

Knock Your Socks Off Selling



Jeffrey Gitomer & Ron Zemke

Book Knock Your Socks Off Selling

Jeffrey Gitomer and Ron Zemke
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Recommendation

The outlook for selling as a career has darkened with the spread of automated and electronic transactions and product sales. How, then, can the modern salesperson succeed? By embracing a consultative sales approach, a salesperson can build one-to-one relationships with clients and become their expert resource for product information. Starting from shine-your-shoes-and-tuck-in-your-shirt basics, consultants Jeffrey Gitomer and Ron Zemke present a highly readable, detailed plan for managing every aspect of the transition from transactional to relationship-based selling. Beginning salespeople can use this book as a how-to guide for developing their careers, while seasoned professionals will gain from its straightforward instructions for developing a portfolio of long-term customers. Managers will relish the tools for cataloguing and improving their sales force's skills. For these reasons, *BooksInShort* recommends this book for sales professionals at every level.

Take-Aways

- "Knock Your Socks Off Selling" turns prospects into long-term partners.
- Develop a verbal, 30-second commercial to make yourself, your company and your product memorable to potential prospects.
- Use cold calls, networking, referrals and top-down selling to find prospects.
- Convert your prime prospects into customers by learning their needs, capturing their interest and then asking for the sale.
- Anticipate objections and be prepared with responses that lead into closing opportunities.
- Discover and fulfill your customers' explicit and implicit expectations.
- Become a part of each step of the purchase process, starting with the first call.
- Convert your customers into business partners by proving your reliability.
- Cultivate your work ethic, communication skills and knowledge to become an outstanding source of information.
- Maintain positive, long-term relationships with your customers by maintaining communications and solving problems as they arise.

Summary

Consultative Selling

"Knock your socks off selling" is a consultative approach to corporate sales. In contrast to sales rep selling, where you give your presentation to as many qualified prospects as possible, consultative sales involves a complex process of delivering customized information and service to long-term customers. The consultative salesperson builds a one-to-one relationship with their clients, becoming a valued source of information and advice about the product line.

“Successful selling is a learnable set of skills - for those with the fortitude, aptitude and persistence to succeed. There are no other rules.”

To build a consultative selling practice, you must make five key commitments:

1. Believe that your products are an outstanding solution for your customers' needs.
2. Believe that you have the ability to help customers solve problems.
3. Uncover, define and understand each of your customer's individual needs.
4. Partner with your customers.
5. Care about your customers' business objectives and help them to achieve their goals.

Becoming a "Born" Salesperson

Customers buy the salesperson, not just the product, so you must work on yourself. People who are "born to sell" share a particular set of character traits and interpersonal skills. By cultivating these abilities, you can become a "born" salesperson as well.

- Self-confidence - Convey enthusiasm with your voice, your eyes and your body language. To be likeable, you must like yourself, so work on your self-esteem and stockpile an arsenal of techniques to reduce stress and cope with rejection.
- Communication - Hone your listening and speaking skills. Pay attention - be as observant and perceptive as possible.
- Relationships - Be loyal. Commit to developing your relationship-building skills. Learn to enjoy the company of your associates and clients.
- Learning - Learn continually about your company's products and services, your customers' businesses and your industry. Inventory your skills and attack all weaknesses.
- Work ethic - Successful salespeople are highly self-motivated, so learn to enjoy a challenge and love a win. Write down specific short- and long-term goals and pursue them with discipline and persistence. Make financial security a goal and strive toward it.

“Even if your organization isn't exploring formal customer partnerships, you can adopt a partnership mindset with your customers.”

"Born" salespeople share another common characteristic - they wield their selling tools with ease and grace. In particular, polish your "Power Questions" and "Power Statements," and your 30-second commercial. Power questions are clear, concise questions that prod your prospects to evaluate their objectives in terms of a new idea or solution. Power statements link your product directly to your customer's objectives, explaining exactly what you have to offer, how it meets their needs and why it is the best solution.

“The customer buys the salesperson first. The first sale that's made is you.”

The 30-second commercial is your most concise pitch. In fewer than 30 or fewer seconds, you should be able to state who you are, what your company is and what products or services you offer. You should then ask one or more power questions, follow up with a power statement and end with a call to action.

Setting Your Sights

The first step in consultative selling is selecting appropriate prospective partners. Consultative relationships require a commitment

from both partners, comfort with risk and, particularly, a willingness to relinquish immediate price benefit for future gain. Several classic prospecting techniques will help you find the best prospective partners. They are:

- Cold call potential prospects - On average, 10% to 15% of an organization's current customers are actively seeking a new vendor and 20% to 30% more are willing to learn about a vendor who can offer better pricing, quality, delivery or service. Use cold calls to find and qualify company decision-makers, pique their interest and book a presentation.
- Network - Devote 10 hours a month to intelligent, selective networking. Choose an organization (or community) that attracts good prospects. Contribute your efforts to that organization with enthusiastic, serious consistency. While you're there, get to know the people you have targeted. Establish a rapport and exchange information with them. Write down a summary of each contact and follow up later as appropriate.
- Get referrals - Ask your most loyal customers for referrals, either in general or to specific prospects. Approach referrals with care because you don't want to jeopardize your relationship with a happy customer. Ideally, arrange a three-way meeting to make the acquaintance and, if that goes well, arrange a second, private meeting where you will sell. After the initial meeting, write a note of thanks to both the referred prospect and the referring customer. Make certain to deliver, or you'll risk losing future referrals.
- Attempt top-down sales - Within reason, start as high in an organization as you dare. Prepare assiduously, gathering as much information as possible about the company and the executive. When speaking to the administrator or other gatekeeper, be polite and professional, but firm. When you reach the executive, move quickly. Deliver your most succinct, compelling message and ask for no more than five minutes for an in-person meeting. If you get the meeting, make the most of it. Count on 40 hours of preparation. Arrive early, equipped with a one-page written proposal, samples, testimonials, articles and your notes. Be knowledgeable and memorable.

Understanding the Customer

Having found and initially qualified a prospect, the next step in the consultative sales process is learning what the customer needs. This will often happen in the course of the initial sales presentation. In advance, gather relevant background information about the company, such as the nature of their industry, their competitive status, their current vendor, the history of their purchases from your company and the history of your company's sales calls to them. Know your prospects' full names, titles, departments, phone numbers and e-mail addresses. Make sure that they are, in fact, the purchasing decision-makers.

“The golden rule of closing: After you ask a closing question, shut up!”

During the first part of the presentation, deploy carefully guided questions to learn details about the customers' needs and how they view them. Use open-ended questions to encourage the customers to explore and evaluate their situations and options. Probing questions can help ascertain the specific characteristics of a particular problem or issue. Closed questions with yes-or-no answers can help to establish individual facts. When you believe you have established an understanding, use confirming questions, such as, so we concur that... to solidify the agreement and give the prospect an opportunity to clarify or add information.

Making the Sale

As soon as the customers' needs have been established, focus on explaining how your product will address those needs. Use power questions to guide the customers' thinking toward the solution your product would provide. Then use power statements, backed by demonstrations, samples and testimonials, to build confidence. Make a compelling value proposition and detail the competitive advantages of the product.

“With a well-written, polished personal commercial, you can take the ambiguity out of your mind - you will be remembered.”

Customers generally signal their desire to buy by asking questions about details like availability, delivery, pricing, financing, guarantees, warranties or references. Use such buying signals to initiate your closing sequence. Ask a confirming question, then deliver your close as casually as you can. When your customer says "yes," make sure to settle the details, including deadlines, delivery method and payment arrangements.

“‘Power questions’ give the prospect a new and different perspective and - sometimes - a different motivation for buying than he started with.”

If the customer voices an objection at this point, learn exactly what obstacles stand in the way of a sale. Once you have found the obstacle, re-confirm that the customer would buy if that obstacle was eliminated. Then present a compelling case that you can remove the obstacle and ask for the sale again. If this doesn't work and you lose the sale, re-evaluate your presentation's preparation, content and delivery and make any necessary changes. Then put it behind you.

Managing Relationships

To satisfy customers over the long term, find out exactly what they expect of you. In particular, you must manage five factors that are central in customers' minds: reliability, assurance, tangible product performance, empathy and responsiveness.

1. Reliability - Discover all indirect and implied commitments to the customer and make sure to address them as well as fulfilling all commitments you have made directly.
2. Assurance - Help your customers trust you by cultivating outstanding product knowledge, organizational knowledge, listening skills and problem-solving skills.
3. Tangibles - Demonstrate a strong, clear value proposition for your product. Support this impression with perfect sales materials and an accurate recording system for contact data.
4. Empathy - Interact with customers according to their individual characteristics.
5. Responsiveness - Set mutually acceptable deadlines and meet them. If something goes wrong, inform the customer promptly, set a realistic new deadline and then meet it.

“What is a 'power statement'? A statement that makes your product or service outstanding, understandable, credible (incredible) and buyable.”

These five factors come into play when managing the seven "moments of truth" in the selling cycle that account for as much as 75% of the difference between salespeople with a portfolio of long-term customers and those with only a handful.

1. Initial customer contact - Seek feedback from friends, colleagues and even customers about the first impression you, your sales materials, your colleagues and your office make. Decide what kind of impression you would like to make and work toward it.
2. The first sales meeting - Know everything you can about the prospective customer and the people you will meet. Rehearse your presentation and polish your materials.
3. Account activation - Be part of the initial product delivery. Arrive with the initial shipment, walk through the completed installation or call to check on the final status.
4. Initial account statement - Make certain that the customer understands your pricing and knows what charges to expect when you close the deal. For a complicated purchase, think about previewing a sample bill. If possible, hand deliver the first account statement.
5. Post-sales follow-up - Check in at the end of the first week, the first month and the first full quarter. Do not take the relationship for granted. Maintain open lines of communication, solicit feedback and respond immediately to any problems.
6. Between sales - Plan a quarterly account activity review. Invite customers to in-house educational events, user conferences and industry association presentations. Invite your customers to test new products or upgrades. Write a newsletter. Clip and send your customers articles about their industry and their business or about yours.

“‘Thinking it over’ is almost always a stall, not a true objection. You can only make the sale if you find out what the true objection(s) is and creatively overcome it.”

Problem solving - When a problem arises, listen to your client's explanation, probe to determine exactly what needs to be resolved and then follow up to make sure the resolution is implemented as quickly as possible. Make sure to apologize personally for the inconvenience. Go out of your way to make it up to your customer.

About the Authors

Jeffrey Gitomer Gitomer is president of Buy/Gitomer, editor of the monthly newsletter *SalesMasterMind*, and author of *The Sales Bible*, *Customer Satisfaction is Worthless - Customer Loyalty is Priceless* and *Sales Moves* a weekly column. **Ron Zemke** is president of Performance Research Associates. He is co-author of the Knock Your Socks Off Service series and author of *Service America* America and 18 other management titles. He has been senior editor of *Training Magazine* since 1976.
