



## ***Know, Like and Trust***

The phrase “People do business with people they know, like and trust” is one of the underpinnings of how deals occur. Lately though, the phrase seems to be uttered almost every time someone talks about marketing or sales. It has become more of a cliché, without substance or the gravitas to be foundational. How do you get someone to know, like and trust you?

To get to know someone is all about getting to know the person. It is not about learning about what the person does, e.g. their capabilities, products and services. What a person does in terms of their career and profession is definitely a reflection of who they are. Learning about who they are involves the passion and motivation behind the career selection.

When meeting someone explore why they do what they do. For example, “that’s an interesting profession; why did you choose it?” Or, “tell me more about how you got into doing what you do”. It also is an opportunity to share your passions and motivations. The other person gets to know you and what makes you tick, hence addressing the first part of the statement – getting to know you.

In order to like someone you need to feel a connection to them. The connection is emotion based. Emotions require opening oneself up; consider empathy and transparency.

The way we become increasingly open with one another is through empathy. In empathy we focus to understand someone from their point of view. This sensing what others feel is known as affective empathy. Sensing what others think is known as cognitive empathy. People who build strong relationships use both. And empathy is the dominant means of understanding.

People are usually not prone to verbalizing how they feel, but we humans are gifted with empathy, so we sense a lot. Word, tones and non-verbal cues are the human means of communicating. Empathy flows predominantly through the tones and non-verbal cues. Affective empathy is very valuable in the business context because being emotionally open verbally is not the usual and normal operating procedure.

Transparency is about being open, which comes more naturally to some than others. None of us is completely open – it’s our nature to keep some things inside. Being open requires me to trust in myself enough to reduce my natural defensiveness.

Transparency makes it easy for others to understand why we do or say the things we do. When others understand our motivation, what’s behind what we’re saying, they can relax. Their focus is on what we’re saying rather than holding an inner voice conversation trying to figure out where we’re coming from.

As knowing someone and liking someone develops, so does trust. Trust is a function of expertise, quality communications and time, factored by another’s perception of risk. It looks like this:

$$\text{Trust} = f \frac{\text{Expertise} + \text{Quality Communication} + \text{Time}}{\text{Perceived Risk}}$$

Trust is elusive – we aren't in control. Trust is a shared experience. The receiver needs to feel safe; the sender needs to be effective and clear. Perceived risk is the key variable in the equation, and it is the variable most out of our control. What's critical here is to recognize that the risk is in the perception of the person extending trust.

A good indicator of risk is anxiety. The absence of risk, e.g. feeling safe, manifests itself in low anxiety, encouraging action. Substantiating our expertise and using quality communication skills can help reduce risk and alleviate anxiety.

Risk is not just for the customer. People in sales or business development experience plenty of anxiety. We are frequently wrapped up in the need to close the deal, make quota, satisfy a boss, become a star, etc.

Most salespeople have relationships with customers, but unfortunately many are surface-level relationships. They know each other, probably some of their mutual likes and dislikes, and the relationship has the opportunity to mature over time.

Blend surface-level relationships with salespeople's anxieties. Now add the traditional sales process, and risk and anxiety are even further increased. The prescribed process of needs analysis, definition of need or pain point, development of solution, delivery of solution, overcoming objections, closing, overcoming objections, closing, etc. until the customer says either yes or no is rife with anxiety and confrontation.

This focus on the sales process, by its very nature, increases anxiety for both parties. The result is an anxious discussion focused primarily on the business application and solution. The connection with the customer loses its rightful priority. Although the intent is to help the customer, the effect may be to increase anxiety.

Ask yourself a critical question -- Is your relationship strong enough for the customer to trust you through the moments of greatest anxiety?

You answer yes when you demonstrate a consistent focus on the customer, your relationship with them, and building trust. Build the foundation for know, like and trust. Competitors go by the wayside when this happens.