

The Power of Partnering

“Get the sale at any cost.”

“Make more calls.”

“Tell them what they want to hear.”

Sales professionals in virtually every industry are under tremendous pressure to close sales. It is not uncommon for them to hear comments similar to ones above from their sales manager, supervisor, or boss. But this approach does not create trust with customers and does not encourage repeat business or a lasting relationship.

A more effective approach is to develop a partnering relationship with your clients. This means working with them to help them achieve *their* goals and objectives. Simple in theory, this strategy requires a completely different approach. Here's what I mean.

In the majority of sales meetings, the sales person looks for ways to position his or her product/service so that the prospect will buy it. However, a partnering approach means putting your goals and objective aside. It means focusing 100% of your attention on your customer. It requires a self-less mindset because there are situations when the best solution is not yours. In fact, it may mean telling your customer to contact a competitor. I experienced this just a few days before writing this article. A subscriber to my e-zine contacted me about delivering a particular service. Although I may have been able to help her, I knew someone who could better meet her requirements. It was mentally difficult, but I made the decision to refer her to my competition.

Partnering also means that you provide exceptional follow-up to ensure that your customer is completely satisfied with their purchase. This does not mean you make just the obligatory follow-up call. It means you explore their actual use of your product and/or service and help them maximize its full potential.

A client of mine was experiencing less than favorable results after implementing a new program into their business. We scheduled a follow-up meeting with the management team, because as the vendor, I knew that the answers lay in the execution of the program. During the meeting we explored several ways to improve their results and one of the solutions required me to provide additional follow-up. Although I could have charged this client for my time, I knew that it made good business sense to absorb the cost of this follow-up because my primary objective was to help my client achieve the best results possible. Subsequent meetings indicated that this investment was worth it as my client began discussing how we could take this initiative to the next level.

The challenge with this concept is that most sales people want some form of instant gratification. But this approach does not offer a direct or immediate payoff for the sales person. However, from a business perspective, it makes good sense.

It is also important to note that you don't necessarily have to give away this additional service. A few sales trainers I know (including myself) incorporate telephone coaching into their proposals. They charge for this service but they position it as a way for the company to improve their results. They demonstrate how this additional investment will drive more dollars to their clients' bottom line. Ultimately, your goal should be helping your customers and clients improve their business results. Here are a few points to consider.

1. Focus on their goals and objective instead of your personal agenda (closing the sale). If necessary, recommend another supplier or vendor who offers the exact product/service your client needs.
2. Follow-up. Contact your customer and talk to them after they have made their purchase. Ask them if they are getting the desired results. If they aren't, look for ways to help them maximize their results. Offer additional support. Give them extra resources. Help them get the best results possible.

3. Incorporate a systemized process into your sales pitch or proposals. People will pay for extras providing they see that value that is brought to their organization.
4. Send information to your customers on a regular basis without being asked. I like to send articles that are relevant to my clients on a regular basis. This demonstrates that I am looking out for their interests, rather than my own. I prefer to send articles written by other people, not just the ones I write.

Zig Ziglar once stated, "You can get anything you want in life if you just help enough other people get what they want." When you help your customers achieve their goals and objectives you become more than a supplier or vendor. You become a preferred partner. And this will prevent your competition from overtaking you in the marketplace.

Create a checklist of the additional services you can offer to your clients to help them achieve their goals. Helping your customers reach their objectives will help you increase your profits.

One word of caution...this is a process, not a quick fix. This strategy does take time to generate a return. However, it is well worth the investment.

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Kelley Robertson, President of the Robertson Training Group, is a professional speaker and trainer on sales, negotiating, and employee motivation. He is also the author of "Stop, Ask & Listen – Proven Sales Techniques to Turn Browsers into Buyers." For information on his programs, visit his website at www.RobertsonTrainingGroup.com. Receive a FREE copy of "100 Ways to Increase Your Sales" by subscribing to his 59-Second Tip, a free weekly e-zine available at his website. You can also contact Kelley at 905-633-7750 or email him [directly](mailto:krobertson@robertsontraininggroup.com).

