

Why empathetic salespeople win more business

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There are thousands of sales books, but few talk about empathy, which is one of the most important soft skills for a salesperson to learn and demonstrate.

Empathy is an emotional intelligence skill, defined as the ability to know what another person is thinking or feeling. It's the ability to walk a mile in another person's shoes. It's an important skill for building long-term, meaningful business relationships. So why isn't empathy studied or emphasized in most sales training courses or sales books?

Well, empathy just sounds a little too soft and touchy-feely. After all, aren't the best sales producers hard charging and competitive? Yes — and they're also empathetic. Because how can a salesperson influence another human being if he doesn't know what that person is really thinking or feeling?

Top sales producers incorporate empathy into their daily interactions with prospects and customers. They know it creates an emotional connection with buyers. And when an emotional connection is made, trust builds. Trust is at the foundation of strong and enduring relationships, and is the reason that empathetic salespeople earn more business.

Here are two ways top sales producers demonstrate empathy during sales meetings and conversations to win more business.

- **Real-World Empathy.** Many companies fall short when they try to teach empathy. A customer-service employee or salesperson is taught to acknowledge and validate a prospect's or customer's positions. She is taught to paraphrase the conversation so the prospect or customer feels like he has been heard. "I understand you must be frustrated. ... So if I hear what you're saying" Most of these techniques sound disingenuous and fake. The conversation lacks authenticity and empathy.

Many salespeople miss the opportunity to be empathetic because they are too focused on the sale. For example, a salesperson, selling recruiting services, meets with a potential buyer. She has done a good job of building rapport and trust. As a result, the prospect opens up, sharing goals and challenges such as, "I am having a difficult time finding good people. It's hindering my ability to grow my company."

To the salesperson's credit, she doesn't jump to closing and presenting solutions. She continues to probe, asking about the prospect's hiring problem. Sounds like a good sales call, right? Wrong. This salesperson missed an important cue from the buyer. This prospect didn't want to answer questions - he wanted a small dose of empathy!

The salesperson should have said, “You know, you’re not the only one having difficulty finding talent. Hiring good people is one of the more difficult and frustrating aspects of running a business, especially when it affects your ability to grow.” Once she shows sincere empathy, then she can move forward and ask the necessary qualifying questions.

- Objection handling. Empathy is important in dealing with and managing objections. Step into your prospect’s or customer’s shoes. Does he or she really want to bring up potential problems or objections? Many prospects don’t want to bring up objections for fear that the salesperson will try to overcome the objection 17 times. Still others don’t bring up objections because they just don’t like to rock the sales boat.

The empathetic salesperson knows the power of bringing up potential problems before the prospect does. It shows the prospect that you have their best interest in mind because you are not avoiding the difficult conversations. Bringing up objections with empathy is a huge trust builder.

For example, the prospect told the salesperson that her current vendor is average. The empathetic salesperson steps into her prospect’s shoes and identifies with the potential worries of working with a new vendor. There is the typical fear of change in working with a new vendor. There is the perceived hassle of change. And of course, there is the worry of how to tell the current vendor that the company just has outgrown what their company can provide.

The empathetic salesperson knows what the customer is thinking, and using empathy addresses the fear of change. “Joan, if I were sitting on your side of the table, my biggest worry would be the perceived hassle of change. Is it going to be worth it? Should we talk further about that?”

Or, “Jim, I think there are things we can do to improve your situation. However, I am sure you aren’t looking forward to having that conversation with your existing vendor. Relationships are important and at one time, this vendor did a good job for you based on the size of your company.”

Empathy elevates trust, which is the foundation of great conversations and relationships. Empathy helps salespeople deal more effectively with potential objections and roadblocks. Empathy improves close ratios because soft skills do produce hard sales results.

Good Selling!

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