



Why Relationships Matter in Sales

Everybody knows that relationships are important. Curiously, most sales organizations do not focus on relationships as a key component of their strategy and tactics. Most sales training does not emphasize relationships or train on building relationships that are effective and sustainable.

In late 2010 advertising agency OgilvyOne Worldwide interviewed 1,000 salespeople around the world. More than two-thirds of the respondents in four different countries indicated that they believed the buying process was changing faster than sales organizations are responding.

Business, especially sales, is usually thought of in cognitive terms. The focus is on metrics and money. Goals and objectives are assessed quantitatively and individuals are reviewed in terms of attainment of goals. When we do well we continue to build by doing more of the same, although sometimes this does not sustain the business. If we did poorly we change things -- our products, services, activities, and any other thing that we think will help us get over the hump. We're vulnerable to the latest business thinking; we're searching for the key to success.

The odd thing is that when we seek to improve, we seldom look to improve our relationships. Our focus does not naturally go to our interactions and the results of those interactions. And most significantly, we don't think in terms of meaningfulness, either for ourselves or more importantly for our customer.

Paradoxically, we know that success in business is about the people. If you are across the desk from the customer and the deal is on the table, the closure of the deal depends almost 100% on the relationship of the people there.

The solutions-oriented salesperson, the mainstay of sales training for the last 20 years, has become the commodity. Customers expect that when a salesperson crosses their threshold they need to bring more than solutions to the table. The customer expectations are that the solutions are the baseline for consideration. Solutions by themselves are no longer unique.

Add to this the world of instantaneous access to information and we have customers who are almost as well prepared as the salesperson when it comes to solutions. If a customer does not know the answer, a simple online query to Google, or a question posted on a myriad of social network platforms will invite more information than the customer really ever needs.

How businesses interact, connect and access information is profoundly different today. These changes are widespread and the ability to stand out in this highly interconnected business world is difficult. Working with customers in a sustainable and successful manner demands a new approach -- a focus on meaningfulness in relationships.

Meaningfulness is at the very core of understanding how relationships work. Every human needs to make meaning of our life. This need is universal, crossing all cultures. Through every experience, we seek to be meaningful. In every relationship we seek to be meaningful.

Consider Bill, the Managing Partner of a successful and profitable mid-level Financial Services firm. When I asked Bill what they did that made them different and successful he responded simply that – “Relationships are what we sell”.

The company’s monthly marketing meeting is dominated by reviews of relationships, not tactical marketing activities. Bill asks the question – “What are you doing to perpetuate a relationship?”

Prerequisites for Bill and the firm’s success are they know their solutions cold, and they either have an answer or know how to get it through their relationships. This translates into revenue and profits. To paraphrase Bill, relationships are about establishing trust. Good relationships have a strong trust factor and dollars at the end.

Relationships supersede selling. Relationships matter because selling today has evolved. 21st Century Sales Success depends on trust before solutions. Trust only builds when the relationship is strong. Shift the focus – you’ll change the results, in very dramatic and positive ways.

Ken Cook is the Co-Author of *How To WHO: Selling Personified*, a book and program for building business through relationships. Learn more at www.howtowho.com.