

Sales Training Article: Being Buyer-Centric from the Start

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Ever wonder what goes through a seller's mind just before meeting with a prospect for the first time? Most everyone would agree it's important to have clear objectives for meetings and that's especially true for sales calls. Poor buyer experiences are more likely to occur when a seller's objective is to sell something or even worse sell a particular offering. I believe a seller should earn the right to begin selling by uncovering buyer needs and would like to describe how to do that.

A cornerstone of CustomerCentric Selling® is that B2B buying cycles begin when buyers share goals, problems or needs they're willing to spend money to achieve or address. There will be instances where sellers don't earn the right to begin selling for any of the following reasons:

- The buyer doesn't have needs that your offering can address.
- The buyer has needs, but won't share them because the seller never established the credibility needed to have a conversation. Buyers don't bare their souls to sellers they don't believe are trustworthy (which Steven Covey defined as being perceived as sincere and competent).
- The buyer is price shopping (the seller is not "Column A") and wants to discuss your price and offering. He or she doesn't want to take the time to share the desired outcomes nor submit to a diagnosis.

Before earning an opportunity to sell, the following steps should be completed in the first few minutes of calls starting with the greeting and call introduction:

1. Attempt to have the buyer conclude you are sincere (different from the negative stereotype of salespeople). You can get off on the wrong foot by misreading whether buyers want to initiate small talk or get right down to business.
2. Attempt to have the buyer conclude that you are competent by stating clear objectives for the call and offering a concise company positioning statement (what your company helps customers do). Try to minimize the hype and opinions many sellers can't resist sharing.
3. By doing some pre-call planning and research be prepared to tell a title/industry specific Success Story designed to take the buyer from latent to active need for an issue you believe is likely to be relevant to the buyer.
4. Be prepared with situational questions to engage with the buyer and hopefully have them share a goal that your offering can help them achieve. Be prepared with a menu of goals for the title you are calling on that can be offered if the buyer has not shared a goal.

Once a buyer shares a business goal, an important milestone has been reached. It should allow the seller to do a diagnosis to help a buyer understand the reasons the outcome can't be achieved and realize the potential value in addressing them.

It all begins by earning the respect of the buyer and making the call about his or her issues, not your offerings. A competent seller has the patience to complete the diagnosis *before* offering their capabilities.

Selling begins once buyers share goals.