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## Interested In Increasing Sales? Think Differently

### Differentiation May Jump-Start Your Sales

by Ron Ameln

In real estate, it's location, location, location.

In sales, it's differentiate, differentiate, differentiate.

At least that's the case for Rick Pearce, national sales manager for GPX, Inc., a consumer electronics company. After trying conventional sales techniques that failed to produce results, Pearce started thinking outside the box. He participated in a sales training program, "Break the Rules and Close More Sales," conducted by Fred Firestone, president of Sempact, Inc. While attending a series of seminars, Pearce realized differentiation could be the key to his selling success. He began to focus on how he could differentiate both his products and how he sold them.

"Prior to this, I would go into sales presentations like every other salesperson—looking for buying signals and attempting trial closes," Pearce said. "Basically, I said 'here are my products and their benefits, do you want them or not.'"

Pearce threw out the old benefit-sales approach, where he was continually thinking of ways to get his prospects to buy. He began putting his product benefits in his back pocket, and began asking more questions of his prospects. His objective was to first determine whether his prospects were experiencing a frustration that he could solve with his offerings. Once determined, his selling process allowed prospects to discover that it only made sense to do business with him. The result: Pearce's sales rose 67% over last year, and he recently received a promotion.

Asking more questions, listening to your customers and not "pitching them benefits"

seemed like common sense. But when it comes to selling techniques, common sense ain't so common. In other words, *it's not the benefits, stupid.*

"A lot of sales training systems are designed to get prospects to the point where they are conditioned to say "yes," and then use manipulative closes to get them to buy," Firestone said. "The old selling approach is to pitch benefits. Most salespeople believe if they pitch loud enough and hard enough, something will stick. If someone says no, the salesperson will just pitch more.

"All too often this approach only succeeds in compromising the relationship. When the prospect feels 'pushed' by the salesperson, the prospect will 'push' back. The push back sounds something like, 'Send us some literature and we'll get back to you.'"

In order to grow sales, Firestone believes businesses have to do one of two things: either further differentiate their products/services, and/or further differentiate their selling processes. Firestone believes sales professionals can differentiate their selling process by conveying more trust and understanding because it's not something generally expected from a salesperson.

Said Firestone: "If a salesperson calls on the phone and says he's got the next best product for you and that he'd like to set up an appointment, your perception is that he is pushing you. People might buy, not because of this hard sell, but in spite of it. On the other hand, if a salesperson calls and says to a prospect, 'if you have three minutes, I'd like to share with you how our product has enhanced the bottom line of many different companies. After three minutes, if it makes sense to go further, we do. If not, we don't. It's up to you.' The perception is totally different.

"In the latter, prospects feel as though they're in control because the salesperson's words aren't perceived to be as a manipulative tactic. The prospect feels in control and is more likely to allow the salesperson time to talk. Bottom line: prospects think they're leading the dance even though it's the salesperson who is leading the dance.

When Pearce began asking questions, clients began opening up about all sorts of problems. Problems Pearce's firm could help solve. "You want to engage a prospect in a discussion of his or her frustration with the status quo," Firestone said. "If the customer knows you understand the problems he or she is going through better than anyone else, an emotional bond forms and he or she will be more favorably disposed to use your solution."

Ken Wartman, CEO of Commercial Letter, a provider of direct-mail solutions, said the approach is "like reverse selling." Wartman was looking for new ways to increase his sales when he first attended Firestone's program. He now asks questions of his clients. "You don't really have to think about being a salesperson with this approach," Wartman said. "It's different from traditional selling. It's all about having a conversation on a personal level."

Differentiation should be the theme of everyone's selling process, according to Firestone.

"It's a two-step process. First determine the compelling reasons your prospects should buy from you vs. the competition. Second, develop a selling process that succeeds in conveying more trust and integrity than that of your competition."