

## We Is Bigger Than Me

In last month's column, I wrote about five fundamental questions. This month, I want to write about a fundamental idea — that the first thing a salesperson has to sell is himself/herself. OK, that's obviously true, but what exactly does it mean? And how far does it take you toward the ultimate goal of printing sales success?

### Two Elements

To sell yourself effectively, you really have to sell me on two interrelated elements. The first is that you know what you're talking about. The second is that you'll do what you say you will do. If I decide that I can believe both of those things, I'll probably think seriously about buying from you. If I don't believe either one, though, I probably won't.

Think of it this way. You sell a custom-manufactured product. It doesn't exist until I place an order and you produce it — and there's a lot that can go wrong between the order and the delivery! If I'm not convinced that you know what you're talking about, I can't be sure that you know enough to prevent any of those things from going wrong. And if I'm not convinced that you will do what you say you will do, I can't be sure that buying from you won't turn into a painful experience.

Please understand this, it's not a matter of whether I *like* you. That is a part of most people's decision-making process, of course, but it's not the most important part. The real issue is whether I *trust* you, to keep all of the promises you make in the selling process. And I'd like you to give some thought to just how many promises you make. *You'll be happy with the quality. You'll be happy with the service. We'll deliver on time. I work with a great team, and we're all committed to your complete satisfaction!*

Selling is largely about making promises, especially selling a custom-manufactured product, and *customer satisfaction* is mostly about keeping all of those promises.

### Selling The Team

While it's true that you have to sell yourself, it's also true that you have to sell your company. But that's the *wrong* way to phrase it! Rather than talking about your company, I strongly suggest that you talk about your *team* — as in, *I work with a great team, and we're all committed to your complete satisfaction!*

What's the difference in the terminology? It's been my experience that when salespeople talk about their company, they usually talk about equipment and capabilities. But does it really make any difference to a buyer whether a job runs on a Heidelberg or a Komori? When you talk about your team, you can talk about people and processes, and that's really where differentiation lives. You can be in competition against a company with the exact same press, but not the exact same people, and rarely the exact same processes.

### People and Processes

My dictionary defines "process" as *a series of actions or steps taken in order to achieve a particular end*. The most important *end* in printing is quality that meets or exceeds the customer's expectations, so the most important *process* in printing is quality control.

Here's another very fundamental idea. *Quality control adds time and therefore cost to print production*. Another way to say that is *the lack of quality control equates to cutting corners*. As a buyer, would you want to buy from a company that cuts corners? Would you be willing to accept a higher cost from a company that doesn't? I know that I can't speak for every buyer, but it's been my experience that most will pay what it costs to get what they really want. Sadly, most printing salespeople aren't very good insurance salespeople. In other words, they don't try to sell a higher price as insurance against quality failures, insurance provided by solid quality control processes and procedures.

Now make no mistake, this is not just a matter of *mentioning* your commitment to quality control. I'm talking about really *selling* it, explaining your processes and procedures in detail, and providing evidence that they're being followed. How do you provide that evidence? I might suggest introducing your prospects and customers to the people who actually do the work, either in person on a plant tour, or using video.

One of my clients produced short video "interviews" with every staff member, focusing on their experience and time in service to the company, and stressing their role in the quality control process. The salespeople use those videos as part of the selling process, and the result seems to be a smooth and effective transition from the salesperson selling himself/herself to the salesperson selling the entire team. As one of the salespeople told me, "The 'we' is way bigger and stronger than the 'me.' I can see how my prospects and customers respond to the idea that I'm the front end of a whole team of talented people."