

Get more attention without saying a thing

Being more approachable can help increase your sales

BY PHIL SASSO

I hate malls. I actually hate very few things in life: liver, lawn work, hip-hop music...

Most things I either like or dislike. But there's something about a suburban mall that stirs up my deepest, darkest emotions. Maybe it's the packs of teenagers. Maybe it's the overabundance of stores. Maybe it's the plastic setting. Whatever it is, I try to avoid shopping malls like I would salt in a wound.



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But when Beth and PJ asked me if I wanted to go to the 41st Annual Father's Day Classic Car Show at a mall near my home, I agreed. It's an awesome show, it's only an outdoor mall, and it's free, I rationalized.

I wasn't sorry either. Not only did I see about 100 amazing cars (Bugatti, Duesenberg and Rolls Royce to name a few), I also learned a lesson in approachability.

"Is that your car?" I asked a guy reading next to a roadster.

"Huh?" he replied, barely looking up.

"The Packard. Is it yours?"

"Uh huh," he responded, turning the page.

"It's nice. Did you restore it yourself?" I asked.

"Uh uh," he replied.

End of conversation. This would be an unapproachable guy.

Then Beth, PJ, and I stopped at a gourmet gadget store in the mall. As I walked in the door, a typical vulture-like mall clerk singled me out to welcome. She seemed able to speak non-stop.

"Hi. My Name is Cindy. Happy Father's Day! If you have any questions, let me know. I'm here to serve you if you need anything. Oh, have you seen our new flat irons? They're great. Do you have a gas or charcoal grill? Here, see how heavy this is," she held the device out toward me.

"No thanks, Cindy," I responded, not breaking my stride. As I walked around the store, I was overwhelmed by the dread that Cindy was following me, waiting to pounce. I quickly left the store without buying anything.

That's a different kind of unapproachable.

Some of the best mobile dealers I've ever met seem to have mastered the art of approachability. They're just easy to talk to. They make you feel comfortable striking up a conversation.

These dealers aren't distant-and-distracted or in-your-face and overbearing. They seem to have struck a perfect balance between giving you space and engaging you. Maybe that's because they realize we like to buy from salespeople we're comfortable around.

What exactly is approachability?

I really can't define it. It is much more about a series of things than a single personality trait. An approachable person comes across as relaxed, comfortable and engaged. When you look in their eyes, they seem open and their body language is welcoming. Cheerful people are more approachable than moody people, for example.

So, can someone learn to be approachable? I think so. Approachability isn't like charisma. Charisma is having an overwhelmingly magnetic personality. Very few people are truly charismatic (and charismatic people can actually be intimidating and unapproachable). Approachability is about being real, genuine and authentic. Everyone can learn to be real (though

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not everyone may want to).

To be more approachable, you need to do the same thing you do at a railroad crossing: stop, look and listen.

Stop

Whether you're toting and promoting or talking to techs on your truck, you need to make it a point to stop and focus on one-on-one interactions with each customer and prospect.

That can be a lot harder than it sounds. When everyone is vying for your attention, it's easy to accidentally overlook someone. And you can get so wrapped up with one customer's problem that you miss another who has a question. Be sure you make it a point to take a moment to connect with everyone who stops to see you.

Make your customer the most important person for the moment you have with him.

Look

You don't have to say a lot to be approachable. Simple eye contact and a warm look can make people more comfortable approaching you. Eye contact is important. It makes people feel acknowledged. And everyone wants to be acknowledged.

A simple look can say much more than a lot of words.

Listen

Approachability is not as much about talking as it is about listening. To be easy to talk to, you need to let your customer talk. Listen carefully. Avoid cutting off your customer. Pretend your customer is the only person in the room and focus on him.

Although we think of successful salespeople as talkative, it's a myth. The top salespeople are better listeners. They ask good questions and engage

their customers. They listen carefully and make mental notes. The rest of salespeople talk a lot.

Approachability is about connecting. Few words are required.

Probably the most approachable person at the Father's Day car show was the woman at the voting booth. Her approachability encouraged me to wait a few moments to cast my vote for my favorite car and not walk away in frustration. The booth was very busy when I arrived, but she made a point to stop what she was doing to welcome me.

"Hi. I'll be right with you," she said. She thanked another juror for voting, then turned, handed me a ballot and looked me in the eye. "How'd you like the show today?"

"It was excellent," I replied, "even if it is at a mall."

She laughed. ■

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