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ACCELERATE SALES:

Show and tell. Better yet—show and prove

Six things your sales associates can do immediately to increase revenue by increasing add-on sales.

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To close a deal you need to make recommendations that capture customers' minds and hearts. That's the core of "consultative selling"—solving a problem or creating a unique and memorable buying opportunity. A client who knows that a salesperson found merchandise she wouldn't have found on her own is more likely to return and show loyalty to the salesperson.

Appraising the Situation

Evaluate your sales team with the following questions:

- Are you hearing persuasive recommendations, or are sales associates simply presenting items that clients request without explaining how they meet their needs?
- Are sales associates providing so much product information that the client's eyes glaze over?
- Do sales associates often say to clients, "I love it" or "It's my favorite" or "I'd buy it"?
- Do clients verbalize why they like a recommendation?
- Do recommendations elicit emotional reactions?
- Do sales associates try to fill silences?

Best Practices

Many sales associates feel that asking for a sale is presumptuous or puts the client on the spot. But if they've made a persuasive recommendation that satisfies the client's desire, they've earned the right to ask if the client wants to purchase. These tips let you "prove" a recommendation rather than simply show a product:

Convert features into benefit statements. Explain how features of your recommendations match the customer's needs. Be specific. For example: "Because you want something striking for this event, I recommend this blue dress that beautifully accents your blue eyes." Research shows that people pay more attention to statements that begin with "because" or "since," and doing so helps link features to needs. Don't discuss features you can't link to a need the customer has verbalized. (One piece of irrelevant information is how much you like the merchandise.)

Engage emotions. Persuasive presentations invoke emotions, not just logical arguments. Elicit emotion by inviting the customer to try on your recommendations. Once the client comments that they like the item, ask what he or she likes about it.

Present more than one item. Recommendations are opportunities to learn more about what appeals to the customer. Bringing out two or three items generates more discussion—and information.

Let the client help you persuade. Psychological research shows that people remember best their own thoughts and statements. Also, their attitudes and feelings correlate much more closely with memories of their own statements. Get the client to state positive feelings. You might ask, “Your smile suggests you like the piece I’ve recommended. What about it appeals to you?”

Don’t fear objections. Objections don’t mean someone doesn’t want to buy. They’re opportunities to learn more about what’s important to the customer and refine your recommendation: “So, you like the style of the dress and the color but feel it may be too long? What length do you prefer? This would require a simple alteration, I’ll call Barbara our expert tailor.”

Check in frequently and test for willingness to buy. Persuasion requires two-way communication. Communicate often to learn how the client is reacting to your recommendation (intellectually and emotionally). Once the client agrees that features of your recommendation meet her desires, you’ve earned the right to ask if she wants to make the purchase. Be silent and wait for a response. I’ve seen clients leave to think through a decision they could have made if they had been given time to think.

About Shanker Inc.

Martin Shanker is the founder and president of Shanker Inc., a Manhattan-based international management consulting firm for such companies as Burberry, Cartier, The Estee Lauder Companies, Ralph Lauren and Van Cleef & Arpels. Described as a 'behaviorist' by The New York Times, Martin specializes in helping global brands accelerate sales and profit by growing their companies from within. By addressing the tough issues of sales and management teams, and the behavioral dimension of retail relationships, Shanker Inc. offers a unique, multi-dimensional way for companies to achieve success through their own people.

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