

Don't Waste My Time!

Many participants in my programs ask how to deal with people who appear to be seeking information and nothing more. In many environments these individuals are called time wasters. Time wasters come in every shape and form but they usually possess a few consistent characteristics – they ask a continuing stream of questions, take up loads of our time, and seldom end up buying anything.

What is particularly interesting about these situations is that many time wasters don't set out to be that way. It is usually our fault that this happens because we don't control the sales process. And in many cases, we become the time waster.

Most sales professionals know they are supposed to ask questions to learn about their customer's needs but I have learned that the majority of sales people tend to be more comfortable responding to questions rather than asking them. Here is a simple fact...the person who asks the questions is the one in control of the sales process.

I have conducted hundreds of sales training workshops in the last ten years and I consistently have people tell me they know the importance of asking questions. As the discussion continues I usually discover that they do in fact ask questions – after they encounter objections or resistance from the buyer or customer. But that means it's too late. Now it will appear that you are trying to justify your product, service, price, etc.

Sales people hear this, but it seldom sinks in. Here is a personal example.

After reading one of my weekly sales tips a sales person emailed me (for the second or third time) and said he had been focusing on his needs rather than mine in his previous correspondence. He presented a couple of good points so I agreed to a telephone conversation. When we connected he immediately launched into a ten-minute monologue about his company and its services. At this point it still wasn't clear what he wanted from me so I asked. He went on to say that he wanted me to endorse his product to my clients and newsletter subscribers. I then stated that my target market is mostly specialty retailers and asked how his product would help them. His reply, "Oh, it won't."

He had now just wasted almost 15 minutes of my time – valuable time that could have been used to work on one of the many projects on my desk. As a sales person, **he** had just become a time waster. If he had asked one simple question in his email he could have saved us both time because he would have learned that our companies were not compatible.

In another situation, I listened to a sales person pitch his product by reading PowerPoint slides. His slides discussed his company, their financial backing, their products, their clients, blah, blah, blah. Not once did he ask me what I wanted in a solution. Instead, he kept his attention focused on his agenda, once again, wasting my time by talking about something that had no relevance to my situation or business.

Professional selling means helping someone make an educated buying decision. That means you need to determine how your product or service fits into their situation. I was once asked by an advertising sales rep what to do if the prospect's publication targeted a different demographic than the advertisers. My answer was simple, "Move on."

In some cases, your product or service may not be needed by your prospect or may not fit into their plans. This means you move on to the next prospect. Don't waste their time and yours trying to reconfigure everything hoping something will work out.

Virtually everyone I know is pressed for time. Respect that fact. Save your customers time by asking a few well-thought out questions BEFORE you suggest a product or service. That way you won't become a time waster.

But, how do you control a customer who is a time waster? There are a couple of ways...

First, ask a few high-quality questions early in the sales process to determine exactly what your customer is looking for and what their buying criteria are. One of these questions should be something that identifies the time-frame that your customer is working with.

The second thing you can do, particularly if the other person has indicated that they aren't making a buying decision in the near future, is to direct them to your website or offer other printed materials for them to review.

Third, ask them to make a buying decision. This approach is effective because the time waster will become uncomfortable and will often end the sales discussion himself.

The fourth strategy is to drop them like a hot potato. Don't waste your time trying to close them. Be pleasant, firm and direct. Tell them that you must take care of other customers and move on.

You only have a certain number of hours of prime selling time in any given day. Don't waste your time selling to people who have no intention of ever buying. And, avoid wasting the time of your customers.

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