

Sales strategies

Find things in common to establish rapport with your clients and prospects

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So what's rapport?

According to the dictionary, rapport is defined as either relation of trust between people, a feeling of sympathetic understanding, in accord/harmony with others or having a mutual understanding.

In business, rapport is the presence of agreement or alignment.

No one is born with powerful rapport building skills. These are learned. The good news is that salespeople can master them, which leads to extraordinary results personally and professionally. Every time the telephone rings or a salesperson walks into a business, there is sales opportunity. Whether calling on an existing client or a new prospect, there are sales to be made. Existing clients need to feel that the rapport established when they first bought is still there and, in fact, growing.

New prospects need to feel comfortable before they make a decision to buy. It's been said many times: "People buy from people like them and people they like." That being said, it's important to remember you don't get a second chance to make a first impression with your prospects.

So how does one actually build rapport?

Here are some suggestions to help salespeople do a better job of building rapport when face-to-face with potential buyers:

No. 1 - It's important that the salesperson takes a genuine interest in getting to know what's important to the prospect. They can only do so by asking "open-ended" questions. Let's say that you're a copier salesperson. Some examples of "open-ended" questions could include: Why are you looking to purchase a new copier? How do you see yourself using the copier? What information do you need from me to be certain that you've purchased the right copier?

No. 2 - The salesperson should look for things that they have in common with the prospect to get them comfortable enough to "trust" the salesperson and his recommendations. Things in common could include where they went to high school or college, what sports they like to play or watch, favorite authors, favorite movies.

No. 3 - Sales people should pick up on key words, favorite phrases and how their prospects speak. For instance their volume, inflection, tone. Salespeople should attempt to mirror their prospect's volume or inflection to make their prospect feel at ease. Most experts agree the ideal rate of speech is between 180 and 190 words per minute. At this rate, people will be able to hear and comprehend what you are saying.

There are different patterns and rates of speech and regional accents that are the product of geographic areas. In the Northeast, people tend to speak faster, while people from the South tend to speak slower than the 180-word rate, so salespeople need to adjust accordingly.

No. 4 - Salespeople should notice how their prospects like to handle information. Do they like lots of details or just the big picture? This awareness will enable the salesperson to give prospects the right amount of information to make the decision to buy.

Creating rapport has many benefits. The biggest is getting a prospect to "trust" your company enough to do business with you in the first place and even more importantly continuing to buy from your company in the future.

What gets in the way of building rapport?

One way salespeople fail to build rapport is by not focusing on or addressing the needs of the prospect. Let me give you some examples of how businesses fail to establish rapport.

Have you ever:

- walked into a business where no one greeted you and - worse yet - the employees just talked amongst themselves?
- felt like you're "bothering someone" or "interrupting someone" just by asking an employee a question?
- had to interact with salespeople that have a condescending or know-it-all attitude?
- encountered salespeople who have little or no social skills. For instance poor communication skills, poor eye contact, poor personal hygiene, etc.
- waited your turn in line only to have the salesperson wait on someone who came in after you first?

Having little or no social skills, lack of product capability knowledge or poor communications skills is a sure fire way to lose that prospect.

Another key to building rapport is clear, consistent and proactive communication.

Research has shown that 90 percent of all problems dealing with customers stem from poor communication and the biggest stumbling block to good communication is poor listening skills. Remember, a brief encounter can lead a prospect to form a permanent impression about you or your company.

By developing rapport you'll be able to create a long-term relationship, based upon trust, which is the key to turning prospects into customers and ultimately to creating customers for life.

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