**Ideas Sell Better than Salespeople**

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Sure, you can master all the sales skills and have abundant product knowledge and industry experience, but you will sell even more (and better) when you have good ideas to bring to the table. Ideas that make a client’s business better make you a better salesperson instantly. Let me explain.

One night after dinner, my friend Tom and I were reminiscing about our sales careers. Tom started his career as a wine salesperson. He called on grocery store managers trying to get them to stock cases of his company’s products.

Tom told me a story about one grocery store manager who had agreed to purchase two cases of his wine. “However, my goal was to sell him 100 cases,” Tom said.

Tom explained that it had been a cold day in early spring, and that on his way to the grocery store he had passed a boat dealer putting up a sign advertising pre-season prices. Tom was trying to sell the grocery manager a Sangria-like summer wine, and this gave Tom an idea for upselling the manager.

“You know what you ought to do?” he asked the grocery manager. “You ought to get a boat and put it at the front of your store so that people see it when they come in. Then we can fill the boat with cases of the wine to make the tie-in with boating and summer. It will really grab people’s attention and it should be a great way to merchandise this wine.

“Where am I going to get a boat?” the manager asked.

“Let me worry about that,” Tom responded.

Tom then drove back to the boat dealer and introduced himself. “How’s business?” he asked. “Pretty slow. There’s still snow on the ground. Nobody is thinking about boating yet.”

“You know what might help? Tom said. “You could put one of your boats in the grocery store about a mile from here. Thousands of people would pass by it see the name of your business right before the season starts.”

“How am I going to get the grocery store to let me put a boat in there?” the boat dealer asked.

“You leave that to me,” Tom told him. “Could you trailer a boat to the store and get it set up inside?”

“I could trailer and set up a boat anywhere,” the boat dealer replied.

Tom went back to the grocery store to tell the manager he had a boat, and because of his ingenuity the store ended up purchasing and selling hundreds of cases of the wine.

Tom’s idea solved three problems:

1. his problem of selling one hundred cases of wine
2. the grocery store owner’s problem selling the wine through to the consumer and
3. the boat dealer’s problem getting more people (traffic) eyeing his boat

Like a chess master, Tom was thinking several moves ahead. He orchestrated a win-win-win idea.

By coming up with a compelling merchandising idea, he made it easy for the store manager to stock up on his product.

You can see yourself as a salesperson with some rates, ratings and packages to sell. Or you can see yourself as the eyes and ears of your prospects and customers.

You’re in and out of a lot of businesses. You see what’s going on in the marketplace. Resolve to become what author Jeff Thull calls a “source of business advantage” to your customers. You can do that by bringing them new ideas rather than rates, ratings and packages.

Will you be that salesperson?

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