

Teach The Kid, Not The Lesson!

“You can learn a lot when you let them talk.”

My wife said that as we were sipping cocktails before dinner last night. She’s a 4th Grade teacher, and she was referring to her students, specifically in terms of what they need in order to get to the next level of their educational development.

“Too many teachers just teach,” she said. “They present the lessons and the kids either get it or they don’t. It works better when you engage them in the conversation. That way you can tell whether they’re getting it or not, and if not, you often learn why they’re *not* getting it, and that helps you to refine your teaching strategy.”

In other words, she said, “you have to teach the kid, not the lesson.”

To put that in sales training terms, you have to sell the customer, not the printing company. So please ask yourself, are you doing that, or are you locked into a *presentation* style as opposed to a *consultative* selling style?

Let Them Talk

I know that you’re proud of your company, your capabilities, your ability to print all of the PMS colors and even process color and to print QR codes on anything from postcards to posters and banners. What you need to know is that I’d rather talk about *my* stuff than listen to you talk about yours. If you don’t let me do that, I’m probably going to start tuning you out pretty quickly. And here’s something else you need to know. I can do that without showing you that I’m not really listening to what you’re saying. So here’s the question, are you *communicating* if you’re talking and I’m not really listening?

On the other hand, if you let me talk, we can have a *conversation*. That’s what happens when you ask a question, listen to my answer, maybe ask another question, listen to that answer, and only then tell me how you think your wicked cool capabilities can help me to address whatever problem or opportunity we’re talking about. Too many salespeople throw their “solution” out into the void without determining if there’s a problem or an opportunity in the first place.

Make Them Talk

Here’s still another thing you need to know. If we’re talking about talking to someone else’s customer, you really need them to have problems—or at the very least, opportunities that their current supplier is not helping them to recognize and capitalize on. If they have no problems, why would they stop buying from that other printer and start buying from you?

I define “prospecting” in a number of ways. One of them is *the search for dissatisfied customers*. If you can find some other printer’s dissatisfied customers, you’re well on your way to developing a new happy customer of your own. But it’s not always easy, because many of them don’t want to admit that they’ve made bad decisions. Beyond that, many of them cling to their status quo, and that can include sticking with an imperfect supplier (the devil you know is better than the devil you don’t know) or ignoring new marketing strategies or opportunities (if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it).

So please understand that when you’re prospecting, the status quo is your enemy. And the first step toward defeating that enemy is to identify and understand it. That may mean getting beyond letting them talk to a point where you *make them talk*. You do that by asking good questions—*provocative* questions!—and then by resisting the temptation to start talking again if an answer is not immediately forthcoming.

A very successful and talented salesperson once told me that sales conversations often get to the point where *the next one to talk loses*. “I had to learn,” he told me, “not to let the people I was trying to sell to off the hook. Asking the questions was easy. The hard part was waiting for the answer. But once I learned how to do that, I found that they often told me everything I needed to know.”

So here’s the moral of this story: Education is all about the kid. Selling is all about the customer.