

L6776: How to Sell Anything

Knowing how to sell is a useful skill in life. Whether it's selling a product or a service, selling your skills in a job interview, convincing others to donate to your nonprofit, or trying to get your family and friends to like your crazy ideas, understanding the sales process will help you get others to support you and make the most out of the opportunities that come your way.

Written here are what I consider the most essential and important principles and techniques of sales. No sale can be made without following these three principles. If you understand and think about these the next time you try to sell anything, I am confident that you will find more success than anyone who is unaware of the basics.

3 GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF SALES

- **PROVIDE VALUE! (**MOST IMPORTANT**)**

Why do we buy? We buy because we find value in what others are selling. Therefore, in order to sell, we must find a way to provide value to our customer (who can be a buyer, a friend, a potential employer, etc.). Before you even try to talk to the customer, ask yourself: What is the value that I am providing? How is my product going to improve my customer's life? Remember that value can be anything: physical needs (food, clothing, shelter), emotional needs (happiness, sense of belonging), aesthetics (clothing style, decorations), entertainment, etc. Don't forget to emphasize why your product is valuable to your customer.

One caveat: your product might be valuable for multiple reasons. It might be a scientific marvel, or it might be very easy to sell, or it might be that you personally like it. This does not matter. One of the hardest parts of sales is figuring out what is valuable for your customer and how your product helps them meet their needs, not yours. Different customers have different needs.

- **Know your customer**

There are a myriad of reasons why a person might buy. If you can pinpoint the needs of a customer and show them how your product can help them meet those, they will buy.

To do so, you must know your customer. What do they like? Where do they spend most of their time? How do they think? What do they care about? Take some time to think about your potential customer before going out and trying to sell. You will be more effective overall by spending time appealing to your ideal customer than blindly trying to sell to people off the street.

- **Know your product**

How can you help a customer with their needs if you don't know what your product can offer? When you know your product well enough you can find more ways that it can satisfy your customer's needs.

Think about what your product can offer, what its limitations are, and how it can be used. This will be of great help when people start asking questions and raising objections. By thinking about them beforehand you will appear more confident and will be able to answer any question with ease.

5 COMMON SALES TECHNIQUES

These are more about the actual selling process and can be useful when you already know your customer, your product, and the value that you provide. There are many sales techniques available and a quick google search will show you hundreds more.

- **Get to the Point**

A big mistake beginners make when selling is trying to reduce tension by starting the conversation with a customer using small talk (How are you?, It's cold, isn't it?, etc.). I would strongly advise against this because people are busy and only have limited attention. In fact, trying to start using small talk might increase the tension: you both know that the purpose of the conversation is to sell. You know it. Your customer knows it. Starting with small talk only pushes back the inevitable. By showing your cards and asking interesting questions/offering value early in the conversation your customer can decide if they are interested or not. This saves both of you time and it will let you move on to the next customer.

This doesn't mean walk up to somebody and ask "Would you like to buy?," but rather start with something interesting that will get them engaged. Use those precious moments with their full attention to go straight to the point.

- **Build Trust**

It's a psychological fact that we are more likely to buy from people or brands we trust. Companies spend billions each year in advertising and customer service trying to earn and keep their customer's trust. Therefore, if you want to sell something, you must build trust with the customer. You might think that this takes years, but there are many ways to build trust or "rapport" instantly. Are you both students? Are you from the same state? Do you both like football? Do you both hate traffic? Finding commonalities and drilling down on them is an easy way to make people relate to you. Once you have your customer's attention, start asking questions to learn more about them. If you find something in common, mention it and keep asking more questions. However, do not fake this by feigning to like something or telling lies. If caught, this will seriously

undermine your credibility and you will probably lose the sale. Better to find something you both genuinely enjoy than to tell lies.

You might think that this contradicts the first technique of getting to the point, but the first technique focuses on starting the conversation. Once your customer knows that you are trying to sell you can note any similarities between both of you and use them to build trust. Don't try to force it right off the bat.

Regardless, different situations call for different responses. It is your job to gauge which techniques will be the most useful given the situation and act accordingly.

- **Get them to say “yes”**

Another psychological fact is that once we agree on smaller favors we tend to agree on bigger ones. The reason is that if you agree with somebody or do a small favor for them, you rationalize that you like them. Why else would you be doing a favor for them? After this, you'll tend to keep agreeing and do even more, bigger favors for them.

In sales, you could start by asking small or general questions such as “Are you interested in reaching more potential customers?” or “Are you looking for a way to increase productivity?” Once the customer agrees with you, you can keep asking more questions to build on the yeses, finally asking in the end if they would like to invest in your product/service. They'll be more likely to say yes.

What happens if they say no to one of your questions? Find another topic that you both agree with and start again.

- **Make it Emotional**

They say that all sales are emotional sales. Human beings are emotional. Most of the things we buy we do because we attach emotion to them, even if we don't notice. That cool jacket that you bought at the store? You wanted to look fashionable and get compliments from others. That new iphone you ordered the other day? You wanted to be up-to-date and have the same your friends have. It's something that we can't help. That's why companies and brands often attach their image to good feelings such as love, happiness, or excitement.

For selling, we can use emotions to show our customer that our product is something worth buying. Guide people to imagine how much better they would feel or how much more productive they would be if they bought your product. Once they see it in their mind's eye, they'll be more inclined to make it a reality.

- **Create Constraints**

Having a sense of urgency often pushes people to buy. This is why people often buy items on “SALE!” because if they're on sale they won't be at the same price much longer. Ever notice how Amazon shows “Only x left on stock” next to some products?

This creates an inventory constraint and increases the likelihood of people buying said product.

In sales, you can create constraints that will get more people to buy from you. These can be everything from time constraints to inventory constraints. Maybe you can have offers for your first 10 clients, or maybe you can have sales for a limited amount of time.

As always, don't just take my advice (or anybody's) at face value. Go ahead and test it. Remember that the best way to learn about sales (or anything) is to practice.

Additional Resources

Here are some of the books that I read to prepare for my sales job and that I recommend to get started. There are many more resources on sales. A quick Google search on "sales techniques" and "sales books" will give you enough material than what you can do with it. Don't try to read every single resource available. It's much more effective to read one or two books and start practicing.

- How to Win Friends and Influence People by Dale Carnegie
- Little Red Book of Selling - 12.5 Principles of Sales Greatness by Jeffrey Gitomer
- Influence by Robert Cialdini
- SPIN Selling by Neil Rackham