



Six Steps to Successful Selling

*“He who has a thing to sell and goes and whispers in a well,
Is not so apt to get the dollars as he who climbs a tree and hollers.”
- Unknown*

Can you sell? Your honest answer to that question might be the determining factor in whether or not you will still be in business one year from now. In the current economic shakeout we are experiencing, your ability to sell your product or services will be your key to surviving and thriving in 2009 and beyond.

But I hate selling!

The idea of “peddling” your services may make you squirm. But the reality is this: you will either successfully bring on new clients or customers by persuading them to utilize your products or services, or you will close your business and try to get a job with your competitor, who did what you were not willing to do. It’s really that simple.

My friend Larry Garvis, CEO of Dale Carnegie Associates, Southeast Florida, points out that the difference between a common (and unwelcome) “peddler” and a successful salesman is that the successful salesman actually becomes a trusted *consultant* to his or her clients. It requires a change in mindset, from “me” to “you,” from “mine” to “yours.” If you are prepared to begin assuming that mindset, and to move from “peddler” to *consultant*, the following six steps will help you get there.

1. **Care about your client.** There’s a common proverb that goes like this: “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” If your sole objective is to move as much of your product or service as is necessary to achieve *your* goals and dreams, then you are rightly suffering a profound dissatisfaction in our current marketplace. With every company feeling the pinch, buyers are more sensitive than ever to the extent of services available to them from you *and your competitors*. That means that **customer service** has never been more important.

I experienced this recently with a vendor who provided copiers to our company. Because of a miscommunication, we were sending lease payments to a supplier in Indiana, when they should have gone to Atlanta. The accounting department in Atlanta was staffed by the rudest group of Neanderthals I'd experienced in a lifetime, and called us daily about two "missed" payments. When my bookkeeper advised them that payments had been made, they essentially called us liars. On our own, we tracked down the error and found out the supplier in Indiana had kept our payments! I wrote a blistering e-mail to our account executive, who went through hoops to fix the miscommunication. The only reason I'm staying with his company is because of him. When he leaves, I'm leaving. *That's* the power of caring about your customer.

2. Have confidence in your offering. This should be a 'no-brainer,' but I'm always amazed at business owners who don't know enough about their product or service to confidently sell it to a prospect, or who don't believe that their own company is the best in its own niche! If you're not convinced about the quality of your company's offering, than close your doors now and go get a job with a company you *can* be sure of. This market requires an almost pit-bull-like loyalty to your own offering, so a prospect should smell your confidence, your enthusiasm, your *belief* that yours is the best on the market, and the prospect is a fool for taking his or her business elsewhere.

Real confidence, however, isn't just some motivational hype. It's built on your own steadfast conviction that you have developed *all the systems necessary* to support your offering, from initial client contact to final delivery of the product or service. It means that your billing systems are in place, your administrative services are fully functional, your production is completely reliable, and your customer service and follow-up processes are debugged. It means that when your prospect makes the decision to go with *you*, his or her experience will be completely satisfactory. That's what gives you confidence in your offering.

3. Listen, then respond. You've taken some sales training and you have your scripts ready for cold calls and for the appointment. You make it inside for a meeting with the decision maker, and now... what? Do you roll through your presentation and extol the wonderful breadth and depth of your services? Do you offer precise mechanical and engineering details about your amazing widget? Not if you want the sale, you don't.

How about a few carefully thought-out and prepared questions for the prospect about his current situation? Some crafted inquiries about the challenges she's facing in the marketplace? A few questions about their experiences with products or services like yours? This requires some knowledge of the prospect's own business, and what his or her likely needs are, and who's likely been filling them before you arrived on their doorstep to make all their dreams come true. The best salespeople are always *listening*, and then sculpting their answers to meet the needs of the customer.

4. **Don't react to rejection.** If you struggle with insecurity, than sales may be challenging for you. I don't care how good your widget is, or how beneficial your service is, not everybody will buy from you *right now*. What I've learned from years in business is that most of my sales calls won't necessarily result in a new client *right now*, but if I don't make any calls, I won't have any new clients *ever*. To some extent, selling is, in fact, a numbers game (see step 5 below).

The other thing I've learned is that when a prospect declines my offering *right now*, it really has nothing to do with me personally. It usually means the prospect has a vendor she is satisfied with *right now* and is not in the market for my offering, or doesn't have a perceived need for my offering *right now*. But if my **response to rejection** is pleasant, patient and understanding, I can leave the prospect with a good feeling about me (and my product or service), perhaps leave her with some information about our company, and perhaps even an invitation to check back with her in a few months. Because I'm in business for the long haul, I've discovered the power of *attrition*, when another vendor fails to satisfy the client's needs for one reason or another, and all of a sudden, the prospect remembers that pleasant and patient guy who called a couple times a year, mailed out a marketing postcard quarterly, and even met her at a networking event the month before. Some sales take a long time to develop. What would you invest in a contact that might eventually send thousands of dollars a year your way?

5. **The power of "Next."** The toughest sales call is the one you make to your only prospect. When everything lives or dies on a single call, your anxiety goes through the roof, and generally, the prospect can sense your desperation. Remember when you called a girl for your first date? Or when you finally got a call from the boy you were interested in? Anxiety and nervous tension probably singed the fiber optic lines! It's also when you're most likely to face rejection and have to deal with it (see step 4 above).

On the other hand, when you have a thousand prospects, your anxiety settles down (although never completely disappears) to something much more manageable. I discovered this when we began marketing to a specific group of attorneys. I made the decision to purchase a *mailing list* from an association we had joined. For \$150, I had the names, addresses and telephone numbers for over *four hundred prospective clients*, all of whom used at least a few of the services my company offered! Since several of our clients were already actively involved in the association, I also had the power of *referrals* to work with, multiplying the effectiveness of my telephone calls. Even without that bonus feature, the sheer numbers of prospects made the telephone drop a few hundred pounds. If I blew a single call, I figured, so what? "Who's next?" became my motivator. **Get a mailing list.** It's worth the money.

6. **The “Slight Edge.”** In his book *The Slight Edge*ⁱ, Jeff Olson describes how a few simple disciplines, repeated every day, begin to affect an exponential change in your circumstances. In sales, Olson recommends making a few calls a day, every day. Not a hundred calls one day a week, but a few calls every day during the week. If you already have a business and are looking to grow it, 3-4 calls a day to a qualified list of prospects will mean 15-20 contacts a week, or 60-80 contacts a month. Over a six month period, you can contact 400-500 prospects using this method. What would your business look like if you had four to five hundred prospective clients who knew about you and your company? What if only five percent became new clients? What would twenty or thirty qualified new clients add to your top line revenue, and your bottom line profits?

Conversely, what if you *don't* make those calls every day? What if you try to make twenty calls in a single day? By using *the slight edge*, you harness the power of *momentum and habit*; a few simple disciplines, repeated every day, change your life exponentially. Not making those calls every day harnesses the power of momentum and habit *negatively*, so the “slight edge” works *against* you, with the results making exponential changes in the opposite direction. Either way, *the slight edge* is always working.

I hope you will use these steps to start seeing your selling in a different light. Remember, you can be an unwanted “peddler” or a trusted advisor; use the six steps and *The Slight Edge* to your advantage!

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ⁱ Olson, Jeff, *The Slight Edge*, copyright © 2005 by Jeff Olson, published by Success Media