

Are you listening?

by Robert M. Gignac

As entrepreneurs and SMEs the key to our survival is the ability to sell our products and ourselves. Since we are always looking for ways to increase our sales, let me offer one that is virtually foolproof: start listening to your customers. From the clients I have spoken with recently, it appears that it happens so rarely; a competitive edge will be gained by doing it.

Please don't confuse the act of listening with the idea that it is easy. On the contrary, it is sometimes the hardest part of the selling process. Why? Too many other things get in our way.

We know exactly what is best for our customers, don't we? Sometimes we are actually right. But, being right doesn't mean you'll get their business. Listening involves hearing what the customers' needs are and meeting those needs. If you hammer away on your "better" solution to the exclusion of the customers' needs, and more importantly their wants, don't be surprised when you don't get their business.

We really don't know what is best for them all the time. We can't know. There are too many variables and factors that are invisible to us, things we are completely unaware of. I'm not saying that we shouldn't help our customers do things better and more effectively. I try to do that with all my customers, but that happens only after we have managed to build and establish a relationship. When we are selling, our focus must be on determining what our customers want, and if it is possible for us to deliver, then we need to deliver it.

Early in any business relationship, we sometimes confuse our needs with their needs, especially at a time when we may be desperate to make that next sale. What we think should be important to our customers, isn't, and the more we tell them what is important, the more their eyes glaze over. When that happens, you will lose your opportunity.

So what is the goal with all this listening? Just to get the sale? No. When we take the time to listen more, and worry less about making the sale, something interesting happens. We make our customers feel heard, responded to, and more importantly, understood. It leaves them with the feeling that we care about doing the right thing for them—not for us.

When you reach that level of understanding with your customers, the sales will follow.

In many ways, it is like playing catch with your customer. Playing catch involves

two people (or more...) tossing the ball back and forth. As salespeople, we sometimes want to play "pitch" only—talking about features, benefits, and how great it will be for our customer—if they would only listen to us. It is only when we take the time to listen to them that we get the ball back.

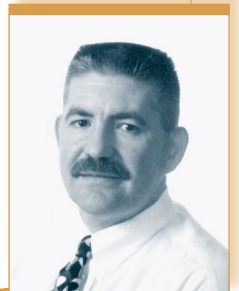
Listen to what they are saying, look for the clues, and pay close attention to what they don't say as well.

The things that can be the most important to our customers can be inconceivable to us. Avoiding preconceptions when we try to sell is hard; we always think we know what's best. It has been said many times that the best salespeople ask the best questions, but that is only partly true. The best salespeople ask the best questions, and then they actually take the time to listen to the answer.

Listening can be hard, but it can make the selling easier. How? It lets you tell your customers what they want to hear. I'm not talking about misleading them, or promising things that you can't deliver. Take the time to emphasize how your products and services meet the needs they told you they had. When you use the information you learned while you were listening you will need to do less pitching. You will be able to focus on what is important to them. When you pay attention, your customers will tell you what you need to say.

Perhaps we have been given two ears and one mouth for a reason. Could it be that we should be listening twice as much as we talk? Are you listening? **SBCM**

Robert Gignac is the owner of Taynac & Associates, providing keynote speeches, seminars, and workshops on personal development, motivation, and leadership. To book Robert to speak at your next event, please contact him at: rgignac@taynac.com or check their Web site.



WWW.TAYNAC.COM