how few try to turn that investment into a sales advantage.

We can learn a lesson from one of the newest trends in the real estate business. Experienced realtors are cultivating referrals by focusing on the top 100 names in their Rolodex. This would include former clients, mortgage brokers and escrow companies. They are sending handwritten thank you notes, stopping by to give them CDs or cookies, and actively soliciting their referrals.

In addition, they are proactively asking their current clients for referrals. Immediately after closing a property sale they are pitching the referral:

"I hope that you are happy with the service I provided you on the (purchase or sale) of your home. I can afford to put emphasis on customer service because my business is really built on referrals. I would really appreciate it if you would not only pass my name on to a friend looking to buy or sell a home, but also call me so I can speak to them directly."

There are several steps a retailer can take to increase the likelihood and effectiveness of referrals. Soliciting future referrals is a start.

Retailers also should have a photo book with testimonial letters from satisfied customers. Potential customers should be encouraged to look through the book for fireplace ideas.

Testimonials should accompany the pictures in the book and say things such as:

"We enjoy the _____ that we bought from the ABC store and appreciate the staff who were informative and pleasant."

"I want to thank you for sending out such a great installation crew. They showed up on time, placed drop cloths throughout my house and cleaned up afterwards. I never thought a remodel project could be so easy."

"This is the third _____ we have purchased from the ABC store. I would recommend ABC to anyone."

Don't wait for your customers to write these testimonials. If a customer tells you how much they like your service, then ask them if you could take a picture of their fireplace and quote them for your testimonial book. Be sure to review the quotation with them prior to putting it in your book. Just like realtors, you should proactively ask your satisfied customers to recommend you to other acquaintances.

Good customer service is an indispensable sales tool that adds value to your business. Once you have achieved it, you should be soliciting future referrals and selling your competency. If you have made the investment to have great customer service, then take the time to reap the dividends.

— Tom Pugh

whether they are getting the support they need to succeed. In essence, we are back to Step 1 – take stock. The process just continues to repeat itself.

5. Institutionalize the process – In other words, attach the same sort of positive financial and recognition rewards generally associated with sales. Make customer service activities an important aspect of regular performance reviews.

Customer Service is the new sales frontier. It may arguably account for the successful growth and longevity of your business. Why wait until your developing customer base is further eroded? The single largest factor responsible for poor customer service is denial. It is our unwillingness to entertain the notion that we can always get better that constitutes our greatest obstacle.

As the employee or owner of a business, we can no longer entrust our financial future to an ever-growing, ever-replenishing pool of customer prospects. The battleground is changing. Competitive pressures demand that our skills and proficiency continually improve when it comes to nurturing our existing customer resources. Excellent customer service is the rudder you build to stabilize your craft and navigate through uncertain economic waters. Here's to a long and profitable voyage!

About the Authors

Bill Lentz received a Bachelor of Arts degree from UC Santa Cruz in 1969 and a Masters of Business Administration degree from the Anderson School of Management at UCLA in 1971.

He has a wealth of sales experience both selling and training. He sold Dale Carnegie Improvement Classes in New Mexico, worked retail sales for four years in a specialty hearth store, was general/sales manager for Firebird Distributing in Santa Fe for seven years, spent another seven years as Regency's Rocky Mountain sales manager, and has worked at Lloyd Pugh & Associates since March 2006.



Lentz

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success in the experience of both our employees and our customers.

3. Implement the plan – Do whatever it takes. It may be as simple as delegating authority to front-line employees. It may entail staffing or scheduling changes. Perhaps your

plan will require investment in additional training. Commit to the investment of time and resources and set a date for implementation.

4. Monitor results – Review progress with the implementation of your plan. Check in with those involved to see

Customer Service Index

The objective of the customer service index is to direct your attention to areas in your business where you may potentially increase customer satisfaction and loyalty. Increasing your customer satisfaction index will not only increase sales and profits, but it also will have the added effect of improving employee morale and adding to the competitive edge we all seek. Therefore, we encourage you to be brutally honest with yourself. No one is judging you or your business. After all, it's hard to set diet goals if you never step on a scale!

Please read the following statements and rate your business on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1=minimal or non-compliance and 5=full compliance.

Company Culture

1. Your company currently has a written customer service policy read by all employees. ☐
2. Are customer service policies and practices a part of new employee training? ☐
3. Company meetings regularly reinforce and clarify customer service issues and guidelines. ☐
4. Employee competence in the field of customer service is a formal part of your company's annual performance reviews. ☐
5. Your company provides a formal, open channel for ongoing customer feedback. ☐
6. Customer feedback is regularly reviewed by management. ☐

Retail Environment

1. Your retail location is easy for customers to find. ☐
2. Your retail location is readily accessible in terms of parking and traffic flow. ☐
3. Your store's signing is up-to-date and easy to read. ☐
4. The exterior appearance of your store is clean and inviting. ☐
5. Hours of operation are prominently displayed and conform to the norm in your area. ☐
6. The interior of your store is clean, organized and well lit. ☐
7. Displays are attractive, current models with an emphasis on "burning" units. ☐
8. Prior to opening, a "walk through" is performed to ensure displays are neat and complete. ☐
9. Product literature is current, organized, and readily available. ☐
10. Care is taken to infuse your showroom with pleasant smells, sounds and sights. ☐

The Selling Process

1. Sales staff is well-groomed, well-dressed, and "wel-coming." ☐
2. Customers receive some form of acknowledgment within 30 seconds of entering the store. ☐
3. A member of the sales staff greets each customer within two minutes of arrival. ☐
4. Sales staff receives professional sales training (other than product training). ☐
5. Customers are treated respectfully and patiently regardless of appearance, personality or purchase decision. ☐
6. Restrooms, refreshments and child-care (if available) are attractive and well maintained. ☐
7. You have your own store "mystery shopped" to evaluate customer service. ☐
8. Telephone is answered within three rings by a knowledgeable and resourceful employee. ☐

After the Sale

1. Delivery and installation teams adhere to schedules and update customers with changes. ☐
2. Delivery/installation personnel are neatly dressed and well groomed when with customers. ☐
3. Within one week of delivery or installation, customer receives a follow-up call to thank them, answer questions and suggest possible add-on sales. ☐
4. Within two weeks, each appliance customer receives a mailing that includes a thank you, a prepaid feedback form, a suggested maintenance schedule and a referral request. ☐

Conflict Resolution

1. Front line employees are empowered to resolve customer complaints on the spot. ☐
2. Employees receive reward and recognition for successfully resolving customer complaints. ☐

Areas	Score	Maximum (out of)
1. Company Culture	_____	30
2. Retail Environment	_____	50
3. The Selling Process	_____	40
4. After the Sale	_____	20
5. Conflict Resolution	_____	10
Total	_____	_____



“That’s Too Much Money!”

How to close the sale when the customer is objecting to the price.

“That’s too much money!” We’ve all heard that everyday customer refrain and recognize it as the price objection.

Whether you sell barbecues or blankets, spas or shoes, wood stoves or waffles, it’s the same old thing. That’s just too much. I could get it cheaper down the street, on the Internet, from my uncle, through our buying club, offshore or anywhere else.

Every retail salesperson eventually becomes frustrated enough to invite his customer to do just that – “Go buy it cheaper somewhere else and never come back here again!”

Would you like to learn how to welcome a price objection? How about recognizing a price objection as a *bona fide* buying signal? Sound impossible? Well,

set your sights high, because that’s exactly where we are headed with this article.

Don’t Take It Personally

This is easier said than done. But it’s absolutely necessary for you to “unhook” yourself emotionally from your customer’s dilemma before you can become a skillful practitioner of what we’ll call:

“Objection Resolution.”

You are not in any way responsible for their current desires, fears, wealth, family situations, happiness or any other emotional state.

Once the burden of the responsibility for today’s purchase decision has been lifted from your shoulders, you will assume a wonderful new freedom to begin the process of Objection Resolution.



The Art of Sales

Why are they in my store if my stuff is “too expensive?”

Good question. Do you know where all the consumers are who really cannot afford your hearth, patio and barbecue products? Neither do I, but chances are they are not hanging out in your showroom. The good news is that most of the customers in your store belong there. The bad news is that most, if not all, will manifest some form of price objection that you must overcome.

Digging Deeper

The price objection is a catch-all comment that can be used to disguise many different issues. Taken at face value, the price objection can only be dealt with in two ways. First, you can defend your price with value arguments (i.e. features and benefits). Second, you can discount your price or try to move your customer to a less expensive choice. We'll return to these options later, but, for now, let's look at some of the other issues that may belie the price objection.

Is there any money left on that table? Most consumers fear opportunistic salespeople may take advantage of them. The price objection becomes your customer's way of avoiding embarrassment and humiliation. It's nothing more than a way of checking to be sure your price is firm. In this case, discounting or downgrading their purchase only proves them right and makes them all the more suspicious.

Whoa, Nellie! People make decisions at their own speed. At times, customers get impatient with salespeople and want to wrap things up. There's nothing sadder than watching a salesperson insist on continuing his presentation when the client is already sold. In the situation where the sale seems to be proceeding too rapidly for a customer, a convenient “brake” they can employ is the price objection. This is hardly the time to launch into a protracted negotiation over price. Instead, invite them to talk things over or take whatever time they require and let you know when they are ready to proceed.

That's for me to know and you to find out! Some customer objections are more difficult to verbalize than others. Rather than appear unsure or uninformed, a customer may seek firmer ground by invoking the price objection. For instance, as a customer I may

have doubts about a viable fuel supply for my hearth product. I may not have considered the associated installation costs. Maybe the idea of a roof penetration raises new concerns. Perhaps it is only now occurring to me that my vacation plans could be compromised. *A patient salesperson interprets the price objection as evidence that the customer is now seriously considering ownership of the new product or service and continues to probe for the underlying issue(s).*

Swimming With The Current

If you have ever shot the rapids or swum in the ocean you have likely encountered strong, threatening currents. The natural response is to fight the pull of the current to regain control. Experts, on the other hand, counsel you to relax and let the current take you, while you slowly correct your course to safety. Remember this when your customer interrupts your smooth sailing with the price objection.

When your customer says, “That's too much,” let them know you would like further information to better understand what they are saying. You clearly demonstrate you are committed to your role as a facilitator in the process of ownership transfer (see “The Art of Sales,” *Hearth & Home*, January, 2008). You are not being adversarial, nor are you trying to push or pull them to a purchase decision.

Remember, your customer never would have come up with this particular resistance if they weren't experiencing a strong desire for your product or service. At this point you let your customer do the work. They explain their issue(s) to you and you simply listen, nod and promote further elaboration. When they are done, the real issues should be in sharper focus.

Resolve the problem if you can. Enlist the aid of your manager if you need help. Often, the customer will resolve their own issue as soon as they have the opportunity to give it voice.

Let's Get Ready To Rummmm-ble!

When it comes to price, some customers (male and female) seem to delight in beating salespeople or business owners down. Every transaction has to be a negotiation. They probably learned this sport from their parents and feel the need to perpetuate the legacy. Fortunately, you have many options available to counter the dreaded “haggler.”



Option 1: Address the objection before the customer makes it.

This option should be moved immediately to the status of “requirement.” Don't make the mistake of waiting for your customer to raise the price objection when you are already 99 percent certain it is coming. This is the same strategy employed by skilled courtroom attorneys when they bring up obvious vulnerabilities in their own case and resolve them before their opponents have a chance to do so.

Your margin of profit is essential to the long-range success and viability of your business. It allows you to staff at appropriate levels. It affords you the time necessary to adequately train and maintain your personnel. It provides a budget for post-sale service and to conveniently inventory products for timely deliveries and installs. Finally, it makes possible your attractive and diversified retail environment. Which of these business essentials are you willing to sacrifice in order to give your customer a “screaming deal?”

Therefore, presentations need to include your company's goals along these lines. Your customers need to hear about the positive experiences of other satisfied customers who may have considered looking for “bargain” alternatives, but found that safe, professional, reliable, on-time service trumped the desire to save a few bucks in the short term. When you own a hearth product that will last 20 years or more, isn't it important to get it right the first time?

Option 2: Clarify the objection.

There are two distinct issues that



underlie the price objection. The first is whether the price is more than the customer had planned to spend.

The second is whether the product in question is worth the price you are asking. You can determine this essential difference with a simple question such as: "When you say the price is too high, do you mean that it's more than you had budgeted, or is it just that you feel the (insert product name) is not worth (insert amount)?"

In the first case you may have failed to properly qualify the buyer or it may be that they didn't really know what they wanted until you showed it to them. *The last thing you want to do is take responsibility for the customer's dilemma and offer a discount.* Remember that customers change their budgets all the time based on the strength of their desires. Or you may have to show them lower-cost alternatives by suggesting fewer options. Keep in mind that a "90 Day Same as Cash" or other financing option can help to stretch many a budget.

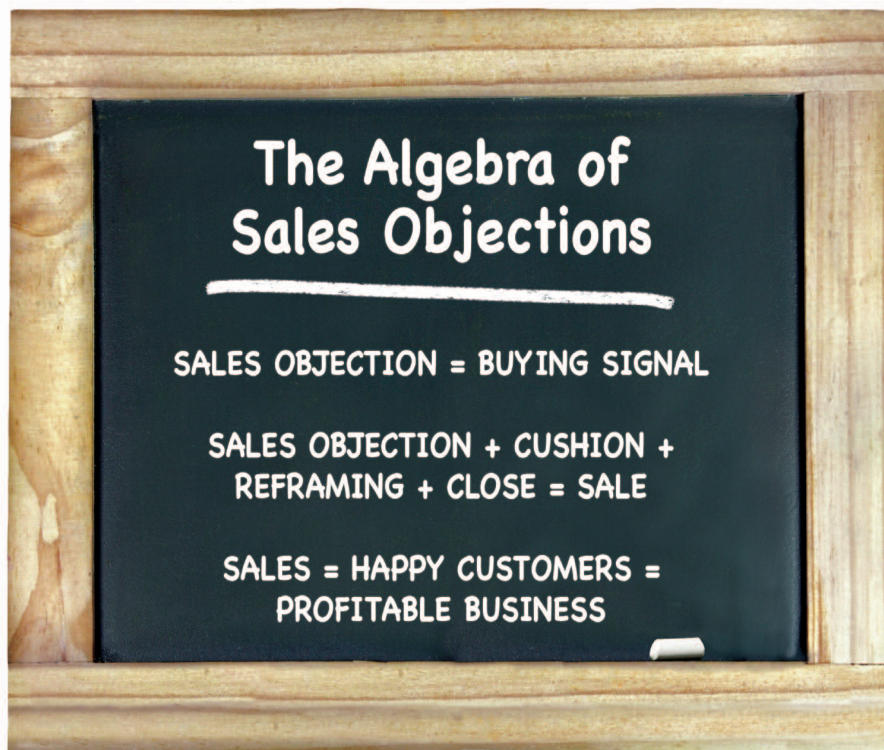
Finally, you can take them over to a lower-cost product within their budget constraints that will serve their basic needs. You will need to point out its positive features and benefits without compromising the value of the higher-cost product. In other words, *do not say or imply that the lower cost alternative is "every bit as good as" the product they can't afford!*

The second issue is *value* related. Your customer is telling you that you have not adequately supported the price with features and benefits that they feel establish its worth. This is a great reason to avoid the mistake of exhausting your arsenal of features and benefits during your initial presentation. You always want to have a few feature/benefits in reserve when this happens.

Option 3: Play the game.

Some customers are simply invested in "winning" a concession from the retailer. It's the eBay mentality. People like to add an element of strategy and cunning before making a purchase. The key in this instance is to remember to play the game. Don't take it too seriously. It's the game that is important, not winning or losing. *Therefore, when you play, never put your profit margin up as the prize.*

A word of caution: When you play,



And you thought you didn't like math.

be prepared to get beat. Some players are more skillful than others and when you do inevitably lose, you want the stakes to be something you won't regret an hour, a day or a month from now. Brush up on your negotiating skills first. Many resources abound on the Internet or at your local bookstore.

Option 4: The Clearance Corral

Since a customer may insist on a "deal" or "sale price" before they will buy, why not give them what they want? Somewhere in the rear of the store, or in a storage area, rope off a 10 x 10-foot Clearance Corral stocked with three or four returns, blemis, discontinued models, or other slow-moving products. When a customer convinces you that the deal is more important than the product, make a special trip with him to the Corral. *Do not start discounting featured products on your showroom floor.* Once they have a chance to examine your bargain products they will either decide to take one or return and pay the price you are asking.

A key element of the Clearance Corral is its separate physical location. It's the place where discounts are found, not your showroom floor. If you don't separate it, your cus-

tomers will assume that everything is up for negotiation. Generally a five to 10 percent discount, prominently displayed on the product, is sufficient. If you haven't tried this approach, you'll be amazed at its effectiveness.

Completing the Sale

Understanding and effectively responding to your customer's price objection is a valuable step toward closing more sales. As salespeople, our mission is to facilitate the transfer of ownership from the present owner to your customer. Our job isn't over until we have assisted the customer in arriving at a definitive purchase decision.

Once an objection has been addressed, it's time to ask a closing question. Briefly review with your customer the more significant feature/benefits that appealed to him and ask if he would like to go ahead and proceed to the paperwork. This is not being pushy, aggressive or mercenary. It's what your customer and employer have every right to expect from you. If your customer were merely looking for a new friend or a casual conversation, he would not have sought you out in a retail location.

The more you practice, the more the process of Objection Resolution and closing will become second nature to you.



A Simple Formula For Objection Resolution

Those of you in the retail sales business are very fortunate. The customers you see already have a strong desire for your products or services. It's quite different from the experience of the door-to-door vacuum cleaner or brush salesperson whose customers generally have not exhibited any sign of want or need for the product.

Consequently, when your customers exhibit emotional resistance to making a purchase, they are really telling you they are getting very close to making a decision to buy. Obviously, if they weren't interested they would leave your establishment or they never would have come in in the first place.

The closer one gets to a final decision, the louder and more insistent the voice of any lingering resistance becomes. At this point, your customer needs you more than ever to help them overcome these final hurdles.

Two techniques for resolving sales objections are invaluable: (1) *Cushioning* and (2) *Reframing*. Let's take a look at how and why they are used.

Cushioning

Remember that objections may be based upon reality or fantasy. At this point, the only thing that matters is if the objection is "real" to your customer. The solidity of your customer's objection is the foundation upon which he/she bases their decision not to purchase what you are selling.

Under no circumstances should the salesperson agree that the objection is valid! Instead, all of the energy required to sustain the objection is left to the customer to provide. This means that you neither agree nor disagree with the actual objection. Either action on your part validates the objection and only serves to feed the strength of this mental/emotional resistance.

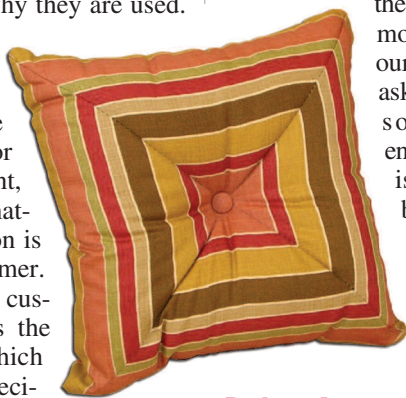
The "cushion" is where you dissolve your customer's need to defend or justify their objection. You promote

a relaxed state of mind and an openness to consider a different way of perceiving the proposition you are making. The "cushion" is a simple restatement of the *intent behind the objection* along with your assurance that the intent has merit.

For instance, let's say your customer states that she doesn't want to make the final purchase until she has the opportunity to do some more shopping. Your "cushion" sounds like: "I understand your desire to make an informed decision." Or, "It makes perfect sense to want to be happy with your final choice."

Notice that you are neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the act of further shopping. Also note that when most people want to continue looking around for more information or more alternatives, they simply do so – they don't stand around discussing it with salespeople.

You follow the cushion with a question that asks your customer if they are interested in achieving their intention in an even more effective way. In our example you might ask, "If I could save you some legwork and ensure your ultimate satisfaction, would you be interested?" Then, following your customer's acceptance of this new proposition, you proceed as outlined below.



Reframing

Simply put, "reframing" is offering your customer an alternative way of meeting the intent of her objection without leaving your store or postponing her decision to buy. I emphasize here that this is not an attempt to "force" or "coerce" your customer into making a decision she is not ready to make. You are not blocking her exit or "pressuring" her. If she didn't want to be here and didn't want to purchase what you are selling, she would be long gone by now.

You can reframe your customer's

**"Reframing"
is offering your
customer an
alternative way of
meeting the intent of
her objection.**

objection by reminding her of the research and shopping she may already have done up until now. You can remind her of the particular features/benefits of the product that drew her to your store in the first place.

Perhaps your store offers a "customer satisfaction guarantee" that would put her fears to rest. Perhaps you have a competitive comparison chart on hand. And you should have a book of satisfied customer testimonials nearby that would communicate how others have successfully faced the same fear and gone on to making satisfactory purchase decisions.

Don't stop now!

If you've reached this point, don't stop now. You're not done yet. Ask your customer if what you've said makes sense. Ask if there is any other reason they should delay owning the product they want. If the answer is "No," proceed to firm up the commitment. If it is "Yes," explore the new objection and repeat the above steps. This process has been known to go on for as many as five to 10 cycles.

Be patient and don't give up. I've seen a prospect exhaust a number of real and imaginary objections until all she could think of was, "It just sounds too good to be true!" At this point, she smiled sheepishly, stopped resisting and signed the contract.

Give Us Your Feedback

We would like to know about your successes and challenges as you put the concepts and techniques of this article to use in your daily work. Please e-mail your comments or questions to walentz@msn.com.





“Hi, My Name Is Bill and I’m a Salesman”

by Bill Lentz

I like being a salesman. So I am frequently surprised to encounter salespeople who feel it necessary to inform their potential customers that, if there is one thing they definitely are *not*, it’s a “salesperson” (the word itself spoken as if to avoid a bitter residue on the tongue.) Apparently somewhere along the line, selling (and, therefore, people who sell things) became synonymous with deception, discomfort and disappointment.

I would like to begin, as I do in my practice of sales coaching, with a list of preconceptions and stereotypes that all of us have heard or, perhaps, even thought ourselves.

Salespeople are worthless.

If a product or service is worth having, you don’t need to be “sold.”

Salespeople lie.

They exaggerate or fabricate the properties of the goods and services they sell.

Salespeople are pushy.

They force you to buy or pay more than you should for the things they sell.

The list could go on, but I don’t want anyone to get depressed and stop reading. As salespeople, we could do a much better job in the public relations area. So where did we go wrong?

The negatives commonly associated with salespeople derive from one serious flaw in our approach to selling. Namely, as a group, *we lack skill*. Let’s face it, sales is one of the easiest careers to enter and the easiest at which to fail. The usual basic qualifications to become a salesperson are that you have no communicable diseases and that you have mastered personal hygiene. (I know that some of you are already questioning whether even these two are hard and fast criteria.)

There is no college major called Sales. There are no trade schools specializing in the field. Most companies provide a minimal sales orientation class for new hires that consists of a handful of brochures and a list of Do’s and Don’ts. Oh, and a few inspiring words along the line of: “Go get ’em, Tiger!”

Look at just about any other profession. Can an untrained, inexperienced person just walk off the street and assume a critical position that directly impacts a business’s bottom line? In the hearth industry our installers receive outstand-



Phil Mickelson.

ing technical training and are required to keep current and refresh their knowledge on an ongoing basis. Our salespeople? Oh, well. And I'm not knocking our salespeople. I have ultimate respect for anyone willing to face the challenges of retail selling with little or no preparation. We are nothing if not courageous.

I also enjoy playing golf. I am inspired and a little awe-struck by the incredible skills and consistency displayed by elite professional golfers. Most of these men and women have exceptional natural ability that they have been honing since childhood. And yet, the best of the best, the top 10 players on the PGA and LPGA tours, always seek to improve through guidance and instruction from proven teaching professionals.

What dedication! I'm certain that the pros can outplay their instructors and, still, they regularly become students in order to gain the slightest edge. And why not? All you have to do is visit their Web sites detailing money earnings to see what one stroke less in scoring average can mean.

Following the Masters Tournament this year, Phil Mickelson's scoring average was 69.07. Tiger Woods' scoring average was 69.62. That's less than one percent difference in skills and, yet, Phil had earned a whopping \$638,000



Tiger Woods.

more than Tiger! Think either of these gentlemen believes that he's now "good enough?" I guarantee we'll see them both out on the practice tee with their respective coaches committed to getting *just a little bit better*.

Money is only one of the motivators.

It's also only one of the measurements of success. As sales professionals, it's up to each of us individually to find our own motivation. Perhaps it's the respect of your peers. Perhaps it's the satisfaction derived from supporting yourself and your family. Whatever it is, use it to get yourself out on the practice tee.

There's no shame in discovering areas where you can improve. And remember, you can improve in many ways. Skill levels, attitude, physical and mental health, product knowledge, interpersonal skills and more can all have an enormous impact on your personal and professional success.

As salespeople we can take pride in our profession and ourselves. A lot of fine, intelligent people out there will do just about anything to avoid the unpredictability, rejection and lack of control inherent in selling situations. These same conditions represent excitement, creativity and challenge to the professional salesperson.

The ultimate service that we provide is essential to the customer as well as to the business owner. Discovering complex solutions to customers' desires and facilitating the process that results in their getting what they want cannot happen in any meaningful way without our assistance. Could you really remove your own appendix without a trained surgeon to help? How many times have we seen consumers disappointed or even endangered because they refused to be assisted by a trained professional?

When salespeople are committed to improving their ability to perform, they demonstrate their respect for their employers, their customers and, most importantly, themselves. In future articles we will explore the essence of the selling function itself. We'll see how a stronger foundation in skills, knowledge and self-awareness can open new doors to success. Until then, when someone asks you what you do for a living I hope you will join me in proudly declaring, "I sell!"

About the Author

Bill Lentz received a Bachelor of Arts degree from UC Santa Cruz in 1969 and a Masters of Business Administration degree from the Anderson School of Management at UCLA in 1971. He has a wealth of sales experience both selling and training. He sold Dale Carnegie Improvement Classes in New Mexico, worked retail sales for four years in a specialty hearth store, was general/sales manager for Firebird Distributing in Santa Fe for seven years, spent another seven years as Regency's Rocky Mountain sales manager, and has worked at Lloyd Pugh & Associates since March 2006.



Bill Lentz.



Reading Body Language for Sales Professionals

By *Dennis Kyle*
Jun 2 2007 - 6:18pm

Body language is fascinating. People rarely recognize how much information they give off and how noticeable it is to the human eye. Even to the untrained human eye.

I can remember coming home from school as a child after having a tough day and seeing my mother. Instantly she would look at me and ask what is the matter. I know for a fact the majority of the time, I would answer “nothing.” However, her keen exploration would soon make me realize that I had a negative attitude.

In sales, it is vitally important to read body language. There are four major areas of body language you need to observe.

1. Eye Contact and Brow Movement
2. Facial Gestures
3. Torso and Arm Behavior
4. Leg Activity

Eye Contact and Brow Movement

Let's look at Eye Contact and Brow Movement closely. No pun intended of course. While in a seminar a few weeks ago, a participant asked me a question regarding a point I made. After I answered her, I asked the clarifying question, “Does that answer your question?” She answered me with a stuttering “Yes,” however, as she answered me her brows were scrunched together demonstrating negative energy. She also glanced away several times rapidly. By noticing her gestures it was obvious she did not understand me.

Now let's take a look at positive and negative indicators:

Positive Behaviors

Direct Eye Contact – Interested, likes you
Smiling Eyes – Is comfortable
Relaxed Brow – Again comfortable

Negative Behaviors

Limited or No Eye Contact – Lying, uninterested, too confined, uncomfortable, distracted
Tension in Brow – Confusion, tension, fear

There may be several reasons why someone is unable to hold eye contact. Now, I'm not talking about staring at someone either. Notice when you are interested how much eye contact you give and why you look away. It can simply be that you are distracted for example a bird flies by

and catches your eye. When people are not able to tell you their honest feelings they most often cannot hold eye contact. Another reason for losing someone's eye contact is when you step into someone's personal space (and each of us has a different size boundary); their natural sign is to look away.

Check it out for yourself. Test some people (make sure you know them fairly well, you don't want to get bopped on the head for invading personal space): walk toward your friend and see how close you can get before their eyes dart away. Also note that the same person has different boundaries for different people, thus the tighter your friendship usually the closer you are able to get.

You have it in you to recognize these signs easily.

Facial Gestures

Facial Gestures are the second part of body language to read. The most important part of facial gestures is the mouth. Upward turns in the corner of the mouth are often positive signs and downward turns or flat lines demonstrate negative behavior. Observe the person's lips to see if they are pressed together or relaxed and comfortable. Do they show signs of happiness or signs of discontentment?

The most important thing to understand about reading facial behavior is that we all have the ability. Most people however never pay close attention to human tendencies and activities. Success in sales requires you to observe human behavior.

Arm and Torso Movements

The third important factor in reading human body language is monitoring arm and torso movements. Simple rule to remember is: "Closed-off posture usually means close-minded attitude and open posture means exactly what the name eludes, open or willing attitude." I know you are thinking, "Okay, Mr. Genius now that you have told me the obvious what does that mean?"

Closed-Off Posture

Shoulders hunched forward – lacking interest or feeling inferior

Rigid Body Posture – anxious, uptight

Crossed arms – can be just cold or protecting the body

Tapping Fingers – agitated, anxious, bored

Fidgeting with hands or objects (i.e., pen) – bored or has something to say

When these signs appear, don't take judgment on yourself or them it's simply time to take a break and see what that person is thinking.

Open Posture

Leaning forward – interested

Fingers interlocked placed behind the head leaving elbows open and armpits exposed – very open to ideas, comfortable

Mirroring you – likes you and wants to be friendly
Still – more interested in what you are saying than anything

Leg Activity

The fourth factor to observe is leg activity. Again this is another area, which is relatively easy to observe once you know what to monitor. Usually negative behavior is observed through fidgety leg movements. There is no direct correlation between crossed and uncrossed legs. However, if you notice a person has their legs crossed and one of them is bouncing on the other, it probably is anxiety.

Leg activity needs to be observed simultaneously with arm position. If you notice a person is bouncing their legs and their arms are crossed over or their torso is slumped over the buyer most likely is closed-off.

Your success depends upon how well you can modify your personal behavior to adapt to situations. And check in with them, STOP talking and ask them what they think.

If you notice a person is closed-down you need to focus on one thing. What do you need to do to increase the person's comfort zone?

Mirroring

The easiest way to increase a person's comfort when they are closed-off is to first utilize mirroring.

Mirroring is a technique by which you observe a person's behavior and then in a subtle way act the same way they are acting. If their arms are crossed over you should sit back relax a little, and then begin to cross your arms.

A psychologist performed a study on mirroring. Two different teachers taught the students a process. One used mirroring the other did not. It was overwhelming that the teacher using mirroring techniques was believed to be much more successful, friendly, and appealing by the students.

So as you look to the future it is going to require that you practice, practice, practice observing people. Remember, reading body language needs to be done carefully. Unlike verbal communication, body language can be rather abstract.

You already have the intuitive skills to learn the art of reading body language. Now you must become more conscious of the subtle signs your prospects and clients give off.

When you notice positive body language, keep on track and move in the direction of closure. If negative signs are being sent to you, step back and redefine your objective internally and externally.

To create more positive energy continually reiterate ideas and validate understanding. Review what you discussed with your prospect and validate it by asking clarifying questions. For instance:

Seller: Mrs. Jones we have discussed a variety things related to project

implementation and pricing structures. We will initiate the project on Dec. 1 and it will run for 16 consecutive weeks concluding on March 31. There are 7 consultants scheduled to be on the project alternating with three people available full-time. The estimated investment is \$98,235.00. Does this make sense to you?

Buyer: Yes it does!

(Observe body language. Don't just assume because the person said 'yes' it means 'yes'. You have to watch their eye contact, facial gestures for positive signs, torso and arms to make sure they are open, and finally if they have any noticeable fidgety behaviors in their legs or feet. If you determine quickly this is a sincere yes, offer an opportunity for questions. If there is any doubt in your mind address it now before moving forward. Let's take a look at both ideas.)

Noticeable Doubt:

Seller: Mrs. Jones I notice there may be a few things you're not clear on, what issues do I need to explain further?

Believe me in most cases when you observe body language and observe it with true compassion and desire to understand, your intuition won't serve you wrong. The client or prospect will have some issues, and they will appreciate you recognizing them. Learning how to define issues early on in a relationship forges a happy road to success. Once the person starts to open up to you with concerns resolve those concerns immediately.

Buyer: Well there are a few things regarding...

Seller: (answer all questions and clear up doubt).

Decisive Yes or After You Clear Up Doubt:

Seller: Mrs. Jones, I'd like to open this discussion-up to any questions you may have regarding the finalization of this project.

It is vitally important you pause when you open the floor up to the individual. Any more words out of your mouth will taint the discussion. The power of your questions is not only in the proper delivery of the question, but how well can you shut-up after you ask it.

Remember reading body language is a matter of paying attention.

Author's Bio

Dennis Kyle is a national motivational speaker and sales trainer. He began Positive Results, Inc. in 1994 training and motivating Fortune 500 and small companies with custom on-site programs and open seated seminars. Dennis is listed in Who's Who International 2000 and has authored books, newsletters, videos and conducts on-line training. Dennis can be reached at 800-926-5953 or via email at dennis@positiveresults.com. Sign up for his free email newsletter at <http://www.positiveresults.com>

SURGEON GENERALS WARNING

Smoking pellet chimney causes customer call backs that are hazardous to your bottom line.



"We have been in the business for over 30 years. Last year alone we installed over 1,000 pellet systems. By designing their pellet chimney system so we don't need to seal the joints in the field EXCELPellet has reduced our installation time by about 35% and resulted in a major reduction in call backs. These guys are very responsive."

Jim Fallon,
Home & Hearth Inc., Hampton Falls, NH

PROBLEM

75% of all initial complaints with pellet stoves are due to leaky venting systems.

Why? Pellet chimney manufacturers design their products to pass the UL and ULC Standards. These standards insure a safe system, but only require the chimney to be leak proof before it is fired, not after. Stainless steel liners expand and contract during use and a system that seals before firing doesn't necessarily seal after repeated use. **Passing the safety standard doesn't guarantee that a system won't leak in the field.**

SOLUTION

EXCELPellet is engineered to be permanently leak free.

How? Excel installed the industry's first high temperature silicone rubber gasket on the inner liner of their pellet chimney. This gasket provides much more flexibility to compensate for expansion and contraction than is possible with fiber or metal seals. The gasket allows the system to be easily disconnected for cleaning, is easy to replace, and is backed by a lifetime warranty. The inner liner is laser welded from Type 304 stainless to be perfectly leak free and suitable for all pellet stove fuels.

Call your EXCELPellet Chimney distributor representative today and invite them to stop by and show you our innovative "Smart Parts" that will save you even more time. High temperature silicone gaskets and 304 type laser welded stainless inner liners cost money, but better performance means no call backs. Excel chimney is never the cheapest chimney, just the best!



**For your Financial Health...
Stop Smoking Forever
Switch to EXCELPellet Chimney**

