

HOW-TO

Sell sincerely

BY BILL BEMUS

I remember a conversation I had with a friend who worked as a project manager for a large commercial real estate development company. The name of a particular landscape company came up and my friend became apoplectic: “Oh! Those guys suck! I just had them on one of my projects. Hate ‘em! They were a pain in the ass every step of the way! I will never use them again...ever...unless they’re the low bidder.”

The recollection of that exchange always puts a smile on my face, especially when it’s juxtaposed with the concept of “relationship selling.” Is it really effective?

I am certainly no sales or marketing guru, but I have hired, read and listened to a lot of them—and I mean a *lot*—over the years, and almost all have touted relationship selling. In its basic form, you foster a relationship with a procurer of products or services (the products or services you happen to be offering) and then attempt to leverage or presume upon that friendship to sway the outcome of the sales process in your direction. A variant of relationship selling is “consultative selling.” How it works: You use your vaunted expertise to help an overworked and under-informed procurer make a purchasing decision. By providing this advice, you become a valued “team member” and your selfless service will be rewarded with the sale.

These approaches to selling never worked for me in the past.

They always seemed insincere. And given the realities of today’s business climate, they seem even more out of touch, especially in a B2B setting. Today’s business buyer, whether it’s a property manager, facilities manager, purchasing agent or government employee, does not have enough hours in the day to finish what he or she has to do as it is. They certainly don’t have time to cultivate new relationships with all of their prospective vendors. And their performance is not going to be judged by their superiors on the personality strength of the vendors they provide. They will be evaluated on the price they pay relative to the value delivered.

If you’re fortunate enough to be proposing on a project and have any kind of online presence, it is likely that the decision maker knows something about your company and service offerings already. You don’t need to waste a lot of their time introducing yourself. This also pertains to their technical questions. With the Internet and Google, nearly all of the information is there for anyone to find; they don’t need you for that anymore.

What, then, is a winning strategy for effective selling? All of us are consumers and buyers of myriad products and services. If you’re reading this, chances are you are an owner or operator of a company and are called upon by salespeople yourself. What motivates you to buy from one supplier or vendor over another? How would *you* sell to *you*? The following are tips that would help you sell something to me:



- 1 DON'T WASTE MY TIME.** We are not going to be friends, at least not at first. I don't need to be flattered nor have my ego stroked.
- 2 GET TO THE BOTTOM LINE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.** What is this going to cost and what's included? And I don't like surprises.
- 3 BE BLATANTLY HONEST.** Tell me what you do well, but I will be more impressed if you tell me what you don't do well. Don't ever tell me you do it all well.
- 4 DON'T PRESSURE ME.** I'm not going to make my decision today. I'm going to sleep on it. Follow up, but not too much.
- 5 DON'T EVER CALL AND SAY YOU JUST NEED 15 MINUTES OF MY TIME.** I know it will take at least an hour to get rid of you. (Refer to Nos. 1 and 3.)

Let me conclude on a positive note. If you're fortunate enough to garner a sale, here's your opportunity to engage in true relationship selling. It used to be called “customer loyalty” and it's still out there. It's a simple concept: Focus on delivering great service at a fair price and you will enjoy long-term relationships with your customers, who may even become your friends. That's a truly satisfying event. **LM**

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