



The SMMarT Guy

The Three Sales Truths

By Kim Robinson

"I have a news bulletin for all of you," began sales Guru Terry Mayfield in his speech to a room full of sales and marketing professionals, "I hate salespeople."

Given the audience, you would think Terry's blunt opening statement would be about as well received as an invitation to go quail hunting with Dick Cheney. But no. Everyone loved it, because they knew he was referring to those 10% of salespeople who simply will not take 'no' for an answer, and who push, push, push their product or service on every prospect they meet, until the prospect either bolts for the door, or is bullied into making a purchase. Unfortunately, it is this 'obnoxious minority,' and not the consultative sales professionals like Terry, who shape the image most people have of everyone in sales.

Terry met with enough success in his twenty-five years as a commission-only salesman and sales manager to comfortably retire when he turned 50 (sweet!). He now speaks professionally all over the country about sales and selling, and I had the pleasure of sharing the podium with him last year at a conference for sales and marketing professionals (I spoke about creative marketing).

I, too, was a successful commission-only salesman and sales manager for many years before I evolved (devolved?) into a professional marketer. I learned the following three truths about sales and the sales process during those years, and I rely upon them now whenever I train sales and customer service teams for my clients.

Sales Truth #1. People buy benefits and not features: No one buys a product or service for what it does; they buy it for what it does for them. The first part of this statement refers to a product's features; the latter part is the benefit of ownership, and it is this benefit that people actually buy. Too often, salespeople bore their prospects and lose sales by yammering on, and on, and on about the features of their product instead of illustrating how those features will benefit the prospect. Additionally, these boring and clueless few also tend to fall into the category of the pushy types Terry and I, and everyone else, hate—"Blah, blah, blah...feature, feature, feature...push,

push, push"...Argh, Calgon take me away!

Sales Truth #1 also applies to marketing. It is marketing's job to persuade people to come to your 'table' (pick up the phone or come into your business), so that professional sales and customer service people can take over and guide them into making a purchase before they move on to someone else's table. A direct mail piece or display ad that clearly spells out one or more benefits of ownership will persuade a lot more potential buyers to visit your table than will a list, even a long list, of features. Period.

Banks in central Iowa regularly violate Sales Truth #1 with their marketing. I can't think of a single bank in central Iowa that does not offer free checking to its customers. Yet bank, after bank, after bank fills my mailbox with postcards announcing that I can now receive FREE CHECKING if I switch my account to their bank. Wow. Alert the media... So-and-so bank now offers me the same thing I can already get from my current bank and every other bank in central Iowa; "free checking." Hold the presses, I'm changing my account right now!...not. Since every bank offers it, 'free checking' drops from being a persuader benefit of banking with a particular establishment, to a common feature of banking in central Iowa. This is true no matter how loudly it's screamed on a postcard, on a billboard, or on a sign at the bank. "FREE CHECKING!" is now simply a feature of banking in central Iowa, and the truth is that people buy benefits and not features.

Sales truths number two and three have everything to do with personal behavior and buyer perception, which, in turn, directly affect sales success.

Sales Truth #2. Everybody likes to buy, but nobody likes to be sold: People enjoy spending money but no one likes to be pushed into making a purchasing decision. Good sales and customer service people help prospects and customers identify and then purchase what they want by guiding them through the consultative sales and customer service process. They



do not 'push.'

Think about it. All this truth says is "don't be a pushy jerk." Really. Help people buy what they want and, if you cannot guide a prospect into discovering for themselves that they want what you have (the consultative sales and customer service process in a nutshell), then quit trying to make the sale. Period. Give it up. Be a good person and refer them to someone else who may be able to help them get what they want.

Sales Truth #3. Nobody ever willingly buys anything from someone they don't like: This is simply good common sense, because we all prefer to do business with people we like, right? To be liked, a good salesperson must punctuate the entire sales process with sincerity and good manners. Every business exchange should resonate with the same magic words taught to us as children, 'please' and 'thank you.'

The important take away from these three sales truths is that they are always true, without exception. Violate any of them in sales, and you'll be one of the salespeople Terry, I, and just about everyone else, hate. Violate Sales Truth #1 with your marketing and you will have anemic response rates and a poor ROI. But, don't worry too much about that if you're a banker, because your competition is doing the same thing. ■

Kim Robinson is the president of The SMMarT Consulting Group, Inc., an acquisition-focused marketing and sales training company based in Clive. Co-author of the book, Communicate Clearly, Confidently & Credibly, Kim also speaks professionally about creative marketing techniques, the consultative sales process, and the need for personal-touch communication in business. To reach Kim: Kim@SMMarTConsulting.com, or 515-223-5510.