

Successful business: it's about selling, not about landscaping

Can you visualize the mega-deal? That's the first step toward actually selling the deal of your dreams.



Joel Lerner: 'The more contacts and recontacts you make, the more you will sell.'

■ Joel Lerner, who has done enough selling to know, says that confidence, a positive attitude and honesty are the keys to selling landscape services.

"You're not selling a service or product," Lerner says. "You are selling yourself. You must expect to succeed. Positive attitudes beget positive responses."

Lerner, owner of Lerner Environmental Design in Chevy Chase, Md. made these revelations during a presentation at the Professional Grounds Management Society's annual conference last year.

As he noted, confidence is a key to successful selling. And "education, field experience and marketing blend together to give you the confidence to sell."

Rejection, though, is an integral part of selling. "You must turn every failure into a positive experience," he notes. "If you don't get a commitment, stay in touch anyway. Call your files all the time."

Here are some basic tips he offered the audience:

- Pound the pavement; personal visits are the best.

- Be friendly, professional and positive.
- Be honest. Clients hate surprises.

The first contact—Selling begins with the first consultation, Lerner believes. And at the first meeting, you should try and convince the prospective customer that "landscaping is the only home improvement that increases as it matures."

From that point, you should sell everything you're offering to the homeowner or other prospective customer.

"My cardinal rule is that if you spend time with a client, you should charge a fee," Lerner advises. "Act independent, charge a fee for your services and consultation."

"You don't need to act desperate for money, either."

He also believes that you should never mention price until it's brought up by the prospective client. "When you do have to quote a price, test the waters," he adds. "Throw out a ballpark figure and watch the property owner's response. Read the person; adjust the figures and get a fair amount of what the market will bear."

Pricing—Lerner warns against quoting a low price right off the bat.

"You don't know what you can get until you try," he says. "It's impossible to crank up prices, but it's not impossible to lower them. And many times, when you do lower your original bid, it gets you the job."

"Low prices don't produce loyalty. I hear everyone talking about the lowballers, but I don't hear talk about the highballers—and they're the ones making the money."

Your service is too valuable to make price the issue, he contends. "Price is simply the vehicle through which great things are accomplished."

If a client cannot afford your original

package, find out what is affordable. If the client tells you that one of your competitors is selling for less, you have to be prepared to explain why your price is more—perhaps because you offer better quality services, guarantees, quality products or dependability.

Closing the sale—In his book "Joel M. Lerner's Landscape Professional's Marketing and Sales Source Book," the author emphasizes that you should not forget to ask the prospect to buy. "It has been reported that more than 50 percent of all sales are lost because the customer was never asked to buy," he writes.

"If you don't ask, the answer is an automatic 'no,'" he contends.

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—Jerry Roche

LEARNER'S GUIDELINES TO SUCCESSFUL MARKETING:

- 1) Sell yourself.
- 2) Visualize success.
- 3) Pound the pavement: the more contacts you make, the more you will sell.
- 4) Work hard: all "breaks" are self-made.
- 5) Don't let your ego get in the way: customers are not dependent on you, you are dependent on them.
- 6) Don't act desperate.
- 7) Don't make promises you can't keep.
- 8) Use visuals to get the client thinking and active.
- 9) Focus on value, not price.
- 10) Make money on everything you provide, including consultations.