

Increase sales through sales style flexibility

Have you ever wondered why in some selling situations the sale comes together so effortlessly?

At other times it feels like nothing appears to come together and the outcome is a lost sale. You know that you followed the sales process, correctly applied your selling skills, and did everything right? Well so you thought.

You could put a great sales outcome down to the fact that you are a good salesperson, are well experienced, have a long-term trusting relationship with the client, and your pricing is competitive. When you don't achieve your sales objective do you use excuses such as the prospective client hadn't dealt with your company before so therefore they felt unsure... your competitor offered a larger discount or other purchasing incentives to win the business? All these reasons may or may not be true, but to get straight to the point are they really valid? The question to ask yourself is would these reasons stand up to professional scrutiny if evaluated by a third party?

Based on my experience as in sales coaching, I have found that many salespeople firmly believe they are flexible in their sales style. As stated in Chapter 9, this is the ability to adapt how a salesperson can sell the way their client or prospective client wants to buy. Generally the more inexperienced salespeople will state that "*It's common sense*" when the subject of style shifting is discussed. Let's dispel this here and now. The problem with this belief is that common sense isn't used commonly and what is perceived as common sense to one person is not common sense to another. There is also the additional problem of how do you objectively evaluate a skill when common sense is so subjective? The answer is you can't.

To state the obvious, one of the core traits required to succeed in sales is the ability to influence others, in fact as many people as possible. Everyone has some flexibility, with some more than others, to influence but this is dependent on their personality, skills, motivation and attitude.

Most of us have two or three innate sales styles that we use consciously and/or unconsciously. What this means is if we restrict ourselves to these sales styles our success will hinge on finding enough clients who will buy the way we sell. To maximise our sales success we need to develop a wider range of sales style flexibility. Being effective at applying sales skills is not enough to become a stand out sales performer.

We need to be able to identify a wider range of client buying behaviours and then intentionally shift into a selling behaviour that makes the client feel comfortable in our presence. This is easy to read and understand - but be warned, in reality it can be quite challenging because with some clients you need to implement behaviours that you have never used or very rarely use.

One of your greatest challenges is working with a client who is very task orientated. They want you to get to the point quickly, provide summarised facts, and are not interested in small talk. The sales interview that you would normally like to spend 45 minutes to an hour can be reduced to 6-7 minutes. The client will in some cases tell you to "*get on with it*" and possibly wind up the sales call if they perceive that you are too slow or are only wasting their time because there is no business value in your sales call. You are now out of your comfort zone and can feel quite tense when you can't create the environment you feel comfortable in.

By knowing how to style shift you will still feel uncomfortable but you would know how to adapt to this selling situation and be better placed to win the business.

Developing greater sales style flexibility doesn't mean you will be someone you are not - but you will learn more about yourself. This is because you are able to extend your range of behaviours, meaning you are able to effectively adapt to more people. This in turn will impact directly on your sales results.

So how do you shift your sales style? This is a three-step process:

1. Put yourself in neutral

Because we are so often rushed going from sales call to sales call we can find ourselves in an autopilot mode to get through the volume of work need in order to get the sales result. This is when we miss sales opportunities because clients who should be buying don't. There is no point in increasing the number of sales calls unless the extra activity equates to more sales. Slow down! Before your next sales call, take a deep breath, exhale slowly and relax. You have now put yourself in neutral, are out of auto pilot and have taken back control of your situation. You are no longer thinking of the previous sales call or the next one. Being in neutral is like using a manual gear box in a car - it allows you to switch to any gear instantly. From neutral you will be able to focus on identifying the buying style of the client.

2. Identify the buying style of the client

This is done by noticing the behaviours of the client during the questioning phase of the sales call. What you need to ask yourself is - is the client more task or people orientation, introverted or extroverted and verbal or non-verbal? If you have identified the client to be:

- Task orientated, extrovert and non-verbal their buying style is Action
- Task orientated, introverted and verbal their buying style is Analytical
- People orientated, introverted and non-verbal their buying style is Harmonious
- People orientated, extroverted and verbal their buying style is Expressive.

3. Shift into the right sales style

Once you have identified the client's buying style you will need to adjust your sales style. 6

If you have identified the client's buying style as Action as a guide you will need to:

- Give them summarised facts and the big picture
- Respect their judgements
- Support them to reach specific goals
- Cope with unwanted details
- Cooperate fully with them

If you have identified the client's buying style as Analytical as a guide you will need to:

- Give them detailed information and specs
- Ask for their opinions
- Treat them with respect
- Do quality work/presentations the first time
- Not interrupt their work

If you have identified the client's buying style as Harmonious as a guide you will need to:

- Make them feel important and effective
- Be patient during the sales process
- Be kind, considerate, and thoughtful
- Help them with important decisions
- Value them as individuals

If you have identified the client's buying style as Expressive as a guide you will need to:

- Listen; give them the opportunity to speak
- Admire their achievements
- Be influenced by them in some way
- Take care of details for them
- Value their opinions; offer alternatives

From a sales coaching perspective, I have learnt the most common reason preventing salespeople from style shifting is that they don't implement the first step in the process – putting themselves into neutral. Always start with step 1.

Selling is a competitive and demanding profession. The greatest differentiator and competitive edge you can create is having the ability to style shift and this is because many salespeople either don't know how or haven't developed style shifting skills. Possessing this skill will provide you with more effective client relationships and lead to improved sales.

6 Terry D. Anderson, Ph.D., Ken Keis, MBA., and Bruce Wares, 2008, Sales Style Indicator, Consulting Resource Group International, Inc

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Kurt's expertise is in sales strategy, sales management development; group structured sales training and infield sales coaching. As a sales person he has successfully sold products and services in 4 major market/product segments: new product sales, consultative sales, relationship sales and retail. During his selling career he created sales records for three companies in two industries and won many other sales awards for outstanding performance.

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