

Three Characteristics of Successful Sales People

by Mike Hawkins
mike@alpinelink.com



In years past, many companies and their sales people relied on selling tactics to sell their offerings. They conveyed rehearsed value propositions. They gave away logoed items to promote their brand. They processed their client prospects through scripted sales systems. In some cases, they employed clever if not aggressive closing tactics such as “if I can show you a car you like, will you buy it today?”

To be fair, sales people of the past were friendly and worked hard. They built relationships with their clients. They entertained, wined, and dined their clients. They gave their clients quality time and attention. From a product standpoint, they knew their offerings well. They attended training programs, maintained up-to-date marketing collateral, and learned to perform compelling demonstrations. They adeptly articulated their offering’s features and benefits. When special offers were available, they gave their clients the best deal possible.

While this worked in the past, it is no longer sufficient for most companies. Prospects now compare competitive alternatives with a simple click on the Internet. They rely on third parties for objective product information. They don’t give suppliers much time for detailed sales presentations. From a relationship standpoint, many don’t want to be friendly with their suppliers until after they make their buying decision.

So how do successful sales people and companies sell their offerings today? What is it that clients and prospects value if not friendliness and product knowledge? Do sales now simply boil down to features and price? Have suppliers inadvertently conditioned buyers to only care about features and price? Have all but the largest sales transactions moved to the Internet? Has the Internet forever displaced most sales people?

Of course the Internet is here to stay. It offers buyers and suppliers alike great value in many ways. And of course features make a difference. If a product or service doesn’t adequately meet a prospect’s needs, it doesn’t make the cut. Price too makes a difference, but more than price, buyers look for value. They want to feel that they are getting their money’s worth. They want a good return for their investment. Yet many buyers don’t use price or features as their primary buying criteria. Smart buyers realize that an initial purchase price doesn’t represent the total cost of ownership. Neither do features determine the ultimate value of a solution, especially for products that are continually updated or upgradable.

So what is it that sophisticated buyers value in their suppliers? For many, it is the assurance that what they buy will deliver the results they expect. It is doing business with trusted entities that deliver on their promises. It is working with suppliers who have the expertise to make a product or service work in their imperfect environment. Especially for seasoned buyers who have been victims of over promises and under deliveries, they want to do business with companies that deliver on their value proposition and fulfill their needs. They want to work with people who add value to the product or service they are selling. They want to do business with companies who meet if not exceed their expectations.



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Suppliers who exceed their client's expectations are experts at what they do. They earn the right to become valued partners because they don't merely articulate a compelling value proposition and offer a good price. They are competent, honest, and resourceful. They provide the capabilities and resources their clients need. They become trusted advisors to their clients because they skillfully solve real-world problems. Clients look to them for advice not only on product features but on practical applications. Clients expect their suppliers to know about other industry offerings and best practices. They expect to work with friendly sales people who fill the role of a valued consultant.

Buyers today want to do business with trusted advisors who deliver tangible and reliable results. To be a trusted advisor:

- **Be an expert.** Not only understand your offering in detail, understand the industry and markets you serve. Understand the practical application of your offerings and how to make them work in less-than-perfect real-world environments. Know the most current methods, relevant approaches, and best practices. Be a thought leader and problem solver.
- **Be resourceful.** Provide solutions, not products. Supply the resources needed to fully address your client's needs. Provide the information and capabilities that are needed to evaluate, acquire, implement, operationalize, and maintain your offering. Provide access to third parties who augment your offerings with value-adding capabilities.
- **Be likable.** Be courteous, friendly, and easy going. Have a can-do attitude. Be confident, but humble. Be professional, but not pretentious. Be candid, but constructive. Be prepared, ask thoughtful questions, and listen attentively. Care for your clients as if their needs were your own. Make them feel valued and respected. Respond to their requests quickly. Be dependable.

Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* (www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches (www.ScopeOfLeadership.com), and president of Alpine Link Corp (www.AlpineLink.com), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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