
CHAPTER 1



Getting Your Act Together before You Take It to the Selling Floor

It is so very difficult to draw water from an empty well.

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In a March 1989 article, Brian E. Kardon spelled out a new retail term called *consumer schizophrenia*. He noted that it might be the most important revolution in consumer behavior since the mass-marketing movement of the 1950s.

Simply put, the way people buy could be characterized as schizophrenic. For example:

- You own an expensive imported car but go to a self-service gas station and pump your own gas.
- You buy premium, designer ice cream at the market, and at the same time, buy the house brand dog food or unbranded tissues.
- You buy a custom-made suit, and then go next door and buy toys at discount.

Selling today is remarkably different than it has been in the past, for two major reasons. The first is that people tend to be cautious about where they spend their money, wanting the best quality and the best deal. Second, at the same time that people are careful about spending, there are more consumer goods than ever and greater use of the mass media to advertise them. And then there's the Internet. All this, of course, fosters more competition for the customer's disposable income.

People don't really *need* a luxury car or a diamond bracelet, but they *want* that kind of merchandise or desire to use it to express their love or their excitement and joy over special occasions. There is, after all, something exhilarating about finding exactly the right gift for someone or precisely the right piece for yourself. Your goal as a professional salesperson is to create a desire in your customers to want what you have. That is retail selling!

It is no secret that the ingredients for success as a professional salesperson can be summed up in three words:

1. Preparation
2. Preparation
3. Preparation

Preparing your emotional and professional self, knowing your merchandise and price structure, and understanding what your competition is doing—these are all essential to successful selling.

The Not-So-Fun Stuff

In 1974, I became a pilot. Why? I have no idea. It just seemed like the thing to do. In studying to become a pilot, one of the first things I learned was to prepare for each and every flight by doing a precheck, or preflight inspection. The precheck encompasses tasks basic to a pilot's safety, such as checking the gas and oil, making sure the compass is working, seeing that there are no dents or holes in the fuselage, and making other fundamental checks that will keep the plane from falling out of the sky and resulting in pressed aluminum. It really sounded like a good idea to me.

Taking care of these essential items is what helps a pilot grow to a ripe old age. There's a saying in aviation: There are *old* pilots and *bold* pilots (a *bold pilot* referring to a pilot who gets into a plane without checking on the fundamentals), but there is no such thing as an *old, bold pilot*. Similarly, there are salespeople who flourish and salespeople who are foolhardy, but there are no foolhardy salespeople who flourish for very long.

Many salespeople only want to learn about the perceived important steps of selling, such as how to close, handle objections, and add on. No one likes to do paperwork or stock work; those parts of the job are tedious. But every job has tiresome tasks, which simply have to be done in order to succeed.

In retail selling, performing repetitive and seemingly boring, painstaking precheck chores lay the groundwork for your success on the floor.

Professional retail selling starts with preparation and knowledge; these, in turn, give you self-confidence and control over the selling process.

Some of the elements of preparation take only a few minutes but have to be done every day. This means that you need to arrive at the store well before your shift begins so that you will have time to prepare your plane for takeoff.

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Some elements of preparation require a greater investment of time and may have to be undertaken after work or on days off. Long-range preparation, which we will discuss later in this chapter, will help you with your overall approach to your work, as well with your daily precheck.

Whether daily or long range, preparing yourself will help you be the best professional retail salesperson you can be and make you less likely to face a “crash landing” when you are with a customer.

Customer Service Points

Retail is a funny business. We all know that companies that offer high levels of good customer service not only stay in business but also, in most cases, flourish. Those who don't . . . don't. Simple, right?

Wrong! I am consistently amazed as I travel around the world at the number of retail salespeople who offer little or no service to their customers. We all have certain stores or restaurants that we like to frequent because of the service we receive from the people who work there: the waitress at the local coffee shop who calls you by name and knows exactly what you mean when you say, “The usual, Alice,” or the dry cleaner's clerk who knows exactly how you like your clothes cleaned and pressed *and* makes sure that they are done that way every time, on time.

I recently went to buy a gift for a close friend. This particular store was very busy, so I had the opportunity to observe the salespeople in action prior to making my purchase. There were two salespeople working behind the counter. One was a middle-aged woman, very well dressed and, at first glance, very professional. The other was a younger woman, in her early 20s. She was not dressed to the hilt like her coworker but did have a professional appearance.

As I waited, I observed customer after customer walking away, frustrated by the first woman's actions. She didn't smile, gave short, terse responses to questions, and so on. In contrast, the younger woman was ringing up sale after sale. She had a smile from ear to ear. She used the customers' names. She took the time to gift-wrap the purchase of a man who was in a big hurry. Whom do you think I chose to buy from? No question! There is no substitute for good, basic customer service—period.

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NO THANKS, I'M JUST LOOKING!

I have included 20 customer service points that, through the years, have been proven the most effective in ensuring that your customers feel relaxed and comfortable with you and your store. Try them. Dare to be different.

1. Satisfy Every Single Customer

Retail can become a trap. If you don't sell the customer you're talking to, there is likely to be another one who you can sell, which will make life worth living again. The trap is never being forced to confront why you didn't make the sale with the first customer. It is always more fruitful to learn from your mistakes than from your victories.

Can you look me straight in the eye and tell me without blinking that you have gone for the sale or gone the extra mile with every single customer you have started a conversation with? I doubt it. Shoppers are not and have never been an interruption of your work: they *are* your work. Heck, they're the only reason you show up in the first place.

I truly believe this is one of the reasons why I have been successful. I could care less *what* people were going to buy, just that they did. Each one was an opportunity to expand my customer base. And besides, I get cranky when I don't go to the register a lot. The question is, "How good are you?" The answer lies in your ability to turn shoppers into buyers at a high percentage, not just how many dollars you put into the register.

From management's perspective, hundreds of thousands of dollars are spent on merchandising, location, and advertising. It flat-out makes sense to try to sell everyone who comes in, doesn't it? Additionally, as a financial consideration, there is a cost attached to driving each customer in the door. For example, in the piano or hot tub business, it could run as much as \$200 in advertising and promotion costs per shopper to get them to come in. In traditional mall stores, the figures may be as low as \$10. In either case, for each person you do not sell, that amount is added to the next customer who comes in. So if you didn't make the sale on our piano shopper, that \$200 cost is added to the next shopper to come in. That next selling opportunity now costs you \$400! You can see how easy it is to go out of business because you didn't try to sell everyone.

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2. Keep Personal Problems Off the Floor and in a Drawer

When *you're* the customer in someone else's store, you expect prompt assistance and courteous treatment—an indication that you are important. Your customers deserve, demand, and expect no less than that, regardless of how you feel personally on a given day.

It's not always easy to adjust your mood, especially if you had a flat tire on the way to work, your teenage children picked an argument with you last night, or you're in the doghouse with your manager. Nevertheless, your customers are entitled to the same *very best* from you that you are entitled to when you are in someone else's store.

Shoppers can't be expected to care about your personal problems, and if you let your bad day show through, you will leave a poor impression of yourself and your company. The ability to perform regardless of problems has always been a benchmark of the professional.

3. Don't Congregate on the Selling Floor

Picture this: You're in the store on a day that's so quiet you've been listening to the clock tick for amusement. About midmorning, you and your colleagues stand around guarding the register, and get involved in a heated debate about last night's big game. You're so caught up in this vital discussion that you continue talking, although you see that a shopper has come into the store.

She doesn't look like a promising customer; she's not focused on any particular item, seems to be browsing aimlessly, hasn't asked for help, and her hair isn't exactly right. You and your colleagues continue with your conversation; the shopper roams through the store for a while and then leaves. Is this any way to run a railroad?

It's easy to get involved in a conversation with other salespeople, especially when things in the store are slow. However, that's not what you're there to do. When customers need help, they often feel uncomfortable about interrupting salespeople who are obviously engaged in personal or even business conversations. Customers who are uncomfortable about interrupting may wind up feeling angry about being ignored.

You can't always control when a customer will come in, and you certainly can't bring him back if he leaves feeling displeased. You *can*

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always find time to “chew the fat” with your friends and colleagues, but let’s be clear: the selling floor is not the appropriate place to do it, particularly when there’s a customer in the store. You never want customers to feel that your conversations with fellow sales staff are more important than *they* are.

The rule for today and every day is: when you’re on the floor, there’s nothing more important than your customer. In theory and in practice, the customer always comes first. There should be an understanding among all floor personnel to stop the conversation when anyone walks in, regardless of how important it is.

4. Acknowledge Every Customer’s Presence

Every customer who walks through your door needs to be greeted in some way—at the very least, a simple hello. Doing this conveys a friendly feeling to your customers, making it clear that you know they’re waiting, and suggesting that you soon will be available to assist them.

A customer may not always seek out a salesperson when she needs help. Perhaps it’s because she feels embarrassed or because she doesn’t want to disturb a salesperson that looks busy. Or maybe she just doesn’t like salespeople, period. Even if you’re occupied with something else, giving each of your customers quick recognition while they wait for your attention helps them develop a positive attitude toward you and your store. Acknowledging the customer makes her feel welcome and lets her know you’re glad she came into your store.

To really understand this point, think of the last time you had a party at your house. You’re in conversation with one of your guests, and out of the corner of your eye, you see a friend come into your house. Even if you can’t leave the current conversation, I’m sure that, with either eye contact, a nod of the head, or a wave of the hand, you acknowledge the presence of your latest guest in your home. Should your business home be any different?

Noticing customers also has a beneficial side effect: it is the number-one deterrent to theft in retail stores. When you make it clear that you have observed the presence of people who have come into your store, they are less likely to attempt to steal any merchandise.

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5. Never Qualify a Customer

Have you ever met someone you didn't like right off the bat? Have you met someone you liked as soon as you said hello? This chemistry is very important in the world of selling.

Did you ever judge a customer upon entering your store as someone who probably wouldn't buy, most likely couldn't buy, never will buy, and can't even spell *buy*?

OK, I admit it. I have always looked at customers and prejudged whether they were going to buy and how much I thought they would buy. I still do it, with a twist. There may be only one difference between the way I act now and the way some salespeople still act. Now, my opinions don't have the slightest effect on the way I treat or serve each customer. I have been burned too many times earlier in my career to continue making judgments based on appearance. There is nothing like dropping perceived losers, only to have a rookie salesperson, who doesn't know *you should judge people*, sell them the store.

The top-10 list of prejudices is, in no particular order:

1. Quality of clothing
2. Age
3. Gender
4. Foreign accent or language
5. Local accent
6. Race or religion
7. Mannerisms
8. Facial features
9. Weight
10. Hairstyle

And one more that didn't make the list may be the biggest prejudice of them all: the customer who comes in three times a week and has never bought anything.

The fun I have now is seeing if my initial reaction was right. It's a game. I make my guess when they first walk in, then sell like crazy, no matter what. After they leave, whether they bought or not, I see if my

initial reaction was correct. If you're a saleaholic like me, who wants to sell to everyone, you might want to play the game like I do.

6. The Invasion of the Customer's Personal Space

Take special care to sense what your customer regards as his personal space. Some people are outgoing from the first words you exchange; others feel uncomfortable when you get too close—physically or otherwise. Before you become too friendly, you have to earn the customer's trust. Don't gamble.

Personal space may be defined as the closeness you are comfortable having with someone, physically and verbally. With some, their physical personal space extends about two feet. With others, being in the same store with you at the same time is too close. In opening the sale, we will talk a lot about physical distance and its implications.

Verbally, there is something you really want to avoid, so that you don't violate your customer's personal space. Don't use your name or ask the customer for hers at the beginning of a presentation. Your customer may feel that her name is very personal. The name exchange at the beginning may very well be too pushy for a lot of shoppers, who would like to remain anonymous until they determine whether they like what they see. However, during probing or the demonstration, it becomes very important. Timing is everything.

I use the *friendly test* to get the customer's name and get an indication of how formal or casual I should be. Offer your name first, and see if the customer reciprocates. Simply say, "By the way, my name is Harry," and wait for a response. There are three possible responses. If the customer says, "I'm Jane," she is comfortable with your calling her Jane. If she says, "I'm Ms. Smith," you can call her by name, but you had better be a little more formal. Or she might say, "That's nice." What you've got here is a customer who is ultra-resistant, and you have your work cut out for you. If she doesn't offer her name in return, you must respect her personal space.

The point is that some people are just more casual and comfortable with people right out of the gate. I know I would never answer to, "Mr. Friedman." I'm just Harry to anyone I meet. We had a company party to celebrate our tenth year in business, and I invited my dad to come. As I was introducing him to my staff, someone said, "Nice to meet

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you, Mr. Friedman.” My dad replied, “I’m not Mr. Friedman. That’s my father!” I guess it’s genetic.

As we’ll examine in opening and probing, perception is a big part of positive communication, and you can learn a great deal about customers from body language and the way they respond to your comments and gestures. Many a sale has been lost by violating a customer’s space—unconsciously!

7. No Sir! No Ma’am!

It would be typical of me to dispute a long-standing tradition of retail salespeople, wouldn’t it? Well, it’s time to do it again! Avoid using “sir” or “ma’am.”

In a recent quest to buy some dishes, I went to a store that is considered to be a little more upscale, influenced by the false perception that in a smaller, boutique-type store, I would receive better service. After selecting a pattern and finally tracking down a salesperson, I asked if I could get everything I wanted today.

The reply was “I’ll check, sir!” I cringed. The salesperson returned and said, “No sir, we don’t have all of the pieces in stock, but we can order then for you, sir!”

I can’t stand to be called “sir” by anyone at any time, for any reason—period. Is it me, or is it a common reaction? Every day I wake up, I feel 18 until I look in the mirror, only to find it isn’t so. I know people are just trying to be polite, but I’ve asked thousands of people sitting in my classes if they like being called “sir” or “ma’am,” and the vast majority—like 95 percent—all hate it, too. It makes younger or middle-aged people feel older and reminds more mature people of the age they’re trying to hide. And it’s particularly condescending when a salesperson older than you calls you “sir.” Trust me, drop the “sir” and “ma’am.” Just be courteous, and leave it at that.

8. Be Empathetic—Not Sympathetic

You are in business to sell customers, not open a psychology practice. Crafty customers have all sorts of stories they can tell to trap you into believing the price is too high, that they need something different, or that you have to make exceptions. Sympathy is feeling sorry for the way your

customer feels. Empathy is understanding how he feels (like walking in his shoes), but not buying in. You can see the danger in not knowing the difference. Many a sale was lost by a salesperson who felt so sorry for the customer that he or she didn't feel it was right to make the sale.

If a customer is vacillating about whether he should spend money on an item in the same month that taxes are due, the kids need new shoes, and the dishwasher just bit the dust, most salespeople sympathize, telling him they understand and expressing their hope that he will come back again when things are better. I, however, would empathize by saying, "I know what you mean. Whenever I feel like I shouldn't spend money, the only thing that seems to make me feel any better is spending more. Why don't you go for it?"

9. Listen to Your Customers' Ideas—Not Just Their Words

The customer may not always know the correct or technical terms for the merchandise she wants. Salespeople often take great pride in knowing industry jargon. This can create a dangerous clash. As an example, a customer once asked me what type of DVD she had to buy to play my sales training videos. It would have been easy for me to say the discs are *DVDs* and the machine is a *DVD player*, but why? Why make her wrong? Of course, it is important to let her know the difference—but after I make the sale, not before.

Words are tricky. There is no guarantee that two people hearing them will believe they mean the same thing. By knowing your products and really listening, you can decipher what your customer means and serve her, without being right or losing a sale.

It can also get you out of some tight spots. I did some sales training for a group of furniture stores once and visited one of the stores right after the session. Of course, the salespeople challenged me by handing over the very next customer who walked in. I had never been in the store, I didn't know where anything was, I was completely out of my element, and I was ill equipped to serve any customer. But I had eight salespeople eager to watch the master die right in front of them. I had to take the challenge.

This lady walked right up to me and said she was looking for a davenport. I'd never heard the word *davenport* in my life. I am a native Californian, and apparently this was a Midwestern way of saying *sofa*.

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I said, “Well, that’s great. What type of davenportos have you seen before that you really liked?” She said, “Well, I really want a seven-foot one this time . . . ” and I immediately ruled out lamps as a possibility. Ideas, not just words. Don’t forget. (By the way, I sold her!)

10. Use Words to Express—Not Impress

Each industry has developed words to better describe things and to prevent misunderstandings and confusion. For example, in the computer business, there are words like *megabyte* and *RAM*. In jewelry, there are *inclusion* and *refraction*. These words make it very easy to communicate with people in the same industry. They are, however, words that may confuse a customer who is not up to snuff on industry jargon. Most of the time, customers won’t ask what the words mean if they are used in a presentation. This would show a weakness and vulnerability. So, instead of clearing up the misunderstood words, they leave.

Suppose a guy decides to take up jogging. He hasn’t bought a pair of athletic shoes in over 15 years and has no idea how expensive and technologically complex they have become. He tries on a pair, and the salesperson mentions they have an EVA midsole. The customer hears the word *EVA* and immediately feels unqualified to make a decision.

He leaves and finds out what kind of jogging shoes his neighbor wears, and he then buys the same kind from someone else. If the salesperson hadn’t taken for granted that every customer knew what *EVA* meant, he could have explained its benefits and been the friend who helped the customer make the buying decision, instead of the neighbor.

Keep your language simple and understandable. If you need to use an industry word, make sure you explain it at the same time. For example: “This MP3 player has 32 gigabytes of memory. That means it can store about 8,000 songs.”

There are two exceptions to this rule: (1) salespeople who are women or young-looking men and (2) technically educated customers.

Society thinks that women don’t know anything technical. (Nothing could be further from the truth.) So women need to establish themselves as experts by throwing a little jargon around early in the presentation. And I don’t know if I want to spend \$5,000 on an entertainment system from a guy who doesn’t shave yet. If he starts talking about total harmonic distortion, I not only like it, I trust him more.

With customers who are technically educated, speak at or slightly above their level occasionally, to gain their respect. But all the while, you should be complimenting them on their knowledge. "This is great. I finally have someone to talk to who knows what I'm talking about!"

11. Customers Love Power

There is a certain feeling of power customers have when walking into a store. They *are* the customer, and therefore feel that they are in charge. For years, they have heard the adage "The customer is always right." But we need them more than they need us, so we will make them right. Customers are people. And people can be obnoxious, rude, and loud and can push every negative button you have. I must have lost thousands of dollars telling these people how wrong they were.

Now, I believe I have the solution. Sell these people about twice the amount of merchandise they came in to buy. I am on the floor to serve, without an opinion of my customer. After all, I'd rather be wrong and rich than right and broke. Wouldn't you?

12. Never Interrupt Your Customer

If you are anything like me during a presentation, you can't help occasionally being so enthusiastic that you interrupt your customers to make a point or correct them on their thinking. The negative side effect to this is a possible lost sale.

People think and feel they are important. And they are. When you interrupt, you are saying that they are not important. Wait your turn, and you are more likely to make the sale. I used to put a Band-Aid around my finger so tightly that it hurt, just to remind myself to shut up and let the customer talk.

13. When Customers Are Talking, They're Buying

The average person speaks at a rate of 125 to 150 words per minute. You are physically capable of hearing upward of 1,000 words per minute. So, when someone is talking to you at 150 words per minute, what do you do with the other 850 words left over? You probably get distracted, and concentration becomes very difficult. I suggest that you take on the burden of

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listening more than talking, and you will have a more involved customer. Whether you believe in evolution or creation, it's interesting to note that you have two ears and only one mouth! Research shows that when a customer is talking, he is, in a sense, buying. It's when he is quiet that you're in trouble.

14. Conversations Should Be Two-Way

Have you ever tried to get into a conversation with a customer who finds talking an almost impossible thing to do? Quality questions have always driven a fine presentation. Your ability to ask pointed-enough questions to draw out your customer is essential. When all else fails, the easiest way to get a customer to start talking is to close the sale. I know this sounds ridiculous, but no matter where you are in the conversation, this puts the burden on the customer to tell you how he feels about your offer to sell.

For example, you're making great points: "Another great thing about this . . ." No response. "And another thing . . ." Silence. You finally resort to, "Shall I wrap it up?" Zoom! They start talking in a flash.

15. Get Your Customer to Like and Trust You

Bob is at a party, and the host introduces him to someone. "Bob, this is Mary. Mary, this is Bob." Instantly, Mary goes on a verbal tirade. "Bob, you wouldn't believe how my day has been! I started off this morning with a flat tire, and that was only the beginning . . ." and on and on. After a while, as Bob politely gets out of the conversation, the host asks him how he liked Mary. Bob's answer is "Yuck."

The host then introduces Bob to someone else. "Bob, I would like you to meet Sara. Sara, this is Bob." Bob says, "Hello," flinching and fearing another Mary. Sara says, "Bob, how are you?" This time, Bob goes off and talks nonstop for 15 minutes, without Sara saying a word. A little later, when the host asks Bob how he liked Sara, he responds, "She was terrific." The host asks what she said, and Bob responds, "I don't know, but I like her." The moral of the story? The easiest way to get your customer to like you and trust you right away is to let him do the talking. After all, you already know what you know. What the customer knows is important, and your job is to get him to verbalize it.

16. Always Look Professional

As soon as a customer enters your store, before anything has been said to her, she has begun to form an opinion of the premises, the merchandise, and you. A shopper's feelings may be affected by many things beyond your control, such as her frame of mind, personal problems, or preconceived ideas about your company. That is why it's especially important that you do your best with the things that *are* under your control.

Both the store and the people offering service within it must have an appropriate personal appearance. Obviously, a store that looks like it's in need of straightening is not as inviting as a store in which the displays and showcases are neat, clean, and bright. The salespeople, too, need to be well groomed, dressed appropriately, and sporting a friendly and welcoming manner.

I got my first job in retail when I was 15½ years old. It was at the height of the long-hair craze, and I had to make a choice between peer pressure and sales. I really wanted the long hair, but I wanted money more. So I can understand how youngsters don't want to give up trendy looks or clothing for a minimum-wage job.

Not long ago, I had to deal directly with this problem at a sporting goods retailer that employed about 80 percent high school-age kids. We had an open forum about the dress code at the store, and I said, "I don't care if you have orange spiked hair, as long as it's in a perfectly straight, neat row!" They got the point. The postscript to the whole story is that we finally let them decide what the new dress code should be. They came up with black pants and ties. Go figure!

I look at it this way. Look and dress as professional as you would like to be. I have a tendency to give customers respect and therefore dress up a little more than is normal in retail. I have never believed that you should dress like your customers to make them feel more comfortable. One bicycle store I visited had salespeople wearing cutoffs, tennis shoes, and T-shirts advertising rock bands I'd never heard of before. That's great if you're selling to someone who is under 20, but what if I want to come in and drop \$1,500 on a bike? You've got to dress to offend the smallest number of people possible. It is, at the very least, worth experimenting with.

I also know that if I were to return to a retail floor permanently right now, I would always wear a red bow tie and red suspenders. That would make me different. I'd have a distinctive look. Then, even if customers

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didn't remember me by name, they'd at least be able to ask for the guy with the red bow tie. What makes you stand out?

17. Stay in Control

Left to his own devices, a customer will run around the store, causing all sorts of confusion, most of the time resulting in a NO SALE. Control can be maintained in any sales presentation if the following things are in place:

- Total understanding of the selling process
- People knowledge
- Product knowledge
- Complete knowledge of what you have in stock and where it is

Winging it is the problem. When you wing it, you have a very difficult time controlling the sale and making your customer feel comfortable enough to buy.

18. Certainty Is the Key

The amateur *wonders* if customers are going to buy. The professional *knows* they are going to buy, and it's only a matter of what and how much. Certainty comes from the accumulation of knowledge and experience. I know a lot of people in sales with 20 years of experience. Unfortunately, it's really one year of experience, repeated for an additional 19 years. Others grow each year and learn from mistakes and the acquisition of new knowledge. People who choose to shop with you have a conscious or even subconscious desire to own what you are selling. So, unless you have a crystal ball, assume everyone is going to buy, and start your journey into finding out what it is.

19. Sell with Enthusiasm, Whether You Love It or Hate It

Selling merchandise you like is certainly easier than selling anything you dislike. You may feel such personal enjoyment from certain items that you never want to show alternatives, or you may be bored by the same old stock and only want to show what's new.

What matters is what the customer wants, period—not what you like or think is best. The moment—the second—you can sell the merchandise that you personally dislike with as much enthusiasm as the merchandise you love—that is the moment you can begin to call yourself a professional.

You may love an item in your store because you're fascinated by the process of getting it from the raw state into the wonderful shape it assumes on your shelf. As an example, you may think it's fascinating that diamonds are formed after millions of years in the depths of the earth, and go through miners, cutters, wholesalers, and distributors before they appear on the gorgeous hand of your customer.

Suppose you sell jewelry and watches. Your customer may have saved for years to buy an item you're not crazy about. You may find yourself disappointed or indifferent to a purchase that seems commonplace. Nonetheless, your customer came to buy what he wants, and you can't let your opinions influence what your customer regards as important. If your customer wants a watch, you need to present a watch demonstration with as much energy and enthusiasm as you would have used to show off that diamond.

Whether your customer came to buy something boring or exciting, something out of fashion or in the latest style, something outrageously extravagant or inexpensive, keep your opinions to yourself. Listen to your customer, and show enthusiasm while you help him select the items that *he* wants or needs.

Side note: It sometimes seems that the store's buyers were on some sort of drug when they selected the merchandise that hit the floor. However, here is my theory. First, a manufacturer thought it was good enough to make. Second, a buyer agreed and bought it for the store. I figure there has to be a customer out there somewhere who agrees with these other two. It is absolutely my job to find that third person. Until the buyer asks me what to buy for the store, it is my job to sell—not to have an opinion on it. And, frankly, if you want to know what kind of merchandise I like best, it's the merchandise that sells the fastest.

20. Dance According to the Music Played

A great salesperson does not relate to customers in the same rigid way each time but has the skill to adapt to situations and to the style and

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tempo of each shopper. You don't need to reinvent yourself every time you are talking with a new customer, nor do you have to develop multiple personalities. Nevertheless, a customer who is doing a foxtrot may not respond very well to a disco beat, and someone who is aggressive may not like a very conservative approach.

I remember teaching a young new salesperson how to open the sale. He watched as I used a very flamboyant approach with a couple in their early 20s. When it was his turn, he used the same approach for a couple in their 60s. No sale. The point is not to qualify your customers, but it's a tremendous benefit to at least look at them and to hear them, to color your presentation in such a way as to make it comfortable for them.

I approached a man one day and asked him how he was doing. He turned on me and said, "You're the third man in a row that's asked me that question." I looked him dead in the eye and said, "Hey, buddy. I don't know where else you've been and who else you've talked to, but I'm a nice guy." Then I turned to all of the other salespeople in the store and said, "Right, gang?" They all responded in unison, "He's a nice guy!" The man laughed and eventually bought. Talk about dancing to the music played!

The Four Occupations of the Professional Retail Salesperson

Many years ago, I found myself like Walter Mitty (a person who dreamed of doing other jobs), pretending to be several different people while I was on the floor. It was a lot of fun pretending. I found that as a professional salesperson, I had acted at times like I was in other professions on the floor. When I aligned myself with these other professions, I saw a significant change in how successful I could be. Here are four of the occupations I used more often.

The Painter

Truly, the only thing that separates your store from others is you. You know . . . the one who's reading this. And the only thing that separates you from anyone else in retail is your knowledge of your products and people and the wonderful words you use to show that knowledge and express yourself.

As a painter uses a brush and canvas to create an exhilarating work of art, salespeople use words to create excitement and desire for their products. Whether you are describing the brilliance of a gemstone, the singular advantage of a camera's zoom lens, or the style and flash of a particular garment, the words that make up your vocabulary need to paint a picture that will really put a buying twinkle in your customer's eye.

This means that you have to make an accurate assessment of your customer so you can communicate with her in a manner that will make her feel comfortable with you. A customer whose style is Van Gogh may not feel relaxed with a salesperson who is fixated on Picasso.

Painting a word picture of your product requires a thorough knowledge of your products and services. How will you be able to say that your merchandise is durable enough to last a lifetime or that it's the latest Paris fashion unless you have taken the time to learn what you need to know about it?

Equally important to your assessment of the customer and your knowledge of your merchandise is your ability to express yourself articulately. Your skill with words will enable you to adapt the product to your client's unique needs and to perform your demonstration in a way that is dynamic, engrossing, and exciting to the customer.

Here's an example of a demonstration statement made by a student of mine in a sales class, talking about selling shoes, and a simple change I made to create excitement. The student said, "These shoes are all leather, which is flexible, making them very comfortable." I changed it to, "You know, when you wear these shoes, you're going to have a smile on your face, because one of the great things about these shoes is that they're soft calfskin leather. And as you wear them, they will mold to the shape of your feet, giving you a custom-made feel. It would be kind of fun to walk around in custom-made shoes, don't you think?"

Remember, a dictionary is vital. And a thesaurus is not a type of dinosaur.

The Architect

Over 10 years ago, I developed a logical sequence of steps for making a sale that have served me and hundreds of thousands of other retail professionals all over the world very well. They are affectionately known as the *Seven Steps to Success*. Don't be fooled by the fact that there are eight listed

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below. The precheck is an introductory step and hasn't ever been included in my seven steps, but it certainly isn't the least important.

1. Precheck
2. Opening the Sale
3. Probing
4. The Demonstration
5. The Trial Close
6. Handling Customer Objections
7. Closing the Sale
8. Confirmations and Invitations

Each step has a purpose and a goal to be achieved. And as these goals are achieved, you earn the right to move to the next step, then the next, and then the next. Just as an architect creates a building by starting with the foundation and building up, a logical sequence of steps will turn shoppers into buyers (the subject of the next several chapters). To get the most out of a customer, you have to have a plan and follow it, not unlike following a blueprint.

Why does the customer want the product? Is it for personal use, or is it a gift? What are the age and gender of the person who will be using it? What will be done with it? Will the item be used conventionally or in some new and unusual way? Or do you find yourself just demonstrating, without the answers to any of these questions?

As the architect of the sale, you want to develop relationships with your customers and draw out information that will allow your demonstration to turn shoppers into buyers. The reason for gaining this information prior to making a demonstration is to build a solid sale. Without it, you may be missing the point, skipping the logical sequence or trying to install the ceiling before you have put in the floor.

My favorite example of how not to be an architect is in the beginning of a sales presentation. Let's say you work in a shoe store, and you are finishing up with a customer. Another customer comes up to you with a shoe in his hand, taken from the shelf, and proceeds to ask if you have the shoe in a size 8½. What would you do at this point? Ninety percent of all retail people would go to see if they had it in stock.

Here is where salespeople break the rule of being an architect and don't do things according to plan. Bringing out the shoe is a demonstration. What happened to opening and probing? Did you say, "Hello," or, "How are you doing today?" Can you tell me why the customer wants the shoe, or what he will be wearing with it? Were his feet even measured? Clerks go to get things on orders from the customer. Professionals build and develop relationships and match merchandise with the customer's desires; they are not there just to step and fetch.

In *Opening the Sale*, you will learn the value of a person-to-person conversation. This conversation will set the mood for the rest of the presentation. This is mandatory if you are going to eventually break resistance and develop trust.

The Counselor

I have become a counselor on the selling floor, as a result of feeling that every weird, unhappy, deranged, or complaining customer wanted only me to help them! Sound familiar?

Counselors get paid lots of money for having clients recline on a couch and tell them their problems, as the counselor continues to say three words over and over: "Tell me more." Can you imagine? Two hundred dollars an hour for three words? However, it is an effective way of getting people to tell you about themselves and their needs.

"Tell me more" is useful for eliciting information about purchases customers wish to make. For example, if you can learn about a customer's underlying need for the item he came in to purchase, you may be able to suggest something that will work better than what the buyer originally had in mind.

Empathy is a key word in selling today. Using "tell me more" conveys empathy and gives customers a nonthreatening opening to say what's on their mind. It also enables you to see things from the customer's viewpoint. When you are able to stand in their shoes by remembering how *you* feel when *you're* a customer, your patrons will relax and feel better about permitting you to assist them.

"Tell me more" is particularly helpful when a customer comes to return or exchange something. You know the type. The minute this customer gets in his car to drive to your store, he starts building his story in anticipation of a fight. He slams his car door and starts hyperventilating

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on the way in to see you. You say “Hello,” and off he goes. “This thing doesn’t work. I hate it. I was sold something I didn’t want.” And so on. Look him dead in the eye, with a sincerely concerned look on your face, and say, “You’re kidding. Tell me more.” I guarantee you he will calm down to a reasonable tone, so you can handle the problem. And even if you can’t, draw as much anger and frustration out of the customer as you can, and then turn the problem over to someone else to handle. It’s unlikely the customer will vent anger with such a vengeance all over again.

Since you represent the company, someone coming in for the purpose of returning merchandise may be waiting for you to be belligerent. Your skill with the *tell me more* technique may turn a customer predisposed to be angry into one who has positive feelings about you and your store. It also presents you as someone who is representing the customer, rather than the store, which, in the long run, is much better business.

The Showbiz Personality

Have you ever given or, as a customer, received a less-than-professional presentation? I’ll bet you have.

Now, think about how often an entertainer has to do the same show or sing the same song. Tony Bennett, as an example, is a performer who has had a successful career for many decades. His staying power is due in large measure to his talent. However, his long-term success is also the result of his willingness to give a first-class performance every time he performs on stage.

Can you imagine how many times Tony Bennett has sung his hit song “I Left My Heart in San Francisco”? I would wager that he has sung it during every performance, every year since making that ultra-famous recording. And he’ll continue to do so for the rest of his life. Every time he performs in front of an audience, he’ll encounter someone who will be disappointed if he doesn’t sing that song.

I remember going to a Neil Diamond concert (I have all of his albums). In nearly three hours, he sang 36 hit songs, all of which I knew. But he didn’t sing the one song that I was counting on, and the evening was a little bit less than I had hoped for because of it.

Do you think that Tony Bennett or other performers enjoy singing the same songs on demand, over and over again? No doubt, they’d rather move on to the challenge or diversity of singing new songs, just as you

might like to put your older merchandise on the back shelf and demonstrate your new products.

Your customers are entitled to receive a SHOWTIME PRESENTATION every single time—period.

It doesn't matter how often you've shown the same item or how commonplace you think the product is. Your demonstration has to be as fresh and exciting on the hundredth or the thousandth time as it was the first time you showed it.

Special note: I feel the *showtime* spirit is so important that our company, The Friedman Group, had SHOWTIME pins made up that every employee must wear at all official functions. And whenever they are asked, "What time is it?" employees must respond, "Showtime!" or it personally costs them \$25. If you don't believe me, ask me or any employee of our company what time it is, and if we don't respond with "Showtime"—you'll have a check on its way that day (you can't ever count on anybody having cash!).

The Daily Precheck

- Has a customer ever asked you for an item, and you went to get it—only to find it wasn't there?
- How about the customer telling you the item is less expensive down the block, and you don't know if it is the same item or if it is less expensive?
- Have you ever been stuck because a price tag has fallen off and you can't give the customer a price?
- How about not having tape in the register or running out of charge slips? Ouch!

These are a few of the hundreds of issues that cause you to lose sales. We are and will continue to be in a world of competitive retailing.

It's difficult enough to make sales, let alone lose them because of a lack of information or preparedness.

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If the store manager hasn't thought to prepare a checklist to get you ready to sell prior to your shift, then I suggest you do one yourself. Remember—knowledge is power.

There are four general categories of things you can do to really enhance your bid to be successful. Working on these every day may make the difference between success and failure.

How Knowing Prices by Memory Will Benefit You

You're on the floor talking to a shopper, and just when the conversation looks like it might be warming up, your customer asks the price of something in your showcase. You don't even have a clue as to what the price *range* is, let alone the specific price, so you have to get into the locked showcase to find out.

Meanwhile, the customer starts to look at something else or decides he hasn't got enough time to wait for you to fiddle around, or worse, figures you've probably never sold one of these items before, since you are obviously unfamiliar with it. When you don't know the price, the probable result is diminished customer interest—even if the price turns out to be a pleasant surprise.

Let's face it—the customer can and often does go from hot to cold while you search for the key or expend time to get into the showcase to look for the price of your merchandise. You keep the momentum of the communication going if you know the price without having to look. It's not worth risking the loss of the sale because you have not committed your prices to memory.

Here are 15 other reasons why memorizing prices is so important to you:

1. It enables you to show products in the customer's price range.
2. You're able to switch more easily if you are out of stock in a requested item.
3. It saves a lot of time.
4. It makes you look like the professional your customer expects.
5. It increases your personal confidence.
6. It increases your credibility.
7. You can give quicker and more efficient phone quotes.

8. You can write up a sale if the tag has fallen off.
9. It increases security—you are aware of switched tags.
10. You can bump up the sale more easily.
11. It helps when adding on.
12. You can better spot missed markdowns, markups, or incorrectly priced items.
13. It increases customer confidence in you.
14. It lets you know if you are in line with the competition.
15. You can quote payments on financed merchandise.

Number 15 is one of my favorites. When financing is an option, the difference between a \$3,000 item and a \$3,500 item may be only a few dollars a month. You're no longer selling \$500 more, but maybe only \$5 more a month. It is essential that salespeople who deal with financing know or be able to calculate payment information rapidly. The less effort you put into quoting, the less effort it will seem to be for the customer to make payments.

How Knowing Your Competition Will Benefit You

Learning everything you can about what and who is competing for the customer's dollar is another way to make yourself ready for successful professional selling.

Never be so bold as to think you don't have any competition. Not only are you being challenged for your customers by people selling the same product, there are also an enormous number of other consumer goods in the marketplace that offer competition for the disposable income your customer could be spending in your store.

Many things compete for customers' attention today, and the less you know about where people can spend their money, the less of an edge you have in your ability to convince a buyer to purchase your product.

Consider these questions:

- What is the competition saying about your company?
- What is the competition selling?
- How do your merchandise or sales policies compare to those of your competition?

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- Does the competition offer service, and what is the quality of it?
- What is the competition's pricing structure?
- Is the competition offering sale prices for the same or similar merchandise?

These may be only some of the answers to seek in your particular retail situation. With the answers to these questions, you can handle a customer's questions about these issues. There are also personal reasons for knowing about the competition, such as increased confidence, which can be a tremendous boost to your sales, as well.

Visit your competitors' stores. Request their catalogs. Talk to the people who have bought from them. Read all of their ads in the newspaper. Accumulating this kind of information is vital to the success of any sales professional, because being aware of what's going on around you puts you in a superior position.

Want some more reasons why knowing your competition will benefit you? Here they are:

- The customer won't know more than you do about the competition.
- You become able to switch from products they sell to products you sell.
- You will know how your promotions stack up (timing, pricing, etc.).
- You will know what competitors say about your store (never bad-mouth them, however).
- You can get merchandise and display ideas.
- You can inform the customer of what they will see.
- You can spot trends in your industry.
- You will know what brands are carried.
- You will gain industry expertise.
- You will know their credit options.
- You can offer competitive pricing.
- You will increase your personal confidence.
- You can get to be the expert your customer expects you to be.
- You will increase your chances of getting the customer to buy now.

How Product Knowledge Will Benefit You

There has been a long-standing controversy over whether product knowledge is more important than sales knowledge or vice versa. The fact is that you shouldn't be choosing one or the other, but making a commitment to both.

Professional salespeople have to be proficient with the techniques and strategies of professional selling and also knowledgeable enough to answer customer questions about their merchandise with confidence.

Don't short-change yourself. With diligence, it doesn't take that long to learn what you need to know to answer a customer's questions intelligently. What are the special features of a particular item? How does one piece of merchandise compare to another of similar price or quality? How does your product work? What are the warranty provisions offered by the manufacturer, or special warranty features offered by your company? What special care or maintenance does it require?

Come on, don't you just hate it when you shop in a store and you know more than the salesperson—and you know nothing? Shoppers expect you to be an authority on what you're selling, and they appreciate it when you turn out to be the expert they expected when they came in.

Here are 15 reasons why product knowledge will benefit you if you work on it every day:

1. It makes you the professional your customer expects.
2. It gives you personal confidence.
3. You're able to show pride in the product.
4. You can handle objections more effectively.
5. It saves time.
6. It allows you to switch with confidence.
7. You can determine potential add-ons more efficiently.
8. It allows you to assist the customer with preparation or indoctrination.
9. You can offer cleaning or maintenance suggestions.

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10. You can inform regular customers of new products and innovations.
11. It allows you to answer technical questions.
12. It elicits trust from the customer and gives you credibility.
13. Your demonstrations will flow more smoothly.
14. You can give custom-made presentations.
15. You can better satisfy the customer's needs or requests.

Take responsibility. If you don't have a system in your store for learning product knowledge, start asking fellow salespeople, your store manager, or the buyers, or write to the vendors. Don't let anyone stop you from being the pro you want to be.

How Walking the Store Will Benefit You

Do you remember your first day working at the store? Was it confusing? Did you feel disoriented? Customers would ask you where something was, and you felt helpless, hopeless, and out of control. These feelings were the natural result of not having knowledge of the physical store, its inventory, displays, and paperwork. After a few weeks, you seemed to get the hang of it, and you felt much better.

But the store changes all the time. New merchandise comes and goes, and displays change. There is a need to keep up with changes and continue to exert that control over the store.

In most great professions, people do a walk-through prior to "doing their thing." The surgeon checks to see if the scalpels are all there and laid out. The plumber rechecks the truck to make sure the tools needed for the job are there. The schoolteacher makes sure there are enough copies of the test to give out. The singer does a sound check. And so on. How about you? Showing up for work at 10:00 AM when you have to start at 10:00 AM won't cut it. It may seem like preaching, but I can tell you how out of sync I have personally felt when I didn't get to my location early and scope out my turf.

Here are 15 reasons why walking the store prior to your shift will benefit you:

1. It lets you know when you need to restock.
2. You can put misplaced merchandise back in its place.
3. You will be aware of new product arrivals.

4. You can quickly find appropriate merchandise for the customer.
5. You can spot maintenance problems or needed housekeeping.
6. You can correct in-store signage.
7. You will know which items have been marked down or moved.
8. You will know how many "hot items" are left in stock.
9. You can prioritize things that need to be done that day.
10. You can spot the need for display changes or shifts.
11. You can find out about new in-store promotions and media advertisements.
12. You can find and match up mismatched items.
13. You will be aware of potential or actual theft problems.
14. You can take care of lighting needs (lights out, misdirected spots, etc.).
15. You'll be ready to do business (paperwork and register supplies stocked).

There Is No Substitute for Preparation

The skills you need to succeed as a professional retail salesperson, like the skills needed to become a successful doctor, lawyer, or plumber, can be mastered through the commitment of time, energy, and effort.

The key to success is organization and preparation, for which there is no substitute. Preparation means:

Performing a daily precheck, tasks designated to organize you every day on the selling floor and make you more confident and knowledgeable.

Your success depends entirely on your communication skills, your knowledge, and your enthusiasm.

When you are prepared, you'll know what you're on the floor to do:

SELL

You'll know the best time to do it:

NOW

And you'll know exactly what time it is:

SHOWTIME!

Hot Tips and Key Insights

- Your success as a salesperson depends entirely on *your* ability to open up customers, to communicate with them, and to satisfy their needs.
- Too many salespeople are professionals who often act like clerks. They do an adequate job of executing routine tasks, but they don't develop special skills, *go the extra mile*, do their homework, or cultivate their clients.
- Selling today is remarkably different than it has been in the past, for two major reasons: people tend to be cautious about where they spend their money, and there are more consumer goods than ever, which fosters more competition for the customer's disposable income.
- The secret ingredients to success as a professional salesperson can be summed up in three words: preparation, preparation, preparation.
- In retail selling, performing painstaking precheck chores lays the groundwork for your success on the floor.
- There are 10 *daily* elements to the precheck: satisfying every single customer; keeping personal problems outside the store; avoiding congregating on the selling floor; acknowledging every customer's presence; never qualifying a customer by appearance; respecting the customer's "space"; not interrupting the customer; always looking professional; showing the merchandise, whether you like it or not; and dancing to the music played.
- *Long-range* precheck activities involve the commitment of a larger amount of time and energy, and may have to be done after work and on your days off.
- A great salesperson does not relate to customers in the same way each time, but has the skill to adapt to situations and to the style and tempo of each shopper, acting as painter, architect, counselor, and show-business personality.

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- Getting out on the floor every day and interacting with customers builds your confidence. On a slow day, use the time you have to enhance your capabilities for when things pick up again.
- When you are prepared, you never lose sight of what you came to do today—sell; the best time to sell—now; and exactly what time it is—**showtime!**

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