

Nurturing Good to Great Salespeople



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What have you witnessed in salespeople that are so off-putting that you would rather forego the purchase and not look further? I recently visited a popular retailer that sells cameras in Singapore and they were obviously more interested in selling the very high end cameras rather than the mid-range ones that are more commonly used by amateur photographers. Upon deciding the brand I would settle for, I asked the salesperson if he would lower the price a little and his response was... "Why, not good enough is it? Check around and come back" before proceeding to stare at me. What audacity!

A second experience I had was in one of the many doughnut outlets in Singapore. After requesting for two donuts, the girl at the cashier said, "Oh, only 2?" Yes, these are people at the counters who are so used to muttering these scripts that make you want to throw the donuts at them. But do these salespeople recognise the consequences of their scripts, etched so deeply in their style of response that breaking such a pattern

might amount to massive withdrawal systems?

Authentic Human Touch

This article was not written to guide people on sales or customer service scripts and appropriate responses because that is the easy part. Robots could do a better job in fact because they won't foul up. With robots, you can expect consistency like how a machine brews and dispenses your coffee just the way you want it. In fact, robots can be programmed to mesmerise you.

But what sets great salespeople apart from robots is the human factor – we have emotional content, an interplay and exchange of feelings mashed and blended with a tone that moves and moulds itself into the encounter which is then delivered artfully. How do you replace that golden authentic smile? The kind that you genuinely feel the person really has your best interests at heart? The patience, grace and charm that deliver the message, "we will be truly happy if you greatly benefit from being serviced by us". Those words, chosen fittingly for the occasion, combined with the appropriate facial expression that

unifies sincerity, respect and integrity, are the key to customer loyalty. Can the metallic smile of a robot excite you when you know that it was programmed by someone not even behind that metallic frame? Maybe not, but there certainly had been times when you were served so badly by salespeople you would prefer dealing with their metallic counterparts.

Limitations of Many Sales Programmes

Quite often, sales programmes focus on skilling and drilling exercises focused on changing behaviour without shaping cognitive and emotional development. Trainers and consultants are equipped to show you how to do it when the situation arises but not all situations can be planned. Ultimate competence happens when one is balanced in understanding their own limitations and accepting them. By the same token, they are familiar with their strengths and are adept at using this to their advantage to offset their lesser abilities.

A well rounded and successful salesperson needs to build interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies.

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The intrapersonal competencies are often the missing pieces in many sales programmes, i.e. competencies that help build internal resources like resilience, awareness and optimism, amongst others. These are often overlooked in favour of shaping essential behaviours that will close the sale like product knowledge, assertiveness, asking effective questions and closing tactics.

Essentially, the overall focus is usually on the sales cycle and building behaviours that will help salespeople connect with their customers, using the right words and keeping the customer involved and informed (behavioural conditioning). That is great for convincing them of the product but the whole encounter is destined to falter when there are unpredictable moments – like when situations go awkward, when the scenes are not scripted, when there is conflict and the salesperson's hot buttons are pressed by the customer. Such encounters call for extra 'reserves' – which, if not trained, sales deals can often fall flat.

Hence EQ Training is not about training one to behave in a certain way but nurturing and building resilience, strength and intentionality and that involves knowing why one does what he or she does and doing what is intended. Practising this builds authenticity and sincerity – something all customers crave for.

A good programme has a mixed blend of intrapersonal and interpersonal lessons which consist of reflection, activities, role play and application because it is about building EQ from the Inside-Out, i.e. mindset and heart set before the skill set.

Below are six qualities that should be covered in any sales programme. Salespeople need to master these qualities:

1. Emotional Literacy

This refers to understanding the language of emotions and how to tune in to them and other people's emotional states. This nurtures sensitivity and an understanding that all emotions serve a purpose whether or not it makes you feel uncomfortable. How you choose to respond to your emotions is what determines your state and physiology. Ignorance about this results in snowballing of problems and eventually causing them to get out of hand.

2. Self Awareness

Being your own radar and observing yourself is probably one of the least likely habits for one to start practising especially if one does not recognise that by doing so, one could surface aspects that stop people from reaching a higher potential. A good sales programme helps people recognise the mask they are wearing and why they wear it. It would literally have them see who they are showing up as and

examine how much needs to be adjusted for better results. Do they portray who they really want to portray or are they portraying what their defence mechanisms are revealing?

3. Optimism

Optimism can be learned and one way to do it is to use Optimistic Language. Well known psychologist Albert Ellis talks about how words influence our feelings and hence our being. For example, just saying "maybe" and "I'll try" gives one reasons to put in 50% effort as opposed to "just do it" and "I will".

4. Navigating Emotions

Navigating emotions is about using your emotions to your advantage. Aristotle said that, "Getting angry is easy but getting angry at the right time, place, period and for the right reason is difficult". How can salespeople capitalise on learning from anger and frustration, sadness, disappointment in their day to day work? How can the fuel that exists during such incidents pave the way for wisdom in a particular incident? If we stay with an emotion long enough, we'd understand the root of such feelings and this allows us the opportunity to obtain the wisdom that is otherwise not available if we had escaped from the pain of holding on to it. By the same token, some hold on to it too long and do nothing. This is even more destructive.



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5. Intrinsic Motivation

How do you marshal the pillars in your life – basically your values? Are you selling and being aligned with your strongest values or are you ignoring them? If you are doing the latter, then stress builds as you are not living or experiencing passion, excitement and being in the zone hence creating dissonance and loss of energy.

It is important to find purpose in our vocation. When the purpose or mission of a salesperson is clear, energy and direction blitzes past most obstacles. When passion is at its highest, people find every way to make things work for themselves and others. So, organisations need to learn how to help their salespeople sell while addressing their values and guiding pillars.

6. Empathy and Being Present

As salespeople, reaching your targets is fundamental to your success but in order for this to happen, one should talk less and listen a lot more. Customers want to be heard and they must feel that you know what they want. This can only happen if you attempt to look from their lenses, strive to experience their challenges and make an effort to feel their discomfort and annoyance. Your responses will be a lot more genuine whether you notice it or not. While you may walk away thinking you could fool anyone with your pretence if you fake it, you'll never know how bad a job

you did until you notice dwindling sales.

These top six qualities of expert salespeople work like top class engines. It drives competent selling and differentiates the good from great performers. Can one build this overnight? No, but practice, practice, practice and this will become second nature to you.

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