



Establishing Rapport: An Essential Sales Strategy

By Jim Stewart

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Nothing is more frustrating to a sales professional than feeling that the customer, client, or prospect is not responding to the sales presentation. At times this feeling is exaggerated because clients may be overscheduled, distracted, not really interested, or feel that they know more about the subject under discussion than the sales professional.

In challenging sales situations such as this, it is helpful to have as many different techniques as possible to achieve the desired positive impact. Buyers (i.e., customers, clients, prospects, etc.) can be identified and categorized into five very distinct groups by observing their behavior during the sales process. Following is a discussion of these five buyer types and targeted strategies for each type that can be used to enhance the relationship and build rapport.

Apathetic Buyer

When working with a buyer who is showing signs of being apathetic, it is particularly important to find ways to get and maintain their attention and interest.

Comments, claims or statements that shock, provide suspense, are novel, add humor, may be familiar, or include “privileged” information are techniques that are useful in achieving this desired outcome.

Sophisticated Buyer

The most important task in dealing with this type of buyer is to change their perspective. They must believe that you also have important information to share. Frequently, the simplest and most straightforward methods work best with sophisticated buyers. At all costs, care must be taken to avoid the impression of presenting yourself as too sophisticated or condescending toward this type of person.

Techniques that can be used to build rapport with the sophisticated buyer include: building respect (using the quality/reputation of your company, sales aids, your success stories, etc.); providing validity (base your conclusions on the assumptions and values of the buyer, as long as they are accurate and appropriate); using “As you know...” statements (allows you to present information that the buyers should know, and allows them to “save face” if they are not familiar with it); and snob appeal (appeal to the buyers need to feel unique by inferring the information/services you are providing “are important, although not necessarily everyone else can grasp that”).

Hostile Buyer

The biggest challenge with the hostile buyer is to reduce or eliminate opposition. It is important to be realistic in establishing desired outcomes when dealing with someone in a confrontational state—the opportunity to change their attitudes and beliefs will be limited. Even a small change in this type of person’s attitude may represent a significant accomplishment.

Strategies to be used must be selected carefully and they must be used sensitively. Establishing common ground, using prior case examples, and candor will be particularly effective in dealing with a hostile buyer. It is also important to not appear hostile yourself, as this will only serve to deepen the buyer’s opposition.

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Credent Buyer

The credent buyer is already a “believer.” Here the goal is to deepen, strengthen, and broaden their support for your products and services. Stick to ideas and concepts that you strongly believe in and have worked previously. False commitment will be obvious to the credent buyer and will have negative results for you, both in the short and long term.

Techniques to build on an already solid relationship could include: relating personal experiences that have both positive and adverse outcomes; sharing “tidbits” of non-essential information; and dramatizing sales presentations.

Critical Buyer

For the critical buyer, facts and ideas will be much more successful than feeling-oriented approaches. It is important to change the attitude of this type of individual by providing sound reasonable points that follow rationally to inescapable conclusions.

When making presentations to a critical buyer, following this basic model/format should elicit a positive response: start with basic assumptions and premises, and then put forward (as appropriate, in sequence) a purpose or hypothesis, a viewpoint, the scope/limitations of your solution, procedures and methods, findings, and implications, gaps and weaknesses, and finally an opportunity for questions.

The resourceful and effective sales professional will already be familiar with many of these approaches and be using them appropriately. The “one trick pony” soon loses ground to more sophisticated, well-thought-out sales strategies that are employed by the thoughtful, sensitive, resourceful and well-prepared sales professional.