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STOP Selling That Way!

The growth of Internet shopping has changed the way we should be selling lighting. It's time to try the E-Way.

BY MARK OKUN

The profession of selling is challenging — and even more so with the “internet of things” happening all around us. For decades (and even centuries, for that matter), the basic selling process remained unchanged and yielded acceptable results.

Today the consumer controls the course of their purchasing like never before, and the old selling process is not as effective as it once was and is losing momentum rapidly. Did you know that clients spend more time shopping online than offline? According to the statistics I've found, they are averaging 10.4 Web sites visited before setting foot in a store. Essentially, they know what they want before they even enter a showroom.

NEW PLAN OF ACTION

I propose that you discard the old sales process and adopt a new one. Like learning a new dance, the new process will eliminate some old steps, increase

the complexity of other steps, and move certain aspects of the process around.

In Daniel H. Pink's book *To Sell Is Human*, he writes, “adopting an attitude of service is the natural way for the profession of selling to advance.” You must believe in the value of your products, your company, and the increased value your involvement brings to the party. Each one of these beliefs will impact the experience the customer has. Putting the wants, needs, and desires of the client first is vital in this new world of sales by service.

Basically, it's a matter of changing your role to achieve your goal. The dictionary defines a salesperson as “a person whose job is to sell things” and an Advisor as “a person who gives advice, typically associated with a professional.”

The Internet has taken away the role of being the “Gate Keeper of Information” from the 21st Century sales professional. For years, consulting a salesperson was the only way consumers could get any information on the product or service they wanted. Nowadays, the consumer comes to the store with various degrees of knowledge. It is the advisor's job to fill any gaps in the information they may have and to advise and direct them to the best solutions for their situation.

It is time to embrace these changes because there will be no going back. Technological advances have made great strides in the way products go to market and how we must sell to people in the 21st Century. One of the most significant changes is that the “E-World” attempts to sterilize the sales process by removing or — at the very least — limiting the human interaction.

So as technology attempts to separate the human aspect from the sales process, I say relationships and human to human connection are more important than ever in the retail world.

WHERE TO BEGIN

Retailers know the best way to sell is to be open and honest. Customers don't want the old school, high pressure sales tactics or manipulation that has permeated the sales process for many years. Instead, they expect to be greeted by a genuine person who demonstrates through words and actions they can be a trusted advisor who is there to assist them with their decisions. That is on top of the skills already needed to be a successful lighting sales professional today.

Lighting showroom salespeople must not only

know the technical aspect of what they sell and how it will work, but they need to have an eye for design. They must know the vendors' products inside and out as well as be current on the hottest colors and style trends. It is a demanding role to fill when you must also be able to assist customers, understand lumen depreciation, be familiar with the quality of the materials used in a fixture, plus talk about the latest style trends.

SELLING THE E-WAY

In an effort to combat the sterilization of the salesperson's role, I suggest selling customers by using what I call the “E-Way.” The E stands for: Engage, Educate & Effective Activity.

E = ENGAGE

When a customer visits your showroom, they are doing more than checking out the lighting. Whether they are aware of it or not, customers are forming an emotional opinion of how they feel about the showroom and the interaction between them and the sales team and other people on the staff. Those emotional opinions determine not only if the customer does business with you, but also how much they will spend. Even if their interaction ends with a purchase, those emotional opinions will dictate whether they will return for additional items or recommend the showroom and its staff to others.

Sales teams that are enthusiastic, engaged, and full of life demonstrate a dedication to their work, are more productive, have higher success rates, and — best of all — customers love them! In the “old days” of selling, individuals who had these traits were also known (by their showroom managers) as “Self-Motivated or Directed.”

In a study of U.S. working places, a Gallup Poll found that only 30% of American employees are engaged in their jobs, while 52% are not engaged, and 18% are actively *disengaged*. According to research, Millennials are the least engaged of the generations surveyed. In order for lighting showrooms to thrive in the future, we must introduce and train this young group of future leaders to the art of engagement. This is important! If salespeople are not engaged in their roles, how will they ever transfer enthusiasm and excitement to their customers?

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U.S. EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT, BY GENERATION

% EMPLOYEES ENGAGED

	2013	2014
Millennials	27.5	28.9
Generation X	29.6	32.2
Baby Boomers	30.9	32.7
Traditionalists	38.3	42.2

SOURCE: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/181289/majority-employees-not-engaged-despite-gains-2014.aspx>

E = EDUCATE

Educating a showroom team goes beyond product knowledge (PK) training. In fact, having worked in a lighting showroom for many years, I can tell you that the plugged in consumer already has more PK than they need! The education these sales teams need is in the soft skills of human to human interaction. These skills are important, and they aren't taught in schools or discussed at most weekly sales meetings. When it comes to Millennials, the future generation is less in touch with these soft skills (due to their dependence on technology for all communication).

In the '90s, I attended a seminar held by Dr. Daniel Goleman on EQ (which stands for "Emotional Intelligence") and was forever moved from the "old way" of doing things. Fast forward to 2015 and the soft skills of EQ are what I consider to be the missing building blocks of connection that we need to instill in our showroom teams. The age of the "internet of things" has made these skills more important than ever.

In the sales profession, providing great customer service and the ability of management to offer a high proficiency in soft skills is a requirement. How do they become proficient? For one thing, interaction with people is required. Because the soft skills are a behavioral skill, the best way to build expertise is by taking lessons learned and applying them in your day-to-day dealings with customers. You can also practice with colleagues by creating mock situations; yes, I'm talking about role-playing.

In either case, having a candid coaching session will help the salesperson understand the emotional impact of a situation. There is no quick or easy way to learn, adopt, and apply the soft skills of EQ. It takes time and repetitive practice. When the combination of technical knowledge and soft skills are melded into



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your customer connections, success is sure to follow.

In your weekly meetings, work with all of your staff on their professional development. Take a topic from the following list and incorporate the desired skill into your staff meetings. If you, or your management, are not skilled in these areas, then your first step is to learn them yourself and become an expert!

- The Art of Questioning
- Listening Skills Are More Than Waiting to Talk
- Problem Solving
- Presentation Skills
- Story Telling
- Building Genuine Rapport
- Build a Mission or Branding Statement

E = EFFECTIVE ACTIVITY

Sales is about effective activities. Nothing written about the methods above will make an impact if there is no activity. Even poor execution is better than not making the effort.

What does effective activity in sales look like? It means that the day-to-day events performed by the sales staff is done in ways that can be measured using (KPI) Key Performance Indicators to be proven effective.

What are Key Performance Indicators (KPI)? While sales volume is a KPI, other indicators provide additional critical information and can be included, such as email address collection, category penetration, customer contacts, and gross margin.

Effective activities focus on customer satisfaction. And by that, I mean having a system for managing in-process projects in order to promote the highest level of confidence with your customers. Or it could be a follow-up system that keeps you connecting with your customer base to solidify customer retention and promote brand awareness.

What's another crucial step in increasing your team's sales success? Being consistent in meeting with staff to provide coaching advice on the losses as well as promoting the benefit of the wins. Continually working on the basics will refine your team's edge; it is hard work. It is too easy to become complacent or let the little things get in your way. If your sales team is expected to execute the strategy, then it becomes the management's/owner's responsibility to actively support what the team needs to be the best they can. There Are No Shortcuts.

What will the lighting salesperson of the future look like? Email me at Mark@bravointegratedmedia.com for more details. ❖

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