



Selling – A Responsibility or Competency?

by Mike Hawkins
mike@alpinelink.com

When you think of a sales person, what characteristics come to mind? Pushy, arrogant, loud, unprofessional ... or empathetic, proficient, consultative and helpful? Your answer is hopefully more of the latter, but likely both, depending on which past buying experience you recall.

Who is a sales person anyway? Is selling a responsibility restricted to those who have sales in their title, e.g. car salesman, clothing saleswoman, insurance sales agent? Or is selling a capability that transcends titles?

Selling, with or without the commensurate title, is about a set of skills which are important to not only those who deal with customers but anyone who wants to influence others including their managers, employees, partners and suppliers. Fundamentally, selling is about understanding people's needs, satisfying those needs and influencing opinions in the process. These three skills are valuable in any profession. In fact, they are of value to everyone. Like it or not, everyone sells.

Selling skills or better put, understanding, satisfying and influencing skills, largely determine who is successful in business. Having competence in these areas turn average architects into great architects, e.g. by translating their client's wants into dream home designs. Selling skills turn average property managers into extraordinary property managers by enabling them to find a rental unit perfectly suited to the family's unique needs. Selling skills turn average business executives into very successful business executives by enabling them to understand, inspire and lead their employees.

Here are four principles to remember that will enhance your selling ability:

1. It is not about you. It's about your customer or whomever you are trying to influence. It is about putting yourself in their shoes and thinking about what you can do for them. Replace any temptations to demonstrate your superiority with a confidence grounded in humility. Don't think less of yourself, just think of yourself less. Think more of them.
2. It is not about what you offer. It's about what the other person needs. Be an attentive listener first, a good talker second. Seek understanding. Let them tell you what they need. Take notes. Reflect back to them key points of what you heard. Ask questions. You can then tailor your follow-on thoughts and suggestions to their specific needs shaping their opinions in the process.
3. It is not about your solution. It's about the value of your solution. As familiar as you may be with your product's features, the details of your services or the fine points of your capabilities, they are secondary to the value they provide. Focus your comments on the benefits your solution provides.
4. Influence comes easiest by adding value. Anything you can do for someone that adds value to them will in turn create value for you. Look for opportunities to give them something of value first. It will come back to you with interest.

Whether selling to customers, motivating your employees or negotiating with suppliers, put these four principles into practice and they will greatly enhance your ability to understand, satisfy and influence.