

## Turn your thinking, turn your sales

Key in on your customer, not your sale

BY PHIL SASSO

"Hello, Mr. Sosa?" started the telemarketer's sales pitch.

"Sasso," I corrected. "How can I help?"

"I'm calling from Pitney Bowes ..."

"I won't waste your time," I said. "I don't need a

postage meter."

"Well, this meter is designed to be perfect for your small business," she replied.

"How can you say that?" I asked. "You don't know what business I'm in."

"We're offering a free 30-day trial," she said. "Why not try it?"

"Try it? Why try something I don't want?" I politely ended the call. Then I sat thinking about how she could have improved her pitch, or avoided wasting both of our time.

I say that because — I'm almost embarrassed to admit it — I was once a telemarketer.

Not just a telemarketer. I was the worst kind: I sold magazine subscriptions. (It was my first sales job.)



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## SALES & MARKETING 101

Most people don't just dislike telemarketers. They hate them. Needless to say, I faced a lot of rejection. Not just rejection. People actually become hostile. At the time I didn't understand, I was a teenager just doing my job. I'd never been interrupted by an annoying telemarketing call.

Today I understand.

My telemarketing drill went like this:

I opened with a choice between *Time* and *Newsweek*. If that didn't work, I peddled *Redbook* or *Sports Illustrated*. They'd usually hang up and I'd dial the next number. After 40 dials of that I'd make my goal of one sale an hour.

Sound crazy? It was. Until one day when my supervisor, Ben, pulled me into his office.

"You're good," he said. "I like you. You work hard and seem eager to succeed. But..."

I looked at him wondering if I was about to get a bonus or get fired.

"But there's a better way to sell," he said. "When you're sitting out there dialing, what are you thinking?"

"Thinking?" I asked.

"Yeah, what's your goal?"

"My goal is to make quota," I said. "I try to make as many calls as I can each day."

"And you're doing good at that. But you can do better," he said. "It doesn't have to be a numbers game. There's a secret to closing more sales."

"A secret?" I asked, moving forward in my seat.

"You need to turn around your thinking," Ben said. "People on the



phone can hear that you're trying to make your sale. Instead, you want them to hear that you're trying to help them."

"To help them?"

"Sure. Your job isn't to make your sale," he said. "Your job is to help them pick the right magazine for them. And in turn, they'll help

you make your sale.”

That sounds simple. But it's not as easy as it sounds. Not in telemarketing, not in mobile distribution. It was especially hard for me since I was basically reading a telemarketing script.

How on earth could they tell what I was thinking? I was reading someone else's words! But Ben seemed convinced it would help. So, I tried.

The rest of the day, there was no change in my sales. The next day, like clockwork, I made my one sale in the first hour. Ben walked by my desk and whispered to me “Remember, it's not about your sale.”

By the end of the third day, I was averaging two sales an hour. Double my quota!

I don't remember my average sales per hour when I left, but after that, I always beat my goal.

I still vividly remember Ben. He wasn't your typical sales manager of the day. He was young, had hair down to his shoulders and wore a leisure suit with sandals to work. But he knew the “secret” to sales success.

“It's not about your sale. It's about your customer.”

The same that's true for hawking magazines is true for hawking tools and equipment. The more a customer senses you're interested in helping him, the more likely he is to buy from you. Are you just making stops, or are you making a difference? Are customers and prospects happy to see you, or do they avoid eye contact to avoid being “sold?”

It's been easy to get swept away by all the gloomy economic news over the past few months. Perhaps you've found yourself focusing more on your sale and your business and you've lost sight of your real goal: helping your customers.

As the clouds begin to part and the economy begins to brighten, turning around your thinking may help you get your fair share of the windfall. ■

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