

## Interruptions Revisited

In a recent column, I wrote about setting priorities and dealing with interruptions. That was a discussion of time management strategy and technique. This month, I have interruptions on my mind again, but from a different perspective. Over the last couple of weeks, I have observed several salespeople and a couple of candidates for sales positions committing what I consider to be a cardinal selling sin, interrupting the person they really should be listening to.

### Too Much Talk...

When I was in Australia back in May of last year, presenting the series of seminars sponsored by Australian Printer and Canon, one of the elements of the program was “The Top 5 Ways To Talk Yourself Out Of A Sale.” They are: Too much *talk*, too little *listen*, Too much *features*, too little *benefits*, Pitching vs. Storytelling, Making it all about price and Blind Persistence I plan to write about all five of those “selling sins” over the next few months, but I want to focus on just the first one today. And I want to stress that it is bad enough that most salespeople talk too much, it is even worse when they talk at the wrong time—and by that, I mean hijacking the conversation when it is the other person’s turn to talk.

### The Art of Conversation

Think about how a *conversation* is supposed to work. One person talks, then the other. The *transition* may be effected by a question or by a statement, but either way, the ideal sales conversation is a back-and-forth exchange of information or opinion or perspective.

Your challenge as a salesperson is to fully understand your counterpart’s opinion or perspective. If you do not accomplish that, you are just blasting out information, and really leaving it up to your counterpart—your suspect, prospect or actual customer—to make the decision you are hoping for. Here is a bit of fundamental sales wisdom: *The decision to buy from you is way too important to leave it up to them.* Sadly, that is what most printing salespeople do. They make their presentation and then maybe ask for the order, but they do not solicit and address the buyer’s concerns or objections as part of the process.

Now let’s consider an even worse transgression, the one I observed several times during the last few weeks. In each of these cases, the buyer volunteered a concern, and one of them even said: “Let me tell you what concerns me.” Before those words were fully out of her mouth, the salesperson said: “Wait, I forgot to tell you about how we have been in business for more than 20 years, which means that you can be sure we will be here for 20 more,” and then proceeded to list several printers who were no longer in business. The buyer then said: “That ‘s not what concerns me,” and before *those* words were fully out of her mouth, the salesperson started talking again, saying: “Well, I think you should be concerned, because printers are going out of business left and right . OK, what was it you wanted to ask me?”

At this point, the buyer looked at her watch and said: “We will have to leave that for another time. I have something else I have to get to.” Translation: “*I do not want to talk to you anymore.*”

### I Would Never...

I can hear you thinking: “*I would never do that.*” I want you to be aggressively objective, though, and consider whether you might be guilty of some possibly lesser example of this cardinal sin. As I mentioned, I have observed several examples of this sort of behavior over the last couple of weeks, including one situation where I was listening in on the salesperson’s side of a telephone call, and heard her raise her voice a couple of times, which made me think that she was talking over her prospect’s attempt to get into the conversation.

Think back on my comment about information, opinion and perspective. And let us add one more word to our conversation: *relationship*. Now a question: Can you gain all the information you need, including your counterpart’s opinion and perspective, *and* build a solid relationship if you do not appear willing to let your counterpart into the conversation? Maybe we should add one more word into this conversation: *likeability*. I have stressed before that the buying decision is more about *trust* than about *like*, but that only means you need more than them liking you to get them to buy from you. If they do not even like you, it is hard to imagine them trusting you enough to buy from you anyway.

One final thought for today. As I mentioned, I have observed this same sort of behavior in people I have been interviewing for sales positions. I bet it will not surprise you that none of those people got hired. Bad habits, whatever they are, do not lend themselves to success. Please give some thought to whether you have this particular bad habit, and if you do, work hard to eliminate it.