

Consultative Selling

by William C. Bauers

An effective sales strategy is crucial to any sales organization. Without a clear plan, sales organizations can find that they are pushing products instead of meeting customer needs. One strategy to avoid this is consultative selling.

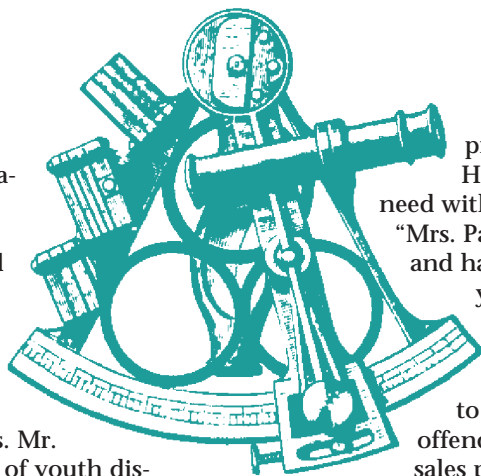
1. Assess customer needs. Some customers have very simple needs. Mr. Smith, for example, needs a book of youth discipleship material. Your publishing company has five products that could meet his need. However, Mr. Smith is not interested in hearing about all five books. He only needs one; anyone will do. Mr. Smith wants a resource, not details.

For other customers, needs are more complex. For example, Mrs. Pakinowski teaches the teens in her church. She is having a difficult time relating with them, and they with her. She is frustrated and feels discouraged. Product alone may not adequately address this customer's need.

2. Show that you understand your customer's needs. For instance, say "Mr. Smith, if you are looking for discipleship materials, I have the perfect book for you." A statement like this shows that you recognize Mr. Smith's need and realize that he is not interested in a myriad of details, just a single resource. When you restate Mr. Smith's need, he feels heard and respected. Furthermore, restating what you heard your customer say ensures that both of you are in agreement.

In handling Mrs. Pakinowski, do not simply listen to her negative feelings and disappointments. Communicate that you sympathize with her frustration and disappointment.

3. Link your customer's needs to a product you sell. In our first example, Mr. Smith wants a single book of discipleship material. Your company sells five relevant titles. Select one and offer it to him. For example, "Mr. Smith, I have an excellent resource titled "Zelos" which will equip you to disciple your teens." In the second example, Mrs. Pakinowski is experiencing a



problem between herself and her class. Her need is more complex. Link her need with a product you sell. For example, "Mrs. Pakinowski, I hear your frustration and have something in mind that will help you better understand your class. Let me tell you about this book."

4. Close the sale. Salespeople tend to neglect this part of selling for fear of offending their customers. Making the sales pitch may be easy, but asking for money, particularly in ministry environments, is not. However, asking for the sale must become easy if you are to succeed as a salesperson.

Mr. Smith and Mrs. Pakinowski both had needs. As a salesperson you offered resources to help. Now you must make it easy for the customer to obtain these resources. Make the buying process as easy as possible by offering the product and arranging for delivery whenever possible.

Asking for the sale is the logical conclusion to any presentation. If you do not ask, you do less than your best and you place the burden on the customer to ask for the product. Asking for the sale is service you give to your customers. There are many polite ways to ask customers to buy. You can ask, "May I have this sale today?" or "How about I send it to you?" or "Let me get this in your hands today," or "Why don't you take it?" If your customer does not want the product, he or she has the right to refuse your offer.

As you approach the future sales presentations you will make to your customers, remember this simple, four-step process:

- Identify your customer's need(s).
- Show that you understand what the need is by communicating it in your own words.
- Link the need with a product you sell
- Ask for the sale.

An effective sales strategy will dramatically increase your effectiveness and sales productivity. ❖

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