

The Trust Factor

Did you ever buy anything from someone you didn't trust? In all likelihood, probably not.

Trust is an important issue when it comes to selling. It doesn't matter what you sell or to whom. It makes no difference if you sell business-to-consumer, B2B, or in a retail setting. Trust is the foundation of virtually every sale.

Yet, it never ceases to amaze me how many sales people will stretch the truth, mislead the customer, misrepresent their company, product, or service, or even deliberately lie in order to capture a sale. While this will certainly work once or twice, most people will seldom fall for this approach again. In the long run, you might win the battle but you will lose the war.

So how can you earn a person's trust? Here are three core concepts that will help you accomplish this.

1. Do **WHAT** you say you will do, **WHEN** you say you will do it. Many sales people forget this fundamental. If you make a promise to a client, keep it. If you say you will do something, make sure you follow through. This more than anything else will demonstrate that you are trustworthy and someone they can count on. And in business, that goes a long way.
2. Be on time for your appointments. Regardless of how long you have worked with a particular customer, make sure you show up on time for your meeting. If, for some unforeseen reason you are going to be late, call. Your clients are busy—show them that you respect their time.
3. Be yourself. How you behave and interact with your clients and customers should not be “an act.”

These may sound like simple concepts. However, I can guarantee that many of your competitors are NOT executing them on a regular basis. That means you can gain a competitive edge just by following these three concepts. But there's more to it than that.

Ultimately, everything you do influences the level of trust you develop with your customers and prospects. Let's look at a few more examples:

- How you treat clients' employees, including receptionists and mail-room staff. Many sales people are rude and treat non-management employees with disdain because they are not involved in the decision-making process. However, behaviour like this seldom goes unnoticed. Regardless of whom you interact with, you should treat them with respect and dignity.
- The speed with which you respond to clients and prospects. If you delay in answering a prospect's request or question you lose the opportunity to gain their trust. I have experienced this in my own business countless times when I have contacted a

company for information and they have been slow in responding. In my mind, if you don't respond quickly **BEFORE** I am a customer, what will happen once you get my business?

- Making outlandish claims about your product or service. Even when they know better, many sales people exaggerate the capabilities of their products. In most cases, their intent is completely harmless. However, if your product or service fails to meet your customer's expectations, anything you tell them in the future will be questioned and they may perceive you as someone who will say anything to capture a sale.
- Pushing unwanted services. While I'm a believer of capitalizing on every sales opportunity, I believe that it is unethical to try and sell a person something that he or she doesn't need or want. This approach shows your customer that you are concerned only with getting as many sales as possible. While you may end up selling more, in the long run you may harm your reputation.
- Listening carefully to your customer. Everyone wants to be heard and one of the easiest ways to earn your customer's trust is to demonstrate that you listened to them. You can do this through the use of verbal prompters, good eye contact, body language such as nodding, and summarizing what they tell you.

Trust is as important now as it was two or three decades ago. In fact, it may be even more critical given today's highly-competitive business world. I recall a sales coach once saying, “The only thing you have is your reputation.” It doesn't matter what you sell or to whom, if you tarnish your reputation, you will not be as successful as you could be. I also remember hearing someone else say, “If you always tell the truth, you never have to remember what you said.”

Lastly, it's not always what you say. Actions speak louder than words and people will often judge your trust worthiness by what you do and how you do it.

What are you doing to create a high level of trust with your customers and prospects?

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