



By Rick Hill

## Sales & Marketing

# Selling: Timing is everything

**W**hen do you try to “close” the sale with your prospect? How often do you ask for the order? Should you be pushy? When does an aggressive personality turn into annoying attitude? The huge misconception in sales is that by constantly asking for the order, you can hoodwink the customer into buying. Industrial or large purchase sales are based more on timing and trust than on aggressive closing. In other words, you don’t have to be a jerk to sell.

### Old Joe

In our small town, there is a motorcycle dealership run by a rather gruff, coarse old man. Joe has built it over the last 30 years into a nice shop with a full line of bikes, tractors, trailers and snowmobiles. He is the only authorized service center for his franchise in 40 miles. Over the years several people have made offers to buy this franchise from Joe. The prospective buyers see the potential that Joe has turned away with his attitude. The offers have been generous, but for 20 years, Joe never sold. Finally people stopped calling and wrote off Joe as a man who would rather die than sell. Until last year, when two buyers were successful in getting Joe to sell.

Did they hound Joe until he gave in? No, they had never offered any money to him previously. Were they loaded with cash and made

him an offer he couldn’t refuse? Oddly enough, their offer was less than some in the past.

This partnership had one huge advantage over the competition: They had taken the time to ask Joe questions. Why did he not sell? What did he want? Where was he planning on taking his company in the next five years? They were more interested in understanding Joe than in their own goal of buying his dealership.

They found out that Joe had been holding on to his business not as a lifestyle or for monetary gain. Joe was saving his business for his son. Joe’s son loved motorcycles. He was a wheelie-popping, cycle-racing fanatic. Through his shop, Joe and his son connected, bonded and dreamed. The partnership learned all this about Joe and never made an offer. They knew the timing was wrong.

Time moved on and, sadly, Joe’s son passed away. All of a sudden, Joe no longer needed the shop. It was finally time to sell. The partnership waited respectfully for Joe to grieve and then sent a small note letting Joe know they were still interested in his business if he was ever interested in selling. The business sold quickly, with little fanfare, about two months later.

This sad story drives home the point about timing. By listening and understanding we come to realize when to approach the customer

is often more important than how. No matter the money, aggressive tactics, or pushy attitudes, it wasn’t the right time for Joe to leave his business. The key to great sales is knowing when someone is ready to work with you, not forcing them too.

### Pushy people lose

So, what is the truth? Do pushy salespeople get more sales? Everyone has been accosted and fooled by these aggressive con artists at least once in their life. We all remember the feeling of embarrassment when we realized we had been conned. Most of the woodworkers I know don’t want to be in sales because they believe they have to change into this aggressive con artist just to get people to sign a contract.

First, the truth. In the book *Spin Selling* by Neil Rackham, studies through the Huthwaite Corporation have shown that on small purchases, being pushy and constantly closing works. Aggressive, constantly trying to close the sale tactics works on small purchases. Rackham surmises that on small purchases, most people feel it is easier to say yes than to have an argument with the salesperson. That is why cell phones are sold on contract instead of as stand-alone units. It is easier to say yes to a \$79 phone and a small monthly contract

than pay the \$500 it really costs. This strategy also works when salespeople hide large purchases, like cars, by breaking them into small amounts. If they sell you on the small \$199 monthly payment using high pressure tactics, it is easier to accept than paying the whole \$22,000 at once.

Many consultants in sales offer a Selling System that guarantees results. I have read many books on sales systems that all seem to use some corny acronym. One was called, IMPACT (Investigate, Meet, Probe, Apply, Convince, and Tie-it-up); another was The CARE Method (Connect, Assess, Respond, Energize); and of course the classic con-artist method, ABC (Always Be Closing). In selling their sales systems they promise that if you keep pushing, you will sell. Actually, the opposite is true for larger purchases, like kitchens, homes or new bathrooms.

When it comes to asking for the order, con artists fail in large sales. In fact, the study showed that out of 54 buyers, 34 of them were less likely to buy when they detected that the seller was using "closing techniques." The Huthwaite studies found that "the bigger the decision, the more negatively people generally react to pressure." Large sales involve large commitments from the buyer, and the more the seller pushes, the more scared the buyer becomes.

### **Knowledge wins trust**

In the cabinet and woodworking business it is common to ask a lot of questions. The customer and the designer have so many different options, styles and layouts available that the initial questions are the key to satisfying the customer. These constant questions aid in building trust before making a large sale.

When you have spent the time to understand the customer's need, then you do not need to be pushy. They will ask you to help them.

It is essential that as a woodworker, you delve into the true need of the customer. The more

questions you have about style, placement, finish and use, the more the customer will see that you understand their need. Once they see that you understand, the sale will lead to its own conclusion.

## Training

The key to closing more sales for large purchases is not in a system like IMPACT, ABC or CARE; it is in training yourself to listen and ask questions. Whether you are on your own, or training a dozen people at a time, you must first focus on the types of questions that will find the customer's true needs: How many kids in your family? (Durability); Do you entertain a lot? (Style); How many cooks in the house? (Function); What are your hobbies? (Use); Where is "family central" in your house? (Size);

What is a normal breakfast routine? (Ease of use).

Then switch to "Why" questions to get at the true emotion of the buyer. Why do you entertain a lot? To show off the house to the boss, or for family get-togethers? Why do you like a window over the kitchen sink? Why do you like granite? The "Why" questions get to the heart of the customer's thinking and establish you as an understanding, involved provider.

Train your staff to make sure they ask the right questions. From these questions they will involve and assure the customer about your company. Once you have established the trust in the customer's eyes, closing the sale will be obvious to both of you.

## Being there

The best advice I can give to increase your sales timing is to increase your knowledge about your local market and customers.

Start by making a list of questions that you need to know about every prospect. Focus on "Why" questions: Why do they want to remodel? Why are they attending this home show? Why did they stop and see your showroom? "Why" questions lead us to the reasons and emotions, not just the money. When you establish the types of questions that lead to your ideal prospects, then you can start marketing and advertising to that segment.

Our goal as woodworkers is to create an aura of trust, responsibility and creativity about our business. We want the business to flow to our door from our efforts and past customer referrals. These referrals will give us the knowledge of when to ask for the business, not just how. ■■

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