

# THE CONCIERGE SALESPERSON

Despite the advances in technology, customers still want to interact with a living, breathing person when making a major purchase. BY MARK OKUN

With all the systemic changes that have impacted the showroom sales process, one aspect of this age-old profession hasn't changed: humans still like to interact with other humans. The digital veils people hide behind online are dropped when they engage with a caring and interested individual.

What do I mean by "concierge?" A broad definition of the word would be a person who is employed by a business to make arrangements or run errands. Think about the concierge desk at a hotel; it's where you go for advice on the best restaurants as well as which areas to avoid. The concierge staff has the local knowledge to make your visit with them memorable. Now let's apply the same principles to a showroom.

From the very start of the sales process through closing, customers warrant exceptional, high-quality service. Sales associates who adopt a concierge attitude abandon high-pressure tactics in favor of a high-contact, high-service approach.

They become a personal facilitator for the client's wants and needs, just like the hotel concierge.

## THE ADVANTAGES

Customers are savvy — they know they can buy just about *anything* they want, *any time* they want, from *anywhere* they want. This means the antiquated concept of "earn 'em or burn 'em" has been replaced with "assist and persist." I don't think any manipulative tactics of the past can pass muster with the digitally astute client. These days, no one wants to feel pressured to do anything, least of all be controlled by a salesperson or feel forced to make a purchase.

The secret sauce for selling in this client-centric, information-rich environment is to become a top-notch communicator and this applies to both seasoned professionals and new team members. When you develop and implement a concierge sales process, your client and your company will reap the benefits.

## THE 3-POINT JOB DESCRIPTION

To be a better seller in every one of the various ways we engage clients requires a plan to make the task much easier to understand and execute.

The first characteristic is to become an effective communicator. The better the communication skills, the greater the quality of each client's experience; secondly, it will help the staff sell better. The ability to build the customer's trust in you, your

company, and the products you sell means that you must put the client's interests at the forefront. In the simplest of terms, it is utilizing the skill of active listening and observation.

Some of the traits of an active listener are: patience with the speaker, letting the customers express themselves fully without interruption, and providing only positive verbal and non-verbal feedback at this point in the sales process. Sales pros should summarize, and later reflect back on, what the client has shared to assure accuracy of understanding and gain additional clarity of a topic or as part of a minor/major closing statement.

The second distinguishing characteristic of the concierge salesperson is expertise. Showrooms must invest the time their salespeople need to become the expert on the products they sell, the company they sell for, and the market they sell in. This special breed of sales pro provides a deeper level of expert status and value to the customer.

The "experts" know which products can be easily exchanged for others, which vendors/sales reps they can count on in a pinch, and which contractor is best for that customer. They direct the client to products that meet the client's level of expectation. Part of the salesperson's arsenal is knowing the showroom's sales process inside and out. A salesperson who doesn't know their own processes — and how to maximize that process for their client — will cause the client to become skeptical of the showroom and the team.

Another skill that increases the salesperson's expert status relates to the digital. The professional must have a command of all internal and external digital platforms used to market and sell to the client. The days of being digitally unskilled are over; those who don't have or fail to develop these skills will be left behind.

Demonstrating a deeper level of digital expertise will develop an increased degree of trust with the client. Trust and confidence are the foundation that client relationships and sales are built upon.

The third trait of the concierge salesperson is unbridled confidence. This ranks third for a reason. When a salesperson expresses confidence, but fails to use active listening skills or demonstrate expert knowledge, they come across as having a big ego and being too "salesy." That does not lead to success. When a salesperson feels great about what they sell, who they are selling it to, and how they are selling it, their confidence goes up.



Sharing that confidence without repelling the client can be done by expressing a story or two.

We all have stories of clients who have had a great showroom experience, and we also have stories of clients who waived off the expert knowledge offered and had some real problems. These two foundational stories must be in the salesperson's arsenal.

Putting active listening skills, knowledgeable expertise, and confidence into play will lead to closing higher average sales and increasing the number of side sales.

## RECASTING THE TEAM

Traditional showrooms have been operating using the same processes for a long time, and that was fine until (about) 2010 when the digital disrupters began to settle into a cadence and the term "Omni-channel" became a term associated with the changes required in all brick-and-mortar showrooms. The future of showroom sales will be about building trust, creating an experience, and fostering human-to-human connection.

How do we adapt to and adopt the concierge sales strategy? It begins with a pragmatic

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Mark Okun is a Sales Success Consultant for Bravo Business Media and President of MOC Performance Group with over 40 years' experience in sales, marketing, and business management within the furniture, lighting, and decorative plumbing industries. He is a monthly contributor to enLIGHTenment Magazine and conducts sales training programs, webinars, workshops and market seminars for retailers, sales representative agencies, and manufacturers. Contact Mark Okun via email at [mark@bravobusinessmedia.com](mailto:mark@bravobusinessmedia.com) or call 800-425-5139 ext. 626.

self-evaluation of the processes in place and testing each part of the customer engagement process with three defining questions:

1. "Does this omnichannel focused action contribute to, or detract from, our defined concierge sales plan?"
2. "Why?"
3. "How do we make it better?"

The answers provide the map from where you are today to the destination you want in six months. One concierge process that screams omnichannel is the addition of individual tablets for use on the showroom floor. There is no longer a need to break the continuity of the sales presentation to step away and get a catalog. Think of the experience: as the client makes selections, the sales team can close some or all of the items on the order — and, in many cases, take a deposit. At the same time, the client knows which products they can take with them and which will be drop-shipped or delivered.

This type of concierge experience provides the client with focused attention, a confident, knowledgeable salesperson that uses all their tools and, most of all, the client saved time with a professional who provided a quick, efficient experience.

Introducing all-new procedures and incorporating new tools to a sales team can be met with frustration. Everyone in their daily lives has been impacted by changes brought on by the digital channel. When the team acknowledges that they are clients, too, and the way they shop for everything has changed, they will look at the sales process in a whole new light.

The same impacts and interactions we want as customers demand we change the way we sell. The concierge salesperson's defined goals are to reduce selling pressure, increase sales metrics across the board, and build long-term client relationships.

**STEPS IN THE CONCIERGE PROCESS**

Concierge is simply defined as a caretaker. When we base our roles as caretakers for our clients, the way we approach everything during the engagement changes. Here are my five guide posts on creating the concierge method in your showroom. This is not an all or nothing approach. Begin with one suggestion, grasp it, and move to another. Please do not feel you have to master all of them at once.

**THE SALES ROLE IS NOW A SERVICE ROLE**

Customers who come to the showroom are gold. Trying to convince them to buy from you has been replaced with providing high service to the client in such a way that they will only consider buying from you. What service metrics that apply to your showroom could be put in place?

**Put the client first, always.** The old process put the spotlight on the salesperson; the concierge process shines the light on the client. They are the most important part of the business, without them we become extinct. Putting the client first goes beyond offering a hearty greeting and nice beverage. Provide examples in story form detailing how the showroom has placed past clients in the first position.

**Collaboration replaces domination.** Listening in order to work with the client to solve their problems is where every concierge salesperson must focus. This one action demonstrates that you value the other person and want to fully understand their needs and concerns. Begin with an open conversation that builds trust. It makes it easier for the customers to share their information.

**Educating clients is the paramount goal.** The salespeople who are best at developing the concierge method are, at heart, teachers. They educate their clients on the products they sell, the problems they eliminate, and why their showroom is the best choice when it comes to partnering with. The showrooms that have and express their own USP (unique selling proposition) are already on their way. Your USP is not just for the sales team, each person in the company must know it and share it.

**Ask for the sale; closing is a requirement.** Today more than ever, gaining confirmation throughout the sales presentation and then asking for the sale is required. Simply put, when the client makes a statement that is within your capacity to agree with, do it in a way that they confirm what is said. For example, if the clients say they want a light gold finish in their room, when presenting light gold items to them, confirm with a pre-closing question: "You mentioned that you wanted light gold for the space?" People do not argue with the information they share with you, and you get a "yes" on your way to the big close.

As Always, Happy Selling! ❖

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