

Transparency

“I can see right through you,” said the buyer to the salesperson. “I know exactly what you’re trying to do!”

Question: Is that a good thing or a bad thing? This may surprise you, but I think it’s a *very* good thing. I believe that the best selling is highly transparent—no tricks, no games, and no subterfuge. The great salespeople don’t trick anyone into buying from them; they help their prospects and customers to reach an unmistakable conclusion. When a great salesperson makes a sale, there’s no “buyer’s remorse”, just the confidence that comes from making a good decision.

Selling Is A Game

I should probably clarify this point: the great salespeople don’t “play games”, but many great salespeople look at selling itself is a game. I think that’s a healthy attitude, especially considering that salespeople “lose” more frequently than people in most other job categories. The great salespeople probably lose less frequently, but you still can’t win ‘em all, no matter what game you’re playing.

(Actually, you can win ‘em all, over a short period of time. That’s called a *streak*. You can also lose ‘em all over a short period of time. That’s called a *slump*. Great salespeople have both, and just like great athletes, they know both will end. With a *streak*, you try to keep it going by continuing to do what’s been working for you. With a slump, you try to make it end by examining what you’ve been doing and making any changes/adjustments that seem necessary. Just like any other game, selling involves strategies and skills, and you can improve your performance by refining your strategies and/or improving your skills.)

Similarities and Analogies

The “selling is a game” discussion comes up early in most of my seminars. After we agree that it’s a healthy way of looking at the job, I ask attendees to consider the similarities/analogies between selling and some other popular sports and games.

Fishing is often suggested as an analogous challenge, and when I ask why, the answer usually has something to do with being in the right place with the right bait. Tennis is another common answer, with its element of each party putting the ball back in the other’s court. Chess is another common analogy, and lately I’ve been hearing a lot about the similarities between selling and poker.

I think those two in particular can help me to make my point, because I think selling at its highest level is a lot more like chess than like poker. Think about the two games. In chess, the whole tactical situation is right out there in front of both players. You won’t always know what your opponent is planning to do, but you always know what he/she *can* do. The pieces have proscribed moves, and the player can’t change what they can do in the middle of a game.

In poker, on the other hand, there is always hidden information, known only to one player, and because of that, the element of bluffing is of major importance. Now, I’ll grant you that there’s often an element of bluffing when you get to the negotiation stage in printing sales, but my point is that bluffing becomes less necessary the more transparent the selling process is up until that point. In other words, the greater the trust, the less important the price!

Transparent Strategy

I teach a selling strategy which includes an introductory letter or e-mail. The gist of that communication is *I’m interested in you (because...), and I think you might be interested in me (because...), so I’m going to call you and ask you to agree to a meeting*. It’s pretty straightforward, and I hope you’ll agree that it’s pretty transparent. To look at it another way, this letter or e-mail says *this is why I’m writing to you and this is what I’m going to do next*. It does not say a great deal about products or services or capabilities or technology or anything else that might be described as a benefit of doing business with you. Why? Because you can’t sell that stuff in a letter! The letter or e-mail is only a tool to help you get the appointment!

When I make the follow up call, it’s also pretty straightforward: “Hi, this is Dave Fellman from Dave’s Printing. I wrote to you recently, and I promised that I’d be calling to see if we can set up an appointment. Are you interested in meeting with me?”

Bad Strategy?

I remember being told once that that's a terrible question. "You're just asking for a *no*!" the salesperson said. "You're not going to sell much printing that way."

"I'm not afraid on a *no*," was my answer. "And I'm not trying to sell printing at this point. I'm only trying to sell the appointment. So why not go straight at the issue?"

Here's why I'm not afraid of a *no*. It would give me the opportunity to say something like this: "Before you give me a final *no*, let me tell you exactly what I was hoping to accomplish in a meeting. I have a bunch of questions I want to ask you, some of them about the printing you buy, but most of them about the way you buy it and receive it and distribute it and the way it works for you. I'm hoping that you buy exactly the kind of printing I sell, and if you don't, I'll tell you that right away because I don't want to waste either of our time. Beyond that, though, I want to explore whether there might be a better way to do what you're doing, either in terms of the quality or service that you're getting, or in terms of whether you're using printing most effectively in running your business or growing your business. I'm one of those consultative sales guys, and that, more than anything, is where I think I might be able to bring some value. So let me ask you again, are you interested in meeting with me?"

Meeting Strategy

I would start out the meeting exactly the same way, with an "opening statement" of my goals and objectives. And let me stress that this would *not* be a presentation. I don't want to show samples or talk about features or benefits, I want ask questions and talk about *needs* and *wants*! I want to learn what features and benefits would be important to this particular prospect, so I can stress them when I get to the presentation stage of the process. Most printing salespeople seem to take a "shotgun" approach to selling; in other words, blasting out everything they've got, as quickly as they can, in the hopes that something will hit the target. The great salespeople take a far different approach.

Here's something else the great salespeople know. When you start each stage of the process with a statement of your goals, you can close with a simple question: "How did I do?"

Think about that. You start by telling them what you're hoping to accomplish, and then you close by asking them if you were successful. No tricks, no games, and no subterfuge—just a highly transparent process of open and honest communication.

Here's the bottom line: Is that the way you want to buy? If so, it's definitely the way you want to sell!