

# Making Sales & Keeping Customers

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**T**HE FIRST STEP IN SELLING is superior service. The top five percent of all salespeople provide the best customer service. You will never find a high performing salesperson that is not exceptionally good at service.

Learning how to sell has to be built around mastering the fundamentals of customer service. I am amazed at how companies worship at the altar of advertising and then when the customers call they get voice mail (that often does not work) and calls and e-mails are not returned.

One of the most destructive pieces of technology is voice mail. Call Lands' End (800-541-3459) any hour of the day and talk with a live, caring and knowledgeable employee. They are an incredible role model. Check out their web site at: [www.landsend.com](http://www.landsend.com).

If you are a potential new customer, when you leave a message you often will not receive a return phone call. E-mails are responded to in three to five days. Keep in mind that you are one click away from your competition. This is not customer response.

Superior service is all about making sales and keeping customers. Your competition will typically have very little follow through. Do not let yourself fall into this same trap. Customer response is "speed" and "follow through".

The *Six Steps for Excellence in Service* that I have built Service Quality Institute's training programs around are:

## 1. FEEL GOOD ABOUT YOURSELF.

Your attitude is reflected in two to three seconds, whether on the phone or in person. In sales there are probably more lows than highs. You have to keep yourself

pumped up to see yourself as you can be, not as you are today.

## 2. PRACTICE HABITS OF COURTESY.

Call everyone by their name and remember their name. Make the prospect or customer feel important. Use a contact management system so you keep track of contacts and the information the clients provide. A professional salesperson that is service driven asks questions, probes, takes careful notes and responds to the needs of the customer.

## 3. POSITIVE COMMUNICATION

The customer can tell in seconds if you care. Be positive. Salespeople can often be perceived as plastic or phoney. "How are you today?" or "Have a good day." vs. "Mike, how was your vacation last week in Orlando?" Be genuine, sincere and timely.

## 4. PERFORMANCE

Keeping your promises. You can be the nicest guy in the world, but if you do not do what you promised, service is lousy and you will lose the sale and customer. Speed is critical. "You will have the price quote by 2:00 PM today.", "I'll call you back by tomorrow." or "It will ship on Tuesday." and then no response. No performance. No speed and not keeping your promise will destroy your sales. Under-promise and over-deliver.

## 5. LISTENING

The best salespeople listen, tune in the customer, and help the customer satisfy their needs and wants. Sometimes we are so busy talking we do not probe or "really listen" to the customer. Sometimes we are so busy thinking of what to say next that we fail to listen.

Recently, I called the sales manager of a mailing house for a non-profit organization I founded to get more information on pricing and capabilities. The previous mailing, I thought, was very expensive and would not work for the extensive mailings I had planned over the next sixty days. I left a message, and two days later received a call. The sales manager never listened, became defensive, and said she would call me the following day because she was in her car on her cell phone. I never did get a return phone call.

She complained to my Executive Director that I was rude. I might have been. I cannot stand salespeople that do not listen or ask questions. Decision makers often feel the same way. Customer response was non-existent. The good news is that there is more than one mailing house in the Twin Cities. This firm missed a significant amount of business and will never be used again.

## 6. LEARNING ABOUT YOUR JOB

It is critical that you learn everything about your products and services. Take time during the evening and weekends to read product information and trade journals. Your confidence will increase and will be communicated to your customers. Self confidence builds trust and more sales.

Master the art of service and you will rapidly become more valuable to your customers and employer. Someone is going to get promoted. It might as well be you. ■

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