

You're Pushin' Too Hard!

I may have encountered the world's biggest salesjerk today.

He called at 9:15 AM. He asked to speak with the owner.

"That would be me," I said.

"Well, today's your lucky day," he said. "I'm going to solve your financing problem. I can get you anywhere from \$100,000 to \$1,000,000 by the close of business tomorrow. But we have to start now. What kind of business is this, and what's your monthly sales volume?"

I should mention here that I believe in Sales Karma. What goes around, comes around. I am a sales person, so I am always polite to any other sales person, no matter how little interest I may have in his or her product or service. I am also a student of Selling, so I always pay attention to whatever strategy and/or tactics any other sales person tries to use on me. That's all to explain why I didn't hang up on this bozo immediately.

"I'm a consultant," I said. "My sales volume is satisfactory. And I don't think I need any financing."

"Everybody needs financing," he said. "How big a balance are you carrying on your credit cards. I can help you use your business to get out from under your personal debt."

That's when I hung up on him.

Pushing Is Good!

The point of today's column may surprise you. You need to be willing to push in order to be successful in sales! There's a point, of course, where pushing becomes obnoxious, but up until that point, it's a good thing.

This all connects to my personal definition of selling, which goes like this: *Selling encompasses all the things you can do to help people to make the decision to buy from you.* Helping people is a proactive process. The classic "soft sell" may be to make your pitch and hope that they buy from you. The classic "hard sell" may be to push hard for the close. The most effective sell is somewhere in the middle.

Here's another guiding principle. Pushing is most effective in the middle of the sales cycle. It is *least* effective at the start, and then again at the finish line.

Faulty Assumption?

I think you'll agree that my salesjerk pushed too hard at the start. What he did was not prospecting, which to me always includes needs/wants analysis. It was all based on his assumption that I needed or wanted to borrow money. Setting aside his obnoxious approach, you simply can't expect to sell people things they don't want or need.

But here's something else to consider. Most businesses *do* want or need financing. In fact, I assume that you have some combination of leases and loans and lines of credit in place right now. You may not need *more*, but you might benefit from *better*, and in my experience, the greatest challenge in printing sales is often to convince someone who already has a printer that you are better. In fact, it might be more accurate to say that the challenge is to get people to even *consider* that you might be better.

This is where you have to be willing to push. Think of it this way, you have plenty of *suspects*. You can take a very "soft sell" approach to those suspects, basically asking them if they're interested in extending a dialog with you. If they are, that's the first step toward qualifying them as real prospects.

But tell me if this sounds familiar. You talk a few times, maybe even quote a few jobs, but they don't seem to be taking you seriously. The tendency is to blame your pricing, but the real problem is usually that you haven't pushed them past the point of sticking with their status quo. Remember, you have to *help them* to make the decision to buy from you. Once you get them to take you seriously, it tends to be much shorter step to placing that first order with you.

Remember, too, that you can alienate people by pushing too hard at the closing stage. It's far better strategy to push in the middle, establish your value, and then *guide* them to the closing stage. That's the point I'm hoping to make today.

By the way, you earn 5 Baby Boomer Points if you looked at the title of this column and said: "Hey, that was a song," plus 20 more if you can name the band that recorded it, back in 1965, when many of us were young.