

Things I Think I Think

I borrowed the title for this week's column from Peter King, a senior writer for *Sports Illustrated*. King writes mostly about football. I write mostly about selling. But I think there's a connection between the title of his column and the challenges printing salespeople face. And the connection is that printing salespeople don't think enough.

Whoa, I know that sounds pretty critical. But please read on, because what you think I meant is only half of what I hope I can teach you today.

You Need To...

I was out on calls with one of my clients' salespeople last week. He's been selling for 10-12 years, and selling printing for my client for 8 months. His previous sales experience includes cars and financial services. He's had quite a bit of sales training, but it's all been of the "hard sell" variety.

Our second call that morning was a first appointment with the marketing manager for a large furniture store. This company advertises aggressively, using radio, TV, billboards and the local newspaper. The salesperson learned all of that with a few basic questions, but then he said: "You need to add direct mail to your marketing."

"Why do you say that?" asked the marketing manager.

"It's been proven that direct mail is the most effective way to advertise," the salesperson said. "We print direct mail pieces for a lot of our customers, and we're really good at it."

Now, setting aside the fact that the first part of that statement isn't universally true, and the second part is a *feature* of the printing company, not a *benefit* to a customer, I really have my biggest problem with the phrase "you need to." Salespeople who say things like that tend to scare me.

On the other hand, salespeople who say "I think" tend to stimulate my interest. If this one had said: "I think there could be some benefit to you in adding direct mail to your marketing mix," he'd have established a different position. *I think* is a statement of possibility. *You need to* is a statement of fact. Now, put yourself in the buyer's position for a moment. Would you rather be told what is possible or told what to do?

I believe that people love to buy, but they hate to be sold to. Do you agree?

Stop And Think

Please consider what I just asked you to do. First, I asked you to stop and think and put yourself in the buyer's position. If you can do that, you stand a much better chance of selling success. In my experience, most printing salespeople don't operate like that. They may think about what they're saying, but they don't think enough about what their suspect/prospect/customer is hearing and thinking in response. That's a perfect description of a *presentation* style vs. a *consultative* style, and I have no fear in telling you that *consultative selling* has been proven to be the most effective way to sell printing.

Second, please note that I asked you a *trial closing question* after making a statement. *I believe that people love to buy, but they hate to be sold to. Do you agree?* If we were having a face-to-face discussion, I would have paused there to wait for your answer. If you did agree, I would have moved forward with the conversation. If you didn't agree, I'd have tried to resolve that issue before moving forward. In sales conversations, there tend to be "points of divergence"—in other words, specific points where the seller loses the buyer's interest or attention because the buyer doesn't believe or agree with something the seller said.

So which is easier to believe, a statement of unproven fact or a statement of opinion. Remember, by the way, that just because a salesperson says it's a fact, that doesn't mean it is, or that it will be accepted as fact by a buyer. On the other hand, you might not agree with an opinion, but I hope you'll agree that an opinion doesn't bear the same burden of proof as a statement of fact.

Anyway, that's what I think. I also think more thinking will generally lead to better selling.