

AS SEEN IN
enLIGHTenment
MAGAZINE
FEBRUARY 2018



PERSUASION Is NOT a Dirty Word

The skills of persuasion have gotten a bad rap over the years – with many people confusing them with manipulation – however, persuasion is a vital sales tool. BY MARK OKUN

The focus of this month's column is a topic I have invested much time and effort in; it has been gaining traction and sought after by salespeople, business owners, and managers alike. These are the forgotten skills of influence and the art of persuasion that salespeople of all calibers need to succeed in the current economy.

Every type of showroom is approaching – or has even gone beyond – the point in time where the need for skilled, face-to-face selling talent is a mandatory requirement.

This one communication skill will be a significant deciding factor in whether a showroom has success or remains in the dreaded status-quo, which will lead to failure.

Enriching a sales force with enhanced interactive skills – when used in daily client interactions – is crucial when combating the

competition either digitally or locally.

For decades, there has been a constant conversation surrounding the act of selling. You probably have heard these phrases: "Selling is an art" or "Selling is a science." The funny thing is, both comments are correct! It just boils down to how and when to use the proper method. The ability to shift a selling situation between logic to emotion and then back again can only happen with knowledge and practice.

WHERE HAVE ALL THE SKILLS GONE?

The title of "salesperson" has been eroded since it became inclusive of other staff, such as clerks and cashiers, which has caused the essence of the sales position – and the associated selling skills that go with it – to be diluted.

Even when there is a clear distinction between "Sales" and the "Sales Support Team," the skill levels among the salespeople will vary or erode. Many of these "forgotten" skills are based on regular communication and conversation, let's call this art. Meanwhile, other actions are formed based on the data we use. There is useful information on data usage in my November 2017 column "Measuring Up."

Understanding persuasion begins with knowing there is an individual psychology and emotion involved in every buying decision-making process, whether the client buys online or in a brick and mortar store. To win more customers and close more sales, you must use skills that help you persuade and inform the client that you/your company are the best choice for them.

In the last half of the 20th Century and into the early part of the 21st Century, these skills of persuasion have gotten a bad rap. I think the main reason is due to the stigma associated with sales professionals.

The consumer public was asked the question: "What do you think of salespeople or the selling profession? What is the first word that comes to your mind?" In Daniel Pink's book, *To Sell Is Human*, 25 words received the highest response, among them are Pushy, Yuck, Aggressive, Difficult, Dishonest, and Sleazy.

No wonder the crucial skills used in the profession of selling have been lost. Sadly, many people believe that persuasion is nothing more than another word for manipulation.

THE DIFFERENCE IS INTENT

The difference between persuasion and manipulation is the intent of the salesperson and the company they work for. If your intention is correct and used to persuade a client to reach a buying decision – and that decision is in both their best interest and yours – then you're on the right side of the tracks. If you are trying to fool a customer and don't believe in the product you sell, the price it is being sold for, and the company you are working with, then using persuasion techniques is nothing more than a manipulation.

ARE PERSUASION SKILLS STILL NEEDED?

Since the introduction of the PC into the retail showroom, much time has been spent teaching new team members how to use "our tech," and

that training continues to keep the people up to date with the system.

As the workforce continues to evolve, the foundational digital skills that the new wave of employees brings with them are native, but what is missing is the soft human skills.

The digital revolution has changed every way that we communicate. Speed and convenience are so much at the forefront that people will text or email from the next room or office for efficiency. This skill may make a person good at on-screen chatting, but it does *nothing* for the client who is face to face with them. At its base, persuasion is part superior communication skills blended with a high degree of situational awareness.

The need for technical abilities is essential and will continue to be so as we advance. Success in sales in the 21st Century economy requires the establishment, training, and coaching of the crucial human-to-human soft skills – not only for the sales team, but for each member of the showroom workforce who comes in contact with clients.

WHAT IS THE PERSUASIVE PROCESS?

To understand the process, you must accept that these skills can be used in a variety of ways, some good and some not so good. Remember, there are no mystical words or actions that will cause a customer to make a purchase that they do not want.

Persuasion begins with the ability to transfer energized positive emotion to the clients who work with you. The persuasive salesperson uses passion and enthusiasm when presenting their company, products, and themselves.

In the past, sales trainees proved to me how much power there is in using passion and enthusiasm. After three weeks of high-intensity new hire training, the recruits were excited and ready to go. They'd hit the floor running, often outperforming the existing sales staff. This success was due to the power of excitement and the confidence they had in themselves that they could do the job.

Confidence and passion are very powerful emotions, but arrogance is repelling! When you demonstrate confidence in yourself and what you are selling, you will reach clients on an emotional level. They will feel confident in you and in the products, you are selling.

HOW TO USE EMOTION

There are many ways that we can persuade

"The most important persuasion tool you have in your entire arsenal is integrity."

– Zig Ziglar

“Persuasion
Is the Art
of Getting
People to
Do Things
That Are
Both in
Their Best
Interest
and Also
Yours.”



Mark Okun is Business Contributor to enLIGHTenment Magazine and President of Mark Okun Consulting & Performance Group. He has more than 30 years of hands-on retail experience training and coaching sales associates in the lighting and furniture industries. Mark@bravo-businessmedia.com

people to buy from us. Emotion, Logic, and Social Proof are just three types of influence employed in face-to-face selling.

Emotional reasoning is a state of mind that the customer operates in automatically without any thought or effort. With eons of human evolution behind us, emotions are relied upon when making choices. What I mean is that client emotions must be taken into consideration as it causes people to take action when making purchasing decisions.

While emotions are present in everyone, it takes good questioning and listening skills to determine which emotional triggers, if any, are going to cause a response from your client. Are the customers building their forever home, is the piece breathtaking to look at, or will the light be the focal point of entertaining?

HOW TO EMPLOY LOGIC

The statement “Once the emotional buying decision has been made, logic justifies it” has been reiterated many times without much discussion on how they are connected.

For increased closing rates, tie emotion to logic when the customer responds or expresses a feeling and link that emotion to a logical anchor in the form of a question.

For example, when pointing out the features of a chandelier the client response of “Oh my!” is an emotional indicator, but we don’t know which emotion. Don’t let this selling jewel slip by, instead ask, “What is it that excites you?” The answer will either provide you with the information to close with or indicate which features to stay away from.

ETHICS ARE IMPORTANT

Tech has changed how customers meet us and has placed our ethics on display. One of the adjustments caused by the digital shift is that products, businesses, and people are all judged before you ever know who your client is. The buyers we work with now are incredibly informed. They are doing more research than ever before when preparing to make a purchase or deciding whether to visit a showroom. This self-directed client investigation requires that we use ethical persuasion in our marketing, and then carry the same moral themes into our in-store signage and displays.

The major online players have jumped ahead of their showroom competition by building credible and ethical reputations online. As the functions of

sales and marketing continue to blend, the sales team takes the emotional connection that marketing is creating and combines it into their selling conversation. This conversation can happen face to face or online. It is no longer an option whether to interact with people on social media or not; in fact, the closer to real-time the better and always use their name.

While some segments of ethical influence are common sense, they deserve to be reviewed. Telling the truth seems pretty basic, after all we teach children to do it from an early age. When the public begins interacting with a salesperson, however, they often believe they will be lied to in order to make a sale. Sadly, this is the lingering reputation from the dark days of selling, and we must squash it.

With all the information available to the public we, as professionals, cannot entertain any truth stretching or awkward embellishment. In fact, telling the hard truth based on the customer’s best interest will set you apart.

It is impossible to persuade someone who is not interested in you or your showroom. The authenticity you project as a lighting expert is one way of reaching prospective clients. Demonstrate authenticity to your community daily in social media feeds. The content is about who you and your showroom are and what activities you do professionally or civically. Customers prefer working with companies that are socially responsible. One thing digital competitors have a hard time doing is supporting local efforts. This is an area that showrooms can excel in.

Show examples of how you solve problems or provide answers to questions that the customer may face. The term “paying it forward” also applies to ethical marketing and sales team interactions with clients. With each social media post or real-life conversation, do it with respect for the person who is your customer.

As a lifelong student of influence and persuasion, I find the topics and details to learn are endless. One sure fire way to succeed at persuasion is to adopt one method and then practice, practice, and practice it some more. Hone your skills with role play and test your craft on the showroom floor, then track your results.

I can assure you that if you invest time in this vital skill, you will be rewarded at the end of 2018. Happy Selling! ❖

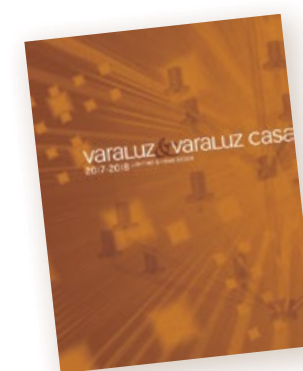


Turn Back Time

The ‘70s were about much more than “Stayin’ Alive”; they also had a decidedly glamorous side. To that, Halcyon speaks volumes. Steel and acrylic bars pair with elegant finishes to suggest a return back to more idyllic times.

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