

Grow Your Selling Credentials and Your Business

Special to New Business Denver
by Garry Duncan

*Every small business owner has to sell.
Here are tips on how to be yourself and do it right.*

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Michael Gerber's "The E-Myth" describes the trap many new business owners experience. Because they are so passionate about their product or service, they fail to focus on other parts of the business, becoming a technician, rather than a manager-owner.

Then there is the dreadful discovery that despite the quality of the offering, it doesn't sell itself. Therefore, the job of owner becomes secondary to the need to sell and create revenue.

Often despair sets in because no one thinks of starting a business as creating a sales job. Moreover, for many outside the sales profession, selling carries a real stigma.

The dictionary defines stigma as "a mark of disgrace or infamy; a stain or reproach, as on one's reputation." It stands to reason, because most of us have more experiences buying than selling, so the chance that we have had more negative experiences than positive with salespeople is likely.

Avoid universalizing, however. After all, you don't say all medicine is bad because there are bad doctors or that leadership is bad because there are bad leaders. It would be correct to apply the stigma only to select sellers, not the profession, and not to yourself. Besides successful sellers don't look like the stereotyped seller anyway. Reframe by considering the skills you already have.

In the last couple of decades, "consultative selling" has become the catch phrase, meaning sellers have interactive conversations, rather than just giving a presentation. When you think about this, you are already competent in having conversations.

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You likely engage in the “consultative business conversations” when exploring financing, getting input on your deliverables, negotiating a lease or a hundred other situations. In fact, everyone has experience selling. Everyone has sold a friend or family member on an idea. You have sold yourself to others you wanted to befriend.

There are some things that will help you avoid looking and sounding like your worst dream. Customers are keenly aware of every action you take, reinforcing the old adage that actions are louder than words. For example, talking to much sends the message that the customer is not as important as what you have to say.

Use these principles to grow your selling credentials and your business:

- The first sale to make is you. People must first buy into the leader (salesperson) before they buy into their product or solution. Start by following the platinum rule, which is, treat others like they want to be treated. People skills and personal communication skills are the key to building comfort, and early buy-in.

In other words, sell to your prospect in the way they like to buy rather than in the way you personally like to buy. Some like more information than others, and some buyers need more time to feel comfortable before making a decision.

Glib schmoozing doesn't work with everyone. Match and mirror their demeanor, body language, tonality and words to increase comfort and gain rapport more quickly.

- A good way to start a conversation is by establishing boundaries for it that are mutually acceptable. It lowers defenses and builds trust.

For example, simply ask, “May I ask you a few questions?” or “Do you have questions now or would you prefer to browse (retail) first?” “Do you have a few minutes to explore this now?”

A sales call is similar to dancing. It is easier to follow a good leader than someone who has no direction or does not know the steps.

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- Secondly, stop assuming needs. One of the biggest reasons for the stigma associated with selling is because presentations take place too soon, or the seller gives too much irrelevant information increasing resistance and rejection.

Get the prospects talking as soon as possible. Qualifying is about getting information, not giving it. When a prospect admits their needs, their receptivity goes up. Think of serving a gourmet meal. You want your guests hungry and you want your prospects hungry for your benefits. You are just having a conversation about them and their wants and needs!

- Have conviction about what you do without overbearing enthusiasm. Unbridled enthusiasm will only alienate, adding to the negative perception. Be authentic and build trust – talk from your heart, speak straightforwardly, follow-up on what you say you are going to do, say what you think respectfully and tactfully.

In simple terms, be human and don't come across as if you are in a formulated process. Be humble and empathetic as you would in any conversation.

- Build consensus with your client and make them feel important by listening and keeping the focus on them. If your actions are self-centered, prospects will avoid interacting with you. For example, are you telling more than asking questions? Do you know what they like about their current product, not just, how your offering is different?

Great sales leaders give up thinking about themselves.

- Keep reality in perspective, because not everyone will buy. The advent of the information age in the 1990's and the internet helped fuel curiosity and the need to know. Easily uncover those who are future prospects or just looking for free consulting, from those who are ready to buy now in the course of a comfortable conversation.

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- Be personally accountable and admit mistakes. IF your customer suspects you are covering up your own errors, you will lose their trust, confidence and eventually their business. You will gain credibility and a follower by admitting a mistake rather than making excuses.
- Selling takes courage. Courage means staying focused with a positive attitude in face of adversity. Courage means taking risks and going past previous limitations and breaking old habits. Assess risk by looking at best case and worst case outcomes. If you cannot live with the worst case outcome, do not take the risk. The most common worst case outcome in selling is a “no.” Can you learn to live with that?

Sales leaders are not afraid of failure because they know the most valuable lessons come from mistakes. But then you already have courage because you have started a new business in a competitive environment.

Despite what perception you may have about selling, you are already better than you think, because everyone has experience selling ideas and themselves at work, to friends and at home. Keep having those conversations with the most powerful to in sales – good questions.

Garry Duncan is President of Leadership Connections, Inc. a consulting and training group focusing on the performance, growth and management of sales teams in business-to-business sales efforts. He has more than 30 years of sales experience and has worked with major corporations such as DuPont and Pfizer. He is credentialed by the Alliance of Values and is a Certified Attribute Analyst. He can be reached at 303.462.12.77 or garry@LeadershipConnections.com | www.LeadershipConnections.com



About Leadership Connections:

Leadership Connections, Inc. (LCI) knows the consultative sale. LCI also knows that consultative selling requires leadership. Our mission is to grow your people and your revenue by developing the selling, and leadership skills in all levels of your business development team: the sellers, the managers, and the sales support teams. LCI coaches and trains confidence, selling skills, sales process, sense of mission, action plans, communication, and leadership.

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