

Three Tools to Help Maximize Sales Potential.

Over half of your potential success on a sales call is dependent on your ability to ask questions, listen, and observe.

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How important is product knowledge to a successful sales career? Although many of you may say it's very important, I'd argue that it's not as important as you may think. There is one piece of advice that always comes up while watching popular TV shows such as "Shark Tank" or "The Profit." Businesspeople are advised time and time again to know their numbers. What the Sharks of "Shark Tank" and Marcus Lemonis of "The Profit" mean is you must know your business: sales figures, margin, inventory turns, expense ratios, profit, etc.

In sales, I equate knowing your numbers to knowing your product. You must know your product; what it does, what it does not do, what it competes against, how it stacks up, etc. There's no way around it and you can't take any shortcuts, you must know your product inside and out. However, I would offer that it's not the most important determiner of sales success.

During the time slot when you're actively in a sales call, I believe 40% of your potential success is dependent on how well you know your products and asking for the sale accounts for an additional 5%. The other 55% – the basis for this article – is dependent on your ability to ask questions, listen, and observe.

Questions. A famous quote by Theodore Roosevelt says it best: "People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care." Customers will tell you what is important to them and why, if you just ask. If you don't have a short list of questions to ask in different selling situations, I advise you give it some thought.

Listen. Be present in both mind and body. Clear your mind and be ready to listen while also paying attention to your body language. Facing your customer, maintaining solid eye contact, and occasionally nodding your head are three ways your body tells them you're listening. Being a good listener requires focus and patience.

You want to listen intently to the answers to your questions, while simultaneously determining how to position your offering, and exercising the patience not to jump in and start "selling" too soon.

Observe. This is a broad category that includes your body language and what you witness around you. Are the words you hear from a prospective customer congruent with the body language you observe? What do you see in the office, or around the jobsite that either validates what you hear or provides clues for areas to ask questions about?

Keeping these three things in mind adds many positives to your sales calls. Demonstrating you understand the customer's situation and a laser focus to your product presentations are near the top of the list. Humans have a desire to be understood and when you seek to understand your customers or prospects through your questions and actions, it builds deeper levels of rapport and trust.

Your ability to impart your knowledge of your products to your customers is obviously important, and many times that means discussing all about your product – some of which will fall on deaf ears.

You can take a more measured approach with questions, listening, and observing. The goal is identifying issues that matter to the customer and using that information to conduct product presentations that are tailored to their situation and not just a "data dump" of every feature of your product.

Show your customer that you care about them, and their business, and are looking for ways to help them be more successful and then tailor both your company story and product presentations to their situation and the issues they are facing. That's the sign of a true sales professional.



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