



Keep your nose to the grindstone to avoid clichés

by Phil Sasso

Some stereotypes are common because they're true. But those are few and far between, especially in salesmanship. Most sales clichés, like the pushy, fast-talking salesman in gold chains, don't sell much of anything. In fact, the definition of cliché says it all, "a phrase or word that has lost its original effectiveness or power from overuse."

A lot of selling tricks lose their effectiveness for one simple reason: they're tricks. No one likes being tricked. And customers can smell a tricky salesperson a mile away. They may buy from you once, but likely never again. (Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.)

Selling isn't a paint-by-number profession. Good sales technique isn't about clever words and phrases used to manipulate people into buying from you. It's based on relationships, product knowledge and integrity.

So here are three common sales clichés to avoid like the plague:

People like being sold

Your average customer doesn't like being sold any more than he or she likes to visit the dentist. We all like buying things. And we tend to like to be convinced we're making a good choice. But no one likes to feel they're being "sold" something. It doesn't matter if it's by a telemarketer, by a politician or by a mobile dealer. Most people can sense when they're being sold a bill of goods and resent it.

I got a call the other day from a woman selling postage meters. I told her I use less than a roll of stamps every three months. She said it would save me time. I told her I enjoyed my quarterly trip to the post office — it keeps me up-to-date on the "Wanted" posters. She didn't laugh. To be honest, I don't even think she heard me. She just read the next part of her script assuming the more she pushed, the more likely I was to buy. But the more she pushed, the more I pulled back.

Salesmanship isn't all about pushing. It's about pulling information out of your customer. The more you know what your customer is thinking, the more likely you are to write up an order for what he or she wants or needs. So, stop selling and start a conversation.

A good salesman can sell ice to Eskimos

If someone doesn't think they need or want something, you won't be able to sell it to them. Period. That doesn't mean every purchase a customer makes is logical.



They aren't. In fact, few customers always make rational decisions.

This weekend, Beth went to a used book sale/fundraiser. The last thing we need are more books. We have two floor-to-ceiling bookcases filled with books. And we still have the bag of unread books from last year's book sale in our basement somewhere. But that didn't stop her. And she picked up some books for me, so I'm not complaining.

Don't waste your time trying to figure out *why* people buy. A lot of people have spent entire academic careers studying buying patterns, but few have been able to figure out a definitive pattern. Instead, get to know *your* products and know *your* customers.

There's a sucker born every minute

I recently listened in on a sales training teleconference where a salesman confessed that he felt lying was a sad reality of selling. He often felt compelled to lie to his customers. I cringed. Then other salespeople on the call agreed. I wanted to scream. But thankfully, the moderator jumped in before me.

The moderator began getting the participants to list the reasons why lying wasn't a good sales technique. There are obvious moral and ethical issues. It's easier to keep the truth straight. Lies will often surface when you least expect

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it. It creates distrust. It can snowball. The list went on and on.


As a mobile dealer, you may find two areas where you are most likely to fudge are on product specifications and delivery dates. You may think it's easier to "guess" at a product specification than to take the time to look it up. You may not see this as lying, but your customer will. If you give him wrong technical information, he will begin to wonder what other wrong information you will give him. Always take the time to research the answer. If you can't do it on that stop, call or e-mail him back or promise an answer next time you stop.

Delivery dates can be harder to resist fudging. You may feel if you promise a faster delivery on a special order, you can beat the competition and make the sale. But do this too often and you'll be known as the distributor who never meets his promised delivery dates. It's better to be honest about delivery times and offer to try to expedite it if you can than to fudge the date and disappoint the customer.

As the saying goes, honesty is the best policy. (There's one sales cliché that will hopefully never go out of style.)

There are probably a lot more sales clichés you can think of. Feel free to e-mail me your favorites (phil@philsasso.com) and I may feature them in a future column.

In the meantime, grab the bull by the horns and avoid wasting time on sales clichés and trickery. Instead, work hard at building relationships, learning your product lines and fostering trust with your customers.

Remember: Hard work is the yeast that raises the dough. Whatever that means. 

Phil Sasso is president of Sasso Marketing Inc. (www.sassomarketing.com), a technical marketing agency focusing on tools and equipment. Visit his sales and marketing blog at philsasso.com/blog.

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