Good Selling, Or Not?

I walked into one of the Big Box stores one morning not too long ago, intending to buy a top-of-the-line Dyson vacuum cleaner for $600+. I walked out with a Shark vacuum that listed for $250 and was on sale for $200. The salesperson sold me on the Shark, telling me that it was probably 90% as good as the Dyson for 1/3 of the cost. Here's the question: Was that good selling, great selling, or poor selling?

I posted that paragraph on my Facebook page and a couple of LinkedIn groups I belong to that afternoon. I thought you might find the range of response interesting. At one end of the scale, a friend of one of my Facebook friends wrote: "I think you got BAMBOOZELED!" On the other end of the scale, several people seemed to get the point I was hoping to get at. Keith Kemp wrote: "It depends on the profit margin." Jim Iverson wrote: "Quick first impression is that it is poor job of selling. That is coming from a business owner that just told one of my sales reps that he "left money on the table" on an estimate." Nancy Bleeke wrote: "Too often sellers are focused on selling the cheapest, when maybe with some effort on their part (matching value, explaining what you get for more $) the overall purchase for the more expensive item would be the great selling thing to do."

Win/Win

The bottom line for me is that great selling results in a win/win scenario—a happy customer and a happy seller. The majority of responses were focused on the happy customer side of the equation, though, with several noting that I wouldn't really know if it was that was accomplished until I got the vacuum home and used it. That point requires two answers. First, I brought it home and I love it. It's probably not as cool as the Dyson with its patented ball technology, but it cleans my rugs and floors way better than the 15-year old Oreck it's replacing. I'm prepared to accept that the Dyson would have vacuumed up 20% more dirt and cat hair—twice as much as the salesperson's "90% as good" statement promised—but I'm perfectly satisfied that it sucked up at least 50% more than the old Oreck. Beyond that, the Shark has some features the Dyson doesn't have, the best of which is that you can lift the whole vacuum motor and chamber off of the power-brush base, and use it as a hand-held with a wide range of attachments. It's not as light as some might like in that configuration, but it words fine for me.

Beyond all of that, the salesperson stressed his company's "no hassle" return policy. Basically he offered me the opportunity to try the Shark out with no risk attached. If I didn't like it, I could simply bring it back and buy the Dyson.

I don't think anyone would question that I got a win, especially considering that I'm going to keep the Shark. Bottom line: I spent $400 less than I expected to and got a perfectly satisfactory product. But how about the seller's bottom line? I don't have access to their net costs, but I'm pretty sure that Bed, Bath and Beyond would have made more money on the Dyson than they did on the Shark.

Win/Win/Win

Now let's consider the salesperson's motivation. I do not think he was on commission, and that could be a flaw in the company's compensation strategy. And as several people pointed out, he may have been told to push the Shark, and may even have earned a "spiff" for selling one. If that was the case, then he accomplished great selling, creating a win/win/win—happy customer, happy salesperson, and we have to assume a happy seller because if they asked the salesperson to push the Shark, they got what they asked for.

I still want to know, though, if they got what they really wanted, or what they really needed. It's been my experience that many companies don't think far enough into situations like this. Assuming that there was a push and a spiff on the Shark, was it communicated with any further guidance? If it were me in the management role, I might have said: "Hey, we'd like you to sell up from the less expensive Hoover's and Bissell's, but we don't really want you selling down from the Dyson's. Please use your best judgment based on the customer's wants and needs."

I think it's worth mentioning that I approached the salesperson with a statement and a question. "I think I want one of these Dyson's," I said, "but I'm wondering what I *don't* get if I buy a less expensive vacuum." I gave him the opportunity, I think, to stress the features and benefits of the Dyson, but instead, he went right to a down-selling strategy. So if I'm right about the Dyson generating a higher profit margin, Jim Iverson is right that the salesperson left money on the table.

We Don't Know

Let's all keep in mind that we don't *know* the whole story here. Keith Kemp raised the critical question, and I only *think* the Dyson sale would have been more profitable. But I also think Nancy Bleeke hit the nail right on the head. Too many salespeople minimize the second win because they think the first win is just about saving money. And I think some companies minimize the second win—their win!—by miscommunicating with their salespeople.

I love my new vacuum cleaner. I'm happy to have saved $400+. I'll go back to Bed, Bath and Beyond (but not specifically because of this experience. The truth of the matter is that I already love Bed, Bath and Beyond. They're our "go-to" source for pretty much anything for the kitchen, and we often find other things we want/need when a kitchen need takes us there.)

All things considered, my final grade for the salesperson is a B-minus. Good selling, but not great selling, because I think he could have done better for his company.

One More Thing…

One more thing for today. According to Facebook, this was my page's most popular post, but what I found most interesting was that 35% of the people who viewed it were organic and the other 65% was viral. I think what that means is that I raised an interesting question, and I think what that tells us is that content is the critical factor in making Social Media work for us.