



The SMMarT Guy

Call Center Sales

By Kim Robinson

A common complaint from call center clients is that their customer service reps (CSRs) don't do enough selling while speaking with callers. They're OK at taking orders, but they're not good at closing calls from people shopping around, nor are they good at up selling existing customers who call in for customer service.

The most common complaint customers lodge (including me) about call centers, is that the hold time necessary to eventually speak with someone is too long.

Given these two situations, call center managers face the conundrum of how to increase sales without increasing hold times.

Here are three simple communication techniques that solve this sales vs. hold-time dilemma. They are quick to teach, easy to understand, and have a proven track record for making calls go faster while increasing sales. They are to engage the caller, ask questions, and control the call. Put in a different order they spell the acronym ACE, as in to "ace" the call.

The first communication technique is to **engage the caller** and keep them actively engaged in conversation throughout the call. The biggest culprit for lengthy call times and poor sales is nothing more than dead air. A common example of how dead air is a deal killer, is when you're in your car singing along with a radio station. You are engaged while singing (even if you sing as badly as I do), but if the station goes off the air for more than just a few seconds, then your engagement with the station breaks and you push another button to sing along with someone else.

The same thing occurs with an incoming call. When it comes to closing ratios and up selling customers,

we need our callers to be engaged with the CSR, so that they don't push another button and "sing along with someone else." We want them to stay with us, because we want them to buy from us.

During a typical incoming call, the CSR greets the caller, finds out what they want, does what they ask, thanks them for the call (well, the good ones do), and then hangs up. This common version of customer service is to just wait for the caller to ask questions. The problem is that when the caller is thinking of a question, or doesn't know the right question to ask, or is simply pondering one of life's mysteries, the CSR waits and—you guessed it—dead air results and engagement breaks.

The CSR can engage the caller right away by immediately letting them know they are speaking with the right person. A simple, *I can help you with that*, right after they hear what the caller wants, accomplishes this. The most important step to maintain engagement, is to always conclude the response to a caller's question with another question.

Caller: "Is your refrigerator running?"

CSR: "Yes it is. (Don't stop there.) *Would you like to help me catch it?*"

This answer/ask technique forces the caller to be a part of the conversation. It does not allow them to wander conversationally, because the CSR's questions can guide the conversation and **control the call**.

It is a conversational fact that the person asking the questions is in control of the conversation. So, when the CSR simply waits to answer the caller's questions and asks none of his or her own, control of the call goes to the caller, engagement breaks, dead air occurs, call times stretch out, and sales close ratios plummet. Do sales happen when the caller is in charge? Of course they do. But, do more sales

occur when the CSR is in control of the call? Absolutely.

I challenge you to pay attention the next time you call into a call center. Take notice of how well the CSR handles your call. Do they ask questions to keep you engaged? Do they gain and maintain control of the call? Or, do they simply answer your questions and wait?

You: "Is your refrigerator running?"
CSR: "Yes." ■

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