



What Does the Customer Expect of the Salesperson?

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“There is only one valid definition of business purpose: to create a customer.”-Peter Drucker

Customers are the purpose of our businesses. They have the needs that we fill. They are the judge of the quality of our offerings. What does the customer expect of our salespeople?

Credibility

Credibility is the core of the sales-customer relationship. Without credibility, the salesperson has nothing to sell. First, they must sell themselves as a credible representative of their employer and of being genuinely interested in helping the customer. The trust earned by the salesperson is the basis for the customer to take action and make decisions—buying decisions. Without trust, there can be no business relationship. When trust is present, even if customers do not like the salesperson’s answer, which might call for extended delivery or price increases, at least they understand that it is the truth. Lost trust equals permanently lost sales.

The second aspect of credibility is mastery of product and process knowledge. Being knowledgeable about the product or service being sold is clearly what most of us have in mind here, but expertise and insight into the customer’s process and application is also key. A lot of time can be wasted trying to sell the wrong product for a customer application. The salesperson can always get additional information from the company that they represent, so depth of knowledge of the item to be sold is less important than genuine understanding of the customer’s application and problem. Great salespeople become experts at the processes of their customers. This expertise is what earns them a seat on the customer’s team as a valued supplier of potential solutions.

Clear Communications

Clear communications is the process by which sales are made. There is no sales process without communications to create a meeting of the minds. Communication means more than the ability to speak or sell. Active and appreciative listening are key to the salesperson creating an accurate picture of the customer’s problem and needs. This accurate picture is essential if the proposed solutions to be sold are to be helpful and seen as an improvement by the customer. The best salespeople, in my experience, were strongest at listening and drawing out all aspects of their customer’s needs before offering any potential solutions. They are non-judgmental as well, even if the problem is one that



the rest of the industry has solved decades before. By being a careful listener, and identifying with the customer’s perspective, the salesperson creates a roadmap by which to offer the solution that they represent.

Customer Agency

In the days that I was in sales management, this would have been described as “willingness to fight for the customer.” We’ve grown past the idea of business relationships being strictly adversarial. Yes, the salesperson works for their principle, but the job of the salesperson is just as much to sell their principle on what they have learned that their customers need in order to solve their problem. Oftentimes what is needed does not nicely fit into the principle’s stated terms, conditions, minimum quantities or standard practices. The salesperson needs to use their credibility, their mastery of the product and process knowledge of both companies and their ability to clearly communicate to effectively advocate for the optimum solution for all parties. Fight for the customer? Not so much. Work tirelessly to deliver the best solution? You bet!

Quality

Even the best salesperson in the world will eventually fail if the offerings they have are defective or of low quality. The pace of business today doesn’t allow for spills, time to deal with non-conformances and failures to comply with stated requirements. As more and more applications are sold in ever-increasing quantities, the costs and consequences of a potential failure leading to recall could be unrecoverable. Part of the salesperson’s credibility is having the sense to work for a reputable firm, with a vision, mission, purpose and execution bias of quality and customer service.

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