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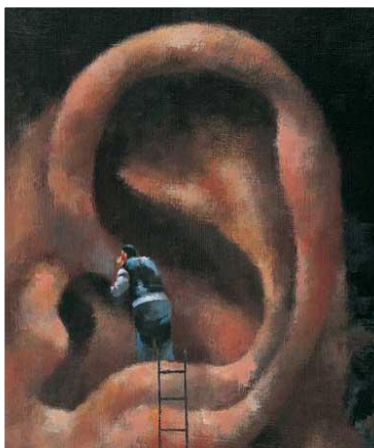


How Do You Establish Rapport?

Salespeople recognize that establishing rapport with a prospect is an essential ingredient for developing a meaningful business relationship. There is an abundance of information available about how to develop rapport. The information covers everything from what to say, the tone of voice to use, and the posture and facial expressions to exhibit, to how to recognize and appropriately respond to various personality styles.

While all the rapport-building techniques have some value in shaping your interaction with a prospect, the most important element for developing rapport and a meaningful relationship is not a technique. It's empathy—the ability to perceive the prospect's problem, challenge, or goal from his perspective, to understand what he feels, and to gain a sense of his desires and motivations. It's a state that results from having a sincere desire to understand your prospect and his world, and ultimately, make a contribution to improve it.

Empathetic salespeople are sincere and inquisitive. They take an interest in their prospect on a personal level. When they meet with a CEO or business owner, for instance, they are genuinely curious about how the person came to own the business or become its CEO.



They ask a lot of questions in order to fully understand the prospect's situation. Their first order of business is to *understand*...not sell. They ask "how," "what," "why," and "when" questions rather than questions designed to manipulate the prospect into one position or another. They recognize that they can't help a prospect solve a problem or accomplish a goal until they fully understand the situation...from the prospect's point of view.

Prospects, like everyone, want to be listened to and understood. They appreciate salespeople who reach them on a personal level. When they interact with salespeople who are sincerely interested, they tend to open up and share information more freely.

When you meet with prospects and customers, be prepared to ask well-crafted questions that focus on them, their situations, and their desires. Learn as much as you can about your prospects before discussing your product or service. When you focus on them first, the sales will follow.

Can You Do More...with Less?

Sales departments are not immune to the call to “do more with less.” With shrinking budgets exerting increased pressure on sales related expenses, closing sales opportunities requires a different strategy. Multiple sales calls and elaborate presentations are no longer the norm. Letting “opportunities” drag on, and chasing prospects endlessly until they make decisions is no longer acceptable (and should never have been).

Today, the salesperson’s marching orders are, “Shorten your selling cycle.” To do that, you must be more selective about the prospects with whom you meet. Invest a bit more time during the initial contacts to establish compelling reasons to schedule appointments. And, when you meet with a prospect, there shouldn’t be any confusion—*mutual mystification*—about what will take place. When you schedule the appointment, establish a well-defined agenda for the meeting—clear objectives to be achieved: the topics to explore, the information to share, and the conclusions to reach. And, define the role each party must play during the meeting in order to achieve the objectives.

Review the agenda at the beginning of the meeting to make sure that the conditions that precipitated the meeting have not changed and that the prospect is prepared to carry out his role in reaching the objectives previously defined. If conditions have changed, or the prospect is not prepared, it may be in your best interest to cancel or reschedule the meeting.

Shortening the selling cycle requires more efficient actions from the time you say “Hello” to prospects until the time you close the sale and they become customers, or you “close the file” and move on to the another prospect. Greater efficiency comes with proper advanced planning and timely execution of scheduled activities. Investing “however long it takes” to develop a relationship with a potential customer is not acceptable. The costs are too great.

Everything Changes

In regard to the physical world and relationships with others, change is the natural order of things.

Day becomes night. Winter transitions to spring. Memory cards have replaced photographic film. iPods have replaced CD players. E-books are now replacing paper books.

Relationships we have with some people deepen and mature...others grow distant.



We accept that everything is constantly changing. Yet, many people refuse to accept that premise in one crucial area of their lives—their attitudes about themselves and their abilities. Have you ever thought something like, “I know I could get so much more accomplished if I could only get organized and stay focused on one thing at a time...but, I’ll never get organized, that’s just the way I am”?

Perhaps staying focused is not your challenge; maybe you believe that you need to be more comfortable interacting with large groups, or you need to be more computer literate, or you need to have more passion for your work.

If you truly believe that you'll never become more comfortable interacting with large groups, or you'll never be able to enhance your computer skills, or you'll never find reasons to be more passionate about your work because "that's just the way I am," then why would you even try?

If you haven't been able to change by now, you'll never be able to. Right?

Wrong!

Everything changes...and so can you. But, every time you say or think "that's just the way I am," you build an artificial barrier keeping you from what you want, and you reinforce the notion that everything changes...BUT YOU! To make matters worse, there are plenty of well-meaning friends, family members, and colleagues who unintentionally help reinforce the barrier. They tell you, for instance, "Don't worry about it. Only geeks understand computers."

You have a choice. You can do nothing and continue to believe, "That's just the way I am," and deny the fundamental principle that everything changes...INCLUDING YOU. Or, you can knock down the barrier and get your life moving in more positive, productive, and rewarding directions.

No amount of physical strength, however, will knock down the barrier. It will take something much stronger. It will take a shift in your attitude; a shift in your way of thinking; and most importantly, a shift in your beliefs. A shift from "It's just the way I am" to "Everything changes...and so can I."

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