

RELATIONSHIP SELLING DOESN'T WORK

There is a dangerous error in sales and recruiting methods that goes something like this: "**People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.**" If you cling to this phrase as the basis of your selling or recruiting methods, then you are probably missing the mark.

You don't win sales by building relationships. You win sales by bringing value and contribution to your customer. The best way to win the hearts and minds and loyalty of a client is to deliver value to them first, and let the relationship develop from there. If you focus just on building a relationship and neglect to solve a problem for your prospect, then you might end up becoming good friends with your prospect...and then you can watch how he will buy from your best competitor because your competitor showed how he could solve your client's problem.

A few years back there was a sales rep who befriended me. We would meet for lunch and drinks after work, and my wife and I would go to his house for parties. But when it came time to buy, I didn't choose him because he never showed me how his service could provide a tangible benefit for me. He did a great job at building the relationship, but I choose someone else who focused on the competency of bringing me an immediate and a long-term benefit.

This is a delicate balance, and I'm not saying that relationship skills aren't important. They are important, but only if you focus on solving some sort of a problem for your prospect first. There are three elements to establishing trust in the mind of a client, and they must be followed in this sequence. If you place the concept of relationship ahead of client value, then you will be quickly relegated to the category of a kiss-up whose heart might be sincere but whose delivery is devoid of any value.

1) **First, find out what motivates the prospect to buy.** This is done by question asking. When discussing the issue, ask your prospect this question: "What problem would you be able to solve when I find the best candidate for your search assignment?" If you can identify the problem, you can get the sale.

2) **Once you identify the problem, focus on that issue.** This is the nerve that you must expose...and then you must jump up and down on it very hard. Do it with delicacy, by saying something like this: "What would happen if you went six months and didn't solve that issue?" Ouch. Pain. Motivation to take action. Compelling reason to consider your value.

3) **Third, bring closure to this line of question-asking by saying this:** "So it sounds like with the addition of this candidate, you might be able to solve that issue, once and for all, right?" "Sure," they respond. Then say this: "So how does that affect your ability for you personally to perform?" The whole point is to bring it to the personal level. Find out how your candidate can solve an issue at the personal level in the mind of the high-level decision-maker.

Remember that people make decisions on an emotional and a personal level, and if you can find out how to solve a problem which affects that senior-level decisionmaker on a personal level, you not only will get the business, you will get a friend for life. And that is the real secret to developing long-term relationships. People don't care how much you know until they know how much you can solve their problems.

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