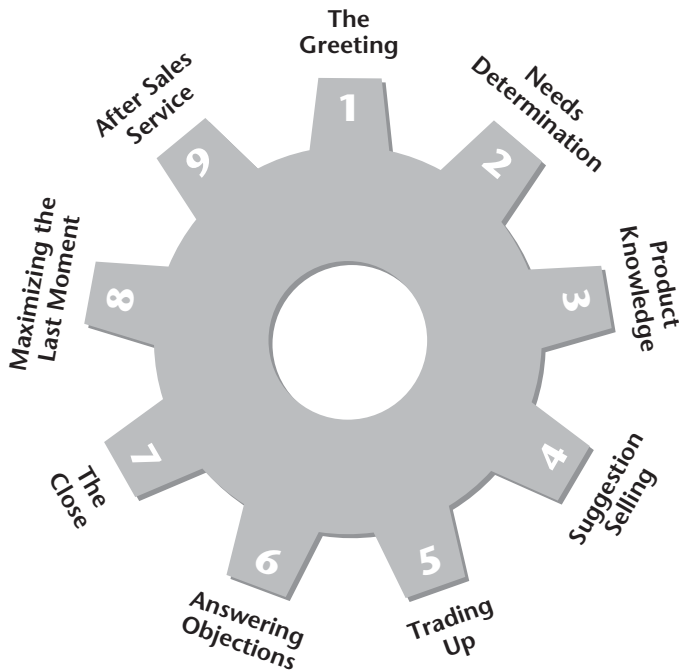


Introduction to Retail Selling



The best augury of a man's success in his profession is that he thinks it the finest in the world.

George Eliot, English novelist

Selling is a profession

Selling in a retail store has not been recognized as a real profession. Yet it is a profession to millions (over five million people in North America), and as far as I am concerned, it is one of the most rewarding professions there is. The words Sales Associate imply two things: First, and foremost, the job is about selling and second, the job is about a partnership and sharing with others in the store.

There are not too many jobs that provide a person with a pleasant work environment and the opportunity to make hundreds of people happy every day. While it is true that many stores have not yet realized how important the Sales Associate is to their business, more and more are discovering that a well-educated Sales Associate is critical for success in the retail industry today. Each and every sale that is made contributes to the success of the store's business. Without great Professional Sales Associates many stores would not remain in business.

Selling is not yelling or telling, it is helping

As a Professional Sales Associate you deal with each Customer as a unique human being. Customers do not "check" their personalities or problems before they come into a store. They come in as the sum total of all of their

past experiences. That experience could be the fight they just had with their parents, children, or friends; the driver who cut them off in the parking lot; the other shopper who bumped them in the mall; and numerous other problems and irritations of the week, year or a lifetime. Customers also bring in expectations of what a certain product or service will do for their lives. They may expect a certain dress, TV or drill will transform their lives. Or they may just expect to find what they need and get home as soon as possible. There are millions of different motivations, moods and expectations you have to deal with as a Professional Sales Associate.

Dealing with human beings is one of the most complex jobs on earth. Every Customer is different, and even the

Dealing with human beings is one of the most complex jobs on earth.

same Customer is different each time you see him or her. The complexities of trying to match a product with the needs of this very complex Customer is a challenge indeed. It requires that you not only have an excellent understanding of your product, but that

you also have a thorough understanding of your Customer and his needs.

What makes a great Sales Associate?

Although it is true that great Sales Associates are made not born, there are some things that you must have inside you in order to become a great Sales Associate. The first is Ego. Selling is sometimes about rejection. There are Customers who, no matter how well you do your job, will reject what you are trying to sell them. Sometimes this rejection can be harsh: The Customer will be rude, angry, or just tell you that “your baby is ugly.” The successful Sales Associate must have a healthy Ego; that allows this kind of rejection to be taken in stride. She or he must know that the rejection

is not personal, but is rather the rejection of an idea or product. Although you can learn to deal with rejection, it is necessary to have a healthy Ego because knowing something intellectually is entirely different from knowing it emotionally. It is easy to say that my friend passed by me in the hall without saying hello because she was busy thinking about a test. But feeling in your gut that this is the real reason is not so easy. A Professional Sales Associate must therefore have a good, healthy view of her or himself.

The second trait that is critical for success in selling is empathy, the ability to understand another person's situation, feelings and motives. If you have empathy, you can better serve your Customers by being so in tune with them that you can often identify one of your products that will meet their needs. Empathy is not sympathy: You understand, but you do not feel sorry for your Customers.

The abundance of Ego and empathy makes for a great Sales Associate. They are the two secrets of good selling. Having these traits is not enough, however. You must learn how to use them in selling. Once you do, there will be no limit to how high you can go in your career or how much you can sell.

A brief history of selling

For thousands of years people have made the things that they need with their hands. If you needed a new pair of shoes 300 years ago, you would either have made it yourself from animal hide or bartered with a local craftsman to make a pair for you. The same was true for almost all goods. In the late 1800s the advent of the steam engine and other motors made the assembly line possible, which, in turn, led to the Industrial Revolution. For many years after almost all

the goods that were produced in factories were bought by a public that was hungry for the products. It almost did not matter what the product was, there was a market for it.

As we advanced into the 20th century, and began producing more than was necessary, the modern salesman was born. I say salesman, because in the early days of selling almost all salespeople were men. The job of the early salesman was to sell what the factories produced. This selling was not concerned with what the Customer needed: It was only concerned with what the company had too much of and therefore had to push onto the Customer. The early salesman was characterized by having a “script” or a set sales “pitch” that was delivered to every Customer regardless of need. It is no wonder that salesmen soon got a reputation of being pushy.

It did not take long for Hollywood, the media and others to portray the job of selling as something not quite honest or honorable. Our society is rife with jokes about salesmen. Movies also often portray selling as a questionable profession. You may have seen *Death of a Salesman*, a play and movie about a salesman. It is a very harsh and critical portrayal of a salesman that may reflect the truth of the '50s, but not the '90s. You may also have seen the modern-day look at salespeople in the movie *Cadillac Man*, with Robin Williams, or the portrayal of the two extremes of stereotypical salespeople in *Pretty Woman*. In *Pretty Woman* we see two distinctly different portrayals of Sales Associates, neither of which is very accurate. One scene has two very haughty women ask, “May I help you?” when Julia Roberts enters the store. They then proceed to shame her out of the store. This is the Sales Associate as snob. In the second store scene, we see the overzealous store manager groveling at the feet of Richard Gere. This is the Sales Associate as slave.

By these portrayals, Hollywood would have us believe that only two types of Sales Associates exist. While there may still be some pushy salespeople in stores, they are often just poorly trained individuals who have not been exposed to proper selling techniques.

Marketing selling

In the late 1950s the concept of Marketing selling took root. By this time the factories of the world were producing more than enough products for everyone's needs. The old

**You need to treat
each Customer as
you would like to be
treated yourself.**

product push was not working as well anymore, and companies had to find a way to sell more products. Marketing selling defines success as discovering what the Customer's needs are and matching your product to those needs. Brilliant! This is the

kind of selling that has taken over the old style of push selling. Marketing-driven selling is what the Professional Sales Associate practices and is what this book is all about.

The Golden Rule

The American Heritage Dictionary defines a friend as:

1. A person whom one knows, likes, and trusts. 2. A person whom one knows; an acquaintance. 3. A person with whom one is allied in a struggle or cause; a comrade.

As a Professional Sales Associate you will find the way you treat your Customers is very similar to the way you treat your friends. This is not to say you have to like every one of your Customers, but you do have to show them respect, consideration and overwhelming concern for their well-being.

The Golden Rule applies to selling almost more than any other profession. You need to treat each Customer as you would like to be treated yourself. You see, everything that

you become, all that you will own and have, comes from your Customers. From the clothes on your back, to the roof over your head, to the food you eat — all are results of your Customer buying from you. A successful Sales Associate realizes this very important truth. If every Customer is responsible for your income and well-being, you should treat every Customer accordingly.

This is often easier said than done. When was the last time anyone who waited on you in a store gave you the feeling that you were that important to them? Yet, would you mistreat the person responsible for your income? A Professional Sales Associate knows that the Customer really is Number One. She treats him that way every day.

As a Professional Sales Associate, you need to form a deep commitment to helping others before you can be successful in selling. Your success is a direct result of a Customer's satisfaction, and that satisfaction is a direct result of your professionalism and commitment to the Customer. The two are inseparable. No Sales Associate can be successful without meeting the needs of his Customers, and no Customer will continue to buy from a Sales Associate who does not satisfy her needs.

**Your success is a direct
result of a Customer's
satisfaction...**

Vending machine selling

In this book I make the distinction between Professional Sales Associates and clerks. Clerks are Jerks. Clerks are like coin slots on vending machines: You just put your money in and out comes a product. A vending machine cannot answer a question, provide critical product knowledge, keep you from making a mistake, really understand your needs, and find the best product to meet those needs. A vending machine is just there to take money. Professional Sales Associates have careers: Clerks have jobs. Professional Sales

Associates build businesses: Clerks care-take businesses.
Professional Sales Associates build relationships with
Customers: Clerks take money from Customers. This book
is for people who want to be Professional Sales Associates,
not clerks.

The nine steps to a successful sales relationship

Although the following are listed as “steps”, they are
also stages that you go through *with* your Customer.

The steps are:



1. The Greeting (Opening)
2. Needs Determination
3. Product Knowledge (Features, Attributes and Benefits)
4. Adding Value By Trading Up
5. Suggestion Selling
6. Answering Objections
7. The Close
8. Maximizing the Last Moment
9. Providing After Sales Services

Each chapter of this book will explain each step and give
you practical exercises to help develop your skills.

The sales road map

Every journey has a best route. The best route is the one
that brings you to your destination in the most efficient
and enjoyable manner. A sale is a journey. It is not a desti-
nation. As a Professional Sales Associate you must recognize
that a sale is not a one-time event, but rather a stop-over
point in your relationship with a Customer. The actual sale
consists of a series of steps that you must follow to ensure
that you are doing your job correctly, that is, pleasing your
Customer.

Not every sale has all nine steps. Some sales will contain only four, while others will have six or seven. No sale should ever contain less than four of the steps. Even that Customer who runs into the store, knows exactly what she needs, grabs it, races up to the cash register and pulls out her wallet to pay, still deserves at least four of the steps of a good sale. You will soon see why.

Practice

As with learning any new skill, practice is the key to success. But often when we first try something new, it just does not feel right. That's because we are creatures of habit and often feel more comfortable doing something the way we always have. I would like you to take a moment, put down the book and try something.

Cross your arms. That's right, just cross your arms the way that you usually do. Now, uncross them and reverse them. If you had your left arm over right, then put your right arm over left. How does it feel? Probably, pretty strange. We are in the habit of crossing our arms a certain way, just as we

... a sale is not a one-time event, but rather a stop-over point in your relationship with a Customer.

are in the habit of doing a million things a certain way. Whenever we change that tried and true way, it feels uncomfortable.

This book will make you do some things that at first will feel uncomfortable, but with practice will eventually become second nature. With these changes, you will be

selling better and making more Customer/Friends than you ever thought possible. You will soon begin to recognize how difficult this journey will be and how much you will need to learn in the process. Brain surgery will begin to look simple by comparison!



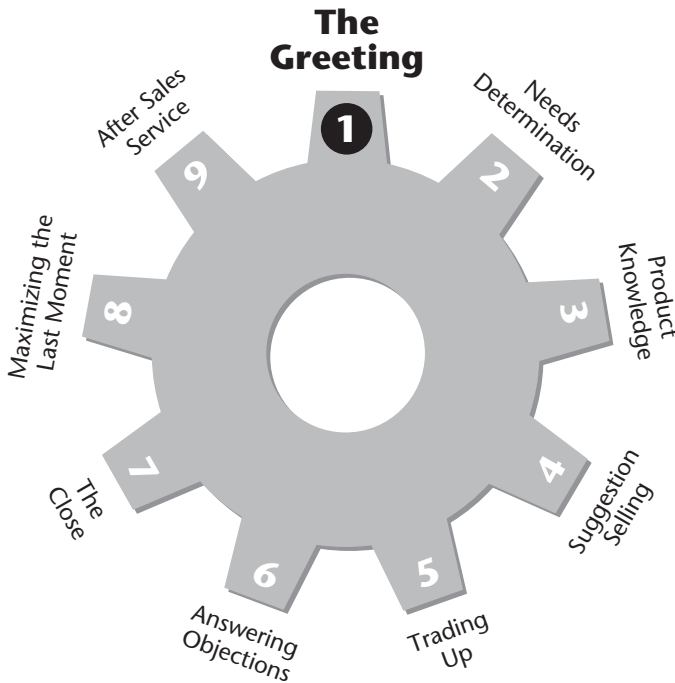
KEEP IN MIND:

- Dealing with human beings is one of the most complex jobs on earth.
 - Marketing selling defines success as discovering what the Customer's needs are and matching your product to those needs.
 - Treat each Customer as you would like to be treated yourself.
 - Your success is a direct result of a Customer's satisfaction, and that satisfaction is a direct result of your professionalism and commitment to the Customer.
 - Not every sale will have all nine steps.
 - A sale is not a one-time event, but rather a stop-over point in your relationship with a Customer.
-

Chapter 1

Step One The Greeting

**(Also known as
The Opening)**



Men greet each other with a sock on the arm,
women with a hug, and the hug wears better
in the long run.

Edward Hoagland, U.S. novelist, essayist

Every sale begins with the greeting, yet this is the step at which most sales are lost. Your only job at this step is to welcome the Customer and make sure that she or he knows you work in the store. That is all you have to do at this step. You do not have to determine the Customer's needs, but just welcome him or her.

"May I help you?"

Very often we hear, "May I help you?" as a greeting to open the sale. This is a major mistake for a number of reasons.

What is the question, "May I help you?" really asking? I would suggest that it is a needs determination question. "Why are you here?" would be a more appropriate question, yet it would not sound right in a store setting. "May I help you?" ignores the Greeting and jumps right to Step Two, needs analysis.

Let me put it this way. Have you ever invited people over for dinner? You probably told them what time to come and that they really did not need to bring anything. As you were preparing dinner, the doorbell rang. Did you go to the door, open it up and immediately ask, "What would you like to drink?"

I don't think so. You probably opened the door and said, "Hi, it's great that you could come. Please, come right in." After gathering their coats and getting them seated in the

living room, you probably then asked, “Can I get you something to drink, or would you like something to nibble on?”

What you did was to greet your guests, and once they were comfortably seated, analyze their needs. The same applies to your store. You first greet the Customer and make them feel comfortable, then you determine their needs.

What type of greeting is the best?

Often, the simplest greeting is the best. Your only job during the opening is to make the Customer comfortable and to let him know that you work in the store. Sometimes a simple “Hi” is sufficient. Some Sales Associates are more comfortable with a more formal, “Good Morning” or “Good Afternoon.” What is important, is that you feel comfortable with the greeting and that the greeting is *not* a question that can be answered with a yes or no.

The greeting should also reflect the feeling or mood of your store. You would probably not say “Hi” if you work in a very expensive store. “Good Afternoon” would be more appropriate.

The reason that we do not want to ask a “yes or no” question at the opening is to avoid a “no” answer. It is always hard to maintain contact with the Customer after he has said no to a question. Even such pleasant openers such as, “It’s a nice day, isn’t it?” are risky. You will undoubtedly confront the tired or grumpy Customer who will respond, “NO!” You will then have to back off.

The other reason for not asking, “May I help you?” is that most Customers respond, “No thanks, I am just looking.” How many times has this happened to you when you were a Customer? Then a few minutes later, when you really did have a question or need help, the Sales Associate was nowhere to be found.

The “Like me” bias

Sometimes we, as humans have a tendency to more comfortably approach people who are “like us” more easily than those who are not like us. “Like us” means of the same ethnic, social, age and gender group. There are some exceptions to this tendency, such as an older female associate who approaches a younger Customer in a “motherly” way, and a younger Sales Associate who approaches an elderly Customer as a grandchild would. The danger is

**Treat every Customer
as a potential million
dollar Customer
and you will never
go wrong.**

when we approach a Customer who is not like us. We need to be very aware of our thoughts and not prejudge the Customer in any way. We cannot assume that the Customer does or does not have money, or that the Customer will respond or react a certain way. Remember: Every Customer,

every human is different. The more we are aware of our tendency to prejudge or categorize people, the better able we will be to avoid doing it. If there is one thing I have learned as a Professional Sales Associate, it is that first impressions of people are wrong as often as they are right, probably more often wrong than right!. Treat every Customer as a potential million dollar Customer, and you will never go wrong.

How Customers behave

It is important to realize that every Customer who comes in your store has taken a risk to do so. It may not be the heart stopping, bungee jumping type of risk, but rather the psychological risk of entering a space that is not familiar. Even with this mild sense of risk, the Customer is on guard against what is happening around him. If you rush up to a Customer who has just entered the store, you will frighten

him. Again, it is not the type of fear that stops hearts or raises blood pressure, but it is apprehension. The smart Sales Associate will recognize this response in his Customer and will be very sensitive to the first approach.

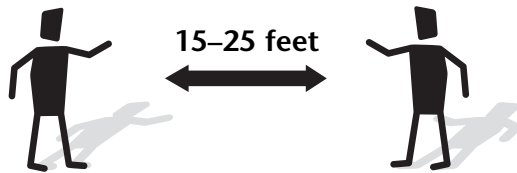
Try this experiment in your store. When a Customer comes in the store, walk towards her and say, "Hi." How did the Customer respond? In most cases the Customer will say, "No, I am just looking." Although you did not say, "May I help you?", that is precisely what the Customer heard. You see, Customers have become like Pavlov's Dog (that famous experiment in conditioning of response) and often respond to the greeting of the Sales Associate as if she had really asked the dreaded question. The act of walking toward a Customer is enough of a "threat" to stop her from hearing what you really said.

Try another approach. To the next Customer who comes in the store, rather than walk toward her, take a step *backwards* (make sure that you are not standing near any stairs!) and say, "Hi." What you will hear back, in almost every case is a "Hi." from the Customer. Why did she all of a sudden hear what you actually said? What was different?

The answer is your body language. In not physically approaching the Customer in those first few seconds, the Customer did not feel threatened in any way. She was therefore comfortable enough to really hear what you said. Although this may not work with every Customer (there are a few who are so deeply conditioned that they will say, "No, I am just looking." no matter what), in the vast majority of cases it will prove successful.

Ideal distance

The ideal distance from the Customer at the approach stage is about 15–25 feet. This is not always possible — you may be working at the front of the store when a Customer comes in the door, and you certainly should not start running backwards to get 25 feet away. But you should be sensitive to the personal space of the Customer and make sure that you are giving him a good distance so that he will not feel threatened. Elderly Customers are particularly sensitive to fast approaches, probably due to past experiences with clerks. Just remember: Do not physically approach the Customer during the greeting. As you progress into the sale and the relationship with the Customer, the distance you maintain will decrease. At each step I will define for you the ideal distance.



Practice

What is the best greeting for you? Choose a relatively standard greeting that you feel comfortable with so that you are never tempted to fall back on the old standby, “May I Help You?” The simplest is the best. A nice “Hi” works for most people. Write down three greetings that you feel comfortable with and that do not contain a question. You are not determining needs yet, and you do not want to risk a “no” answer from the Customer during the opening. Try your greetings with some Customers who come in the store. See

which one you feel most comfortable with, as well as the one to which Customers respond the best. Also listen to other Sales Associates when you are a shopper. Try to pick up some new ideas for greetings. When you hear a great one, remember it.

My openers are:

Remember:

- They cannot be answered with a yes or no
- They reflect a positive attitude to the Customer
- They are honest and comfortable
- They reflect the feeling of the store



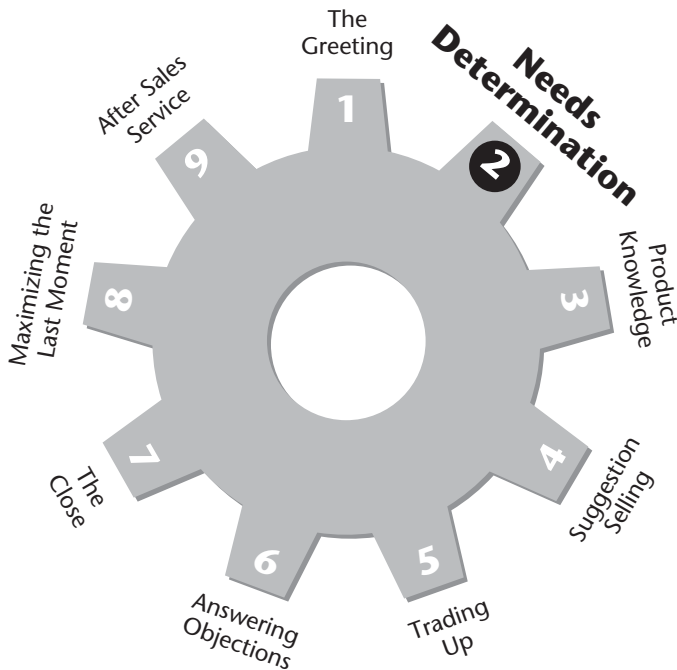
KEEP IN MIND:

- You should feel comfortable with the greeting that you use, and it should *not* be in the form of a question that can be answered with a yes or no.
 - First impressions of people are probably more often wrong than right.
 - Treat every Customer as a potential “Million Dollar Customer”, and you will never go wrong.
 - Do not physically approach the Customer the first few seconds after he has entered your store, to avoid threatening him.
-

Chapter 2

Step Two Needs Determination

Now that you have greeted the Customer and made her feel welcome, it is time to move to Step Two and discover her needs.



One of the best ways to persuade others is with your ears — by listening to them.

Dean Rusk (b. 1909), U.S. Democratic politician

Why do Customers buy?

Customers usually do not go into stores just to get out of the rain (although, rarely they might!). They enter stores in search of something. The second step in your journey to the perfect sale is determining what a Customer really needs. The key words are *really needs*. Your job is to take what the Customer tells you and translate that into a product or service that will satisfy and delight the Customer. Here is an old story I heard in Marketing 101 in University which will give you some idea of what I am talking about.

A Customer goes into a hardware store and asks to see a drill. But is it a drill she really needs, or a hole? What should she have asked for?

Likely, her real need is a hole. Yet, can you imagine this Customer asking the Sales Associate for a two-inch deep three-eighths of an inch hole?! The Sales Associate would think the Customer was nuts. But the Customer asked for a drill, not a hole. Did her request reflect her need?

Maybe not! Can you think of a reason why?³ What questions might you ask this Customer to learn more?

³ Possibly the Customer needs to turn screws and not drill holes. Therefore an electric screwdriver would be a better choice. Can you think of others?

Here are some questions that will give you insight into Customer needs. The answers are in the appendix of the book. Don't cheat! Answer the questions, and then look at the appendix to see how you did.

	True/False
1. Customers usually know what they want.	_____
2. Most Customers want to be left alone when shopping.	_____
3. Many people buy when they are unhappy.	_____
4. Customers cannot be persuaded to buy something they said they did not want.	_____
5. In times of tight money, Customers buy only what they need.	_____
6. What Customers ask for is not always what they want.	_____
7. Most Customers have a price limit on their shopping needs.	_____
8. Yesterday's luxuries are today's necessities.	_____
9. Shopping can be an emotionally rewarding experience.	_____
10. Spending money makes people happy.	_____

How do I move from the Greeting to the Needs Determination stage?

1. Observe

2. Question

3. Listen between the lines

4. Suggest

Once you have greeted the Customer, then what do you do? Generally your best strategy at this point is to do nothing! Just observe what the Customer does. In most cases one of two things will happen:

- A. The Customer will approach you and ask if you have a particular item or where an item can be found in the store; or,

B. The Customer will move to a particular area of the store and begin to look at merchandise.

It is rare that a Customer will just stop in the middle of the store and stare at the ceiling. Either the Customer will ask if you have something, or she will begin to look around. If she asks for a specific item, it is often best to answer her question with a question, particularly if you do not have that exact item in your store.

Let me give you an example:

A Customer enters the store and, after saying hi to you, asks you if you carry Arrow shirts. Unfortunately your store does not stock this brand of shirt. You could say to the Customer, "No, we do not carry Arrow shirts," upon which the Customer will likely turn and walk out of the store. Or you could try this approach. The Customer asks you if you carry Arrow shirts and you respond, "Oh, are you looking for a shirt for yourself or as a gift for someone?" This response does not have the Customer leaving the store, but instead gets her to talk to you. You answer the question with a question, because you do not have the specific requested merchandise and need to know more about this Customer's needs.

If the Customer was to ask for Arrow shirts and you did not carry shirts at all, of course you would let the Customer know. But if the Customer is looking for a shirt, you need to determine how important the Arrow brand is to the Customer before you walk away from her. By asking the "gift or yourself" question, you get the Customer talking and thereby have the chance to really determine if Arrow is important to the Customer or not. It is entirely possible this Customer is only marginally interested in Arrow as a brand and just thinks that Arrow is what she should be looking for. Or she could be using Arrow as a generic name for brand name shirts. As a Professional Sales Associate, you

know you have many shirts in your inventory that are equal to, or better than, Arrow. However, if you just answer “no” to the Arrow question, you will lose the chance to show the Customer any shirts.

The quality of your first questions to the Customer is important, not only to maintaining the relationship with the Customer, but also in ensuring that you can match the right product to her needs by really determining what those needs are.

Open-ended questions

It is a good idea that all questions during the Needs Determination step be Open-ended Questions. Open-ended Questions are simply questions that cannot be answered with a yes or no or a one word answer. Remember, your job at this step is to learn as much as you can about the

It is a good idea that all questions during the Needs Determination step be Open-ended Questions.

Customer’s needs. You need to talk about 10 percent of the time (asking questions), and the Customer should be talking about 90 percent of the time. Closed questions such as, “Is this a gift?” are often answered with “no.” This ends or makes it difficult to continue the conversation. Open-ended

Questions, such as, “Tell me a little something about the person that the gift is for” or “How exactly do you want to use it?” or “How do you feel about this style?”, are answered with more information by the Customer. In order to be effective, you need to be prepared. A Professional Sales Associate develops an entire list (repertoire) of questions she has memorized and has immediately available for use.

When determining your Customer’s needs, think about your merchandise. Begin by selecting a really popular item you sell quite a few of each week. It might be a blouse, a

dinnerware set, a hammer, a watch — any product with which you are familiar. Ask yourself, what kind of Customer is generally interested in this kind of product. Is it important that the Customer be married, young, a college graduate or earn above a certain income? Should she have children or own a home? Will she be going to a party or attending school? What are some of the key things that would enable you to better sell the benefits of the product?

This takes a great deal of practice. At first, asking the questions will seem unnatural, not like you. Over time, however, you will acquire an easy style in asking the questions.

Nothing will leave my store until I know what it is for

Questions are critical in understanding the real needs of the Customer. If your commitment to the customer is to make sure that you fulfill her needs, then you also must make the commitment to the idea that, “Nothing will leave my store, until I know what it is for.” What you are promising the Customer is that, as a Professional, you will sell her only what she needs. You cannot do this unless you take the time to really uncover and understand those needs.

Listen between the lines

Do you know the average human can process about 950 words per minute? And the average human can speak at about 150 words per minute? What do you think happens when we are listening to someone who is talking at 150 words per minute, and we have all that space left over? In most cases, we use this leftover space to think of other things: what we are going to say back to the person, what we are going to do that night, how we are going to find time to count all that stock that just came in. We seldom

have problems filling up the space between people's words. It's the other things that we are thinking that often distract us from what others are saying. Have you ever been told by a friend in a conversation, "But I just told you that!" and you honestly did not hear it?

As a Professional Sales Associate you must become an excellent, active listener. This means that you become aware of your poor listening skills and actively engage your mind with the Customer. Here is one simple exercise that you can do with a friend or co-worker to help you understand the difference:

Speak a single simple sentence, with a question in it, to your friend. For example, you could say, "I had a tough time getting up for work today. I was exhausted. How about

**What you are
promising the
Customer is that as
a Professional you
will sell him only what
he needs.**

you?" Have your friend repeat your sentence word for word, then have her reply to it and add her own question. Then you repeat her reply, before you can answer her question. After several attempts, you will get some idea of how difficult it is to truly listen to everything that is being said. Generally as someone is talking to us, we are either busy formulating a reply or we are off in another

world. Yet to satisfy your Customer's needs, you must hear those needs. The average person can listen to a 15 minute talk that is of great interest to her and, 10 minutes after the talk, only remember about 10 percent of what was said. Imagine how much we remember if it was boring!

Yet every Customer you meet has the right to your undivided attention. This is where active listening comes in. Practice repeating what the Customer says to you, in your head, while the Customer is talking, and at the same time, try to formulate questions that will give you more information about that Customer's needs. Use those extra

800 words per minute, which your brain has available to actively reflect on what the Customer is saying. It is as if you were a detective charged with investigating a crime, but in this case the only crime that might be committed is failure to meet the Customer's needs.

There are not a lot of books available on active listening, though there are some college courses that cover the basics. See what is available in your local area and sign up for any course that promises strategies for better communication skills. The more time you spend in discovering and uncovering others' needs, the easier the sale will be. The best needs determination leads to the best sales.

Running it up the flagpole

When attempting to learn more about your Customer's needs, it is not a bad idea to show your Customer an item and get her reaction to it. This is called, "running it up the flagpole and seeing who salutes" or "running it up the antenna to see what the reception is". Whatever you call it, suggesting or showing an item at this stage can often help you get information from your Customer. It is as important to know what he does not want, as what he does want.

When you show an item, watch and listen to your Customer very closely. Learn from what she both says and does not say. Also, observe her expressions. If a Customer

The best needs determination leads to the best sales.

bursts out laughing or frowns at a certain product, that should tell you something. Remember, the suggestion technique is only used after you have exhausted your questions and are not getting any more information from the Customer. But be careful, sometimes Customers will interpret suggesting items as pushiness. Keep in mind that you are still relatively early into your relationship with the Customer, and the last thing you want to do is pressure her.

How Customers behave

The move from the Greeting to the Needs Determination step is a gentle one. Be aware that although you may now move closer to the Customer, do not rush towards her.

Also be aware that people often say things they really do

**People often need
time to get used to
a new idea.**

not mean. How many times have you said something and regretted it a moment later? Things like, “I will never go out with you again!” or “I hate you!” or “That’s the wrong color.” Although we can often admit we

have said something we did not mean, when another person tells us something, we usually assume it’s the absolute truth.

For example, sometimes a Customer will reject an item or price the first time she hears it or sees it. Have you ever gone shopping, seen an item and rejected it because it was too expensive or the wrong color and then, after seeing other items, came back to the first and realized by comparison it was not very expensive or that the color was fine? Once you realize people often say things they may not mean, you will not make the mistake of rejecting an item that the Customer first responds to indifferently or negatively.

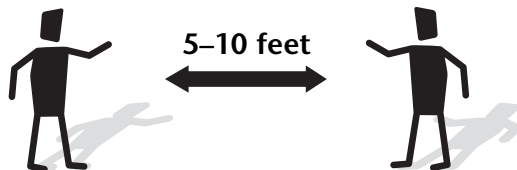
This is also related to a second truth about human behavior: People often need time to get used to a new idea. A Professional Sales Associate knows this and realizes, if she suggests an item to a Customer and the Customer rejects that item, it is not necessarily totally rejected. Customers can, and often do, change their minds. As a Professional equipped with this knowledge, when you hear the Customer say, “I don’t like that color.” or “That’s the wrong style.” or “That’s much more than I wanted to spend.”, you realize that the Customer can easily change her mind about this later in the sale. So do not make a big deal of it. Do not

emphasize the point — it will only lead to the Customer solidifying this thought in her mind. If you gloss over this apparent rejection early in the sale, you will be able to re-introduce the item later, without making the Customer feel that she cannot go back on what she said earlier. (This is entirely different from an objection at the end of the sale, which I discuss later in the book. You would never gloss over an objection at that point in the sale.)

Once again, people will say things they really do not mean, and people will take time to get used to a new idea. During the needs analysis stage, therefore, listen very carefully to what you are hearing and filter out what you, as the Professional, know may be caused by these two very human factors. You can and will often need to change the Customer's first thoughts and impressions during the sale.

Ideal distance

The ideal distance from the Customer during the Needs Determination stage is about five to 10 feet. Any closer, and the Customer will feel that you are “on their shoulder” and pushing them. Any further, and it is hard to carry on a conversation. If you are “running it up the flagpole”, you will have to be closer to the customer. Obvious exceptions to this rule would be if you were in a jewelry store showing a customer a ring or small item when you would need to be closer to do this. Remember the rules, but never forget common sense!



Practice

The most important part of determining needs is the questioning of the Customer during this stage. Have a standard set of questions that apply to each type of Customer who approaches any area of your store. Choose a particular display or presentation area in your store and imagine a Customer standing in front of this area. Write down three open-ended questions (questions that cannot be answered yes or no). The questions cannot be social — they must lead to information about the needs of the Customer.

For example, if I worked in a computer store and the Customer were looking in the hardware area at printers, I could ask, “Is most of your printing, business letters or do you print a lot of graphics?” Or “What kind of computer do you own?” The answer to either of these questions will give me more information about the Customer that will allow me to match a printer to her needs. Do not ask questions that do not give you product-relevant information. If it is not important that the Customer has children, then do not ask. If it is relevant, then ask. Eventually you should have questions for every area of your store.

Area of store: _____

Open-ended Question I would ask: _____

Open-ended Question I would ask: _____

Area of store: _____

Open-ended Question I would ask: _____

Open-ended Question I would ask: _____
