

## Part One: Initial Thoughts

*Luxury means paying tribute to customers seeking perfection from creations while being waited on by exceptional salespersons. Selling and service are at the forefront of every luxury brand. Selling is a professional art, and only excellence is acceptable from luxury sales staff. If you are seeking enjoyment and fulfillment, you should consider becoming a salesperson in the world of luxury.*

—Michel Guten  
President, Institut Supérieur de Marketing du Luxe;  
Vice-President Délégué du Comité des Champs-Élysées;  
Former CEO, Lancel;  
Former Vice-Président, Cartier France

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# The *Vital Role*

## of the Sales Ambassador

1

The publicity photograph in the magazine shows a stunning, sensual, young woman with a top brand-name handbag on her shoulder. The handbag is chic and beautifully designed. While traveling into town, the potential buyer observes this image and makes a mental note of the name of the impressive creation.

She takes time during her lunch break to go to the boutique located in an area where there are many other luxury brands. There, in the window, is the same handbag, looking even more appealing than in the advertisement.

The potential buyer does what many of us do when we see something we want. She starts to justify why she should have it. She finds at least half a dozen good reasons why she absolutely needs, deserves, has to have that handbag.

She walks to the door to enter the boutique.

The next few minutes are crucial to the brand. The company has spent time and money with marketing, designers, craftsmen, and a variety of experts to choose the materials and make the creation, not to mention logistics, packaging, quality approval, testing, and the list goes on.

Now it is the Sales Ambassador's turn. If he fails, everything that has been done before has no meaning or purpose.

Through the glass door the Sales Ambassador can see the woman entering. Just as important as seeing her is understanding that her expectations are extremely high. She has already begun to have a strong desire to own the beautiful piece. But when the contact is not at the right level, the bubble can be easily burst. If she sees the brand as overpromising and underdelivering, the magic fades.

The Sales Ambassador knows that it is essential to have a presence and approach that is elegant but friendly, one that will quickly put the woman at ease in the universe she is entering. With a welcoming smile on his face, he approaches as the doorman opens the door for the woman.

*Customers expect service to be at the same level as the creations brands are promoting.*

## In the eyes of the customer, the Sales Ambassador *is the brand*

# 2

For each contact with a customer, it is important to remember that the Sales Ambassador *is* the brand for the customer. When your demeanor invokes positive feelings in the customer, the chances for completing a successful sale are increased. The better the customer feels about the entire process, the stronger the possibility of completing the sale will be. The term “Ambassador” is important here. The Sales Ambassador truly represents the brand.

When a contact is negative, the whole brand is seen as negative. Consider the Sales Associate who becomes exasperated or indifferent with a customer, who in turn then leaves angry and/or disappointed. The Sales Associate was the brand for the customer, a brand that has failed in her eyes.

Upstream, a great deal of energy and work has been put into bringing the creations to the customer. When bearing in mind just the designing, creating, marketing, and communication required up to this point, Sales Ambassadors understand how critical their role is in the whole process.

The Sales Ambassador’s positive role is essential for the brand. If the creation does not sell, the whole process grinds to a halt.

***Sales Ambassadors have a vital role to play in the brand’s success.***

# Loyalty begins

## 3

## with the first contact

Where does loyalty come from? From trusting someone. There can be no loyalty without trust. Trust is something that is built with each contact: *“I can trust this person a little more.”*

Therefore the opportunity of building trust with someone begins by putting that person at ease right from the first contact. Is this contact with the Sales Ambassador honest and sincere? How does the Sales Ambassador show that she really cares about the person? Could other helpful advice be shared?

Helping customers find what they want and providing solutions for their needs are both parts of building trust and loyalty.

There are fewer things more fragile than trust. Although it may develop little by little over a period of time, it can be shattered with one blow. One contradiction, one insincere comment, one dishonest, or even seemingly dishonest situation, can destroy in a moment a trust that has been meticulously built over time.

Sales Ambassadors know that loyalty is the key to long-term success. They make sure that trust remains something that is built over time, and that any possibility of trust being broken is eliminated.

***Building trust is the best way to build loyalty.***

# Keep in mind how 4 you like to *be treated*

It's almost too simple. It closely resembles the old Golden Rule: "Do unto others. . . ." Sales Ambassadors start with their own personal impressions. They evaluate the service they receive in situations all the time.

Here are some of the frequent responses that people give when asked the question "*Why are you loyal to certain places?*"

*"They remember my name."*

*"The Sales staff is never pushy."*

*"I feel good when I enter."*

*"It is a positive experience. Even if I do not buy, people are glad to see me and help me."*

*"The staff is honest and sincere."*

*"The Sales Ambassador sent me a 'thank-you' note."*

Customers will also reveal the way they like to be treated. We all have different preferences for how we want to be approached. Sales Ambassadors observe and analyze behaviors. For example: "Is this someone who likes to be left alone for a while or who would prefer more immediate assistance?" The ability to have a flexible and adaptive style is essential in building customer relationships with a variety of people.

The strength of a brand and the quality of its creations do of course play a role. But much more derives in large part from the quality and service given by the Sales Ambassador.

*How do you like being treated?  
Develop an adaptable approach.*

There are customers

# 5 *behind* customers

When people shop, they are often searching for something that goes beyond minimum expectations. They may want more than simply to go to a place displaying objects. When they shop, they want an experience.

Years ago, a hairdresser we know had a very good experience at a luxury jeweler's. A bracelet given to her by her grandmother needed repairing. While she was there, the Sales Ambassador let her try on a beautiful diamond ring. There was no attempt to sell it to her. It was just for fun, the pleasure of seeing it on her finger.

Eight years later, she still tells this story. For eight years she has sent hundreds of customers to the jeweler. Once the contact became an enjoyable experience, she became an Ambassador of the brand.

A strange story? Of course not. It happens every day, all over the world. It happens with every pleasant experience. People remember the pleasure. When you make customers' visits metamorphose into experiences, they, in turn, give you access to their network. They happily share their positive experiences with people they meet and know.

The Sales Ambassador understands that there is more to a successful sale than having the customer make a purchase. Each customer visit is seen in the long term, opening the door to other opportunities for the customer to return and share the experience with family, friends, and colleagues.

***Develop your network fast through making each customer contact an experience.***

## The incredible *loss* from one *lost* customer

6 Losing a customer means more than losing one person. It also means losing access to their universe and the people they know. In other words, their network is no longer available to you.

A customer goes away dissatisfied because of a poor welcome and unacceptable service. If his children, parents, colleagues at work, friends, people he plays sports with, or even someone he meets at a conference somewhere needs something you could supply, he won't suggest going to see you.

But it is worse than just cutting you off from dozens of good contacts and potential customers. Unhappy lost customers, even the ones who do not complain directly to you before leaving, will spread negative information about the poor service they received.

*When one customer leaves unhappy,  
you lose dozens of contacts and opportunities.*

# The *emotional* side of the purchase

When considering a person's buying habits, it is important to understand why certain creations, which obviously go beyond their functionality, are being purchased.

People don't buy a sports car to get from A to B, a luxury watch to know what time it is, or a beautiful hand-stitched travel bag because they have things to carry.

If they simply wanted to get from A to B, they would drive any car or take public transportation. If they just wanted to know what time it was, they could buy an inexpensive watch. If they only wanted to carry things, they could use a plastic bag.

They buy these objects because design and style have an uplifting impact on their lives. People feel the pleasure that comes from owning and being in contact with the quality and beauty of the creation.

Customers also want to make a statement about who they are and show their tastes. At times, they make purchases to be seen as belonging to a certain group. Other times, the reason can be distinctly the opposite, they want their purchase to set them apart from everyone else.

A Sales Ambassador's role is to understand that customer requests are more than the mere functionality of an item. A gentleman once purchased a necklace for the simple pleasure of having it on display in his living room as a work of art.

When the Sales Ambassador moves into the realm of dreams and emotions, the exchanges that take place in this universe are very different.

***Go beyond functionality. Be a dream seller.***

## The *island vacation* or the *earrings?*

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Sales Ambassadors understand that they are competing against a variety of choices, including the possibility that the person may not buy at all. Competition is everywhere. Take travel agencies and the possibilities of a vacation as an example.

A couple has been together for five years and they are now thinking very seriously about how to celebrate their upcoming wedding anniversary. They visit a travel agency to obtain information about taking an island vacation—two weeks off, lie in the sun, and just relax together. Because they both work, they could use the rest.

Early one evening, they are out walking and stop to look in a window of a well-known brand's boutique at a beautiful pair of earrings. The woman cannot hide how much she likes them. Her grandmother (whom she adored) had a similar pair.

The next day, the man decides to visit the boutique. He and his wife are hesitating on whether they should really take two weeks off. Maybe it would be a better idea for him to buy his wife those lovely earrings and then take her out to a nice restaurant. The price? Well, it's pretty much the same. As he walks into the boutique, in his mind he cannot help thinking "*The vacation or the earrings?*"

In the boutique, the salesperson does not take him seriously. She does little to welcome him and nothing to find out why he is interested in the earrings. The man soon has the impression that he is unwelcome. He is treated so poorly that he feels uncomfortable and leaves the boutique.

The following week, the couple flies off to their island vacation.

***Remember, you could be competing with a travel agency.***

## The price is *only one* of the factors

One of the key points that all Sales Ambassadors understand is that price is only one of the reasons people buy.

But forget Sales Ambassadors for a moment and ask yourself the question “Do I always go to the cheapest place to eat, buy the cheapest clothes, use places that offer the cheapest services?” The answer is, of course, no, you don’t.

And why not? Because buying and selling is more complex than just what the price says. You go someplace because that “something else” is happening there. There is an energy; there are good quality offers in both creations and services.

This does not mean that price-oriented people will not come to shop at your place. But if they have only come to you for the price, then they will leave for the price, as soon as they find cheaper somewhere else.

Offer them the best service you can and avoid lowering the price. When you do give a lower price, you undervalue the quality, the savoir-faire, and the image of the brand.

*Impeccable personalized service  
justifies the price.*

# 10

## The “Wow” comes when you go beyond expectations

Along with being consistent, Sales Ambassadors look for ways to deliver a delightful and unexpected level of service. They are constantly finding ways to create an unforgettable experience with each customer. Often, it is the little things that make this happen.

Some examples:

- ◆ While visiting India, a Sales Ambassador brings back a special package of the customer’s favorite tea.
- ◆ An after-sales service center that fills a rush order so that the customer can take the piece with her on a trip.
- ◆ The delivery of a gift that would normally not be available for an anniversary, but because of exceptional service, arrives just in time.
- ◆ A restaurant owner who offers without charge photographs of customers celebrating an event.
- ◆ A luxury hotel that prints complimentary business cards for their guests with their name and contact numbers at the hotel.

Everyday opportunities exist to create an unforgettable moment, so that customers share with others the incredible service they received.

*“You won’t believe what happened to me! I was in (the name of a boutique), and the Sales Ambassador . . .”* followed by the story of their astonishing experience.

*To create the “Wow,” exceed expectations every time.*

# 11 *Discretion and confidentiality*

A customer who has established a person-to-person contact with a Sales Ambassador wants conversations and purchases to be kept confidential. The longer a Sales Ambassador knows a customer, the more the customer will share with him. This information, sometimes very personal, is given because trust has been established between both parties.

We mentioned earlier how fragile trust is. Discretion on the part of the Sales Ambassador is essential in maintaining the relationship. Along with personal information, purchases should also be kept confidential. Beyond the obvious security issue, in particular with high-priced creations, the question of who the purchase was made for could be very sensitive. A Sales Ambassador might be told one thing, whereas something else happens.

Customers dislike finding out that there were conversations about them behind their backs. They begin to doubt and wonder what was actually said. So when the opportunity to divulge something about Mr. X's purchase last week and how much his wife is going to like it comes up, the Sales Ambassador simply makes it perfectly clear that discretion is one of the rules of the house.

What else is the Sales Ambassador saying when she does not gossip about another customer? She is telling those doing the asking that she will also be discreet about them. Customers know that if there is talk and gossip about others, then they will be talked about as well.

***Building long-term relationships requires discretion.***

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## Story 1

A businessman had been coming to the luxury Japanese hotel for more than a decade. Every year he booked one of the prestigious rooms at two different times during the year, meaning that he stayed 30 days per year in the hotel and also used their spa facilities. The gentleman was well known by many of the staff who greeted him by his name. For a special occasion, the VIP customer booked a table for several of his closest friends for a dinner party. The evening was wonderfully run, the food delicious. But when the guests left after thanking their host, they were each billed for parking their car in the hotel's parking lot. One friend happened to mention this to the host a few days later. The VIP customer called the hotel to find out why they were billed, and happened to have someone on the telephone who did not recognize who he was. "Sir, we are only following policy and when people use our parking, they are charged for it!"

How do you think this concluded? See page 149.

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