

It's The Little Things

I've been privileged to observe quite a few great salespeople over the years. In fact, it's been my practice to pay attention whenever anyone's trying to sell me something. I watch and listen to what they do and what they say, and some of what I've learned from these observations has been incorporated into my own selling style. They say imitation is the most sincere form of flattery. I say life is all about learning. Either way, anyone who's serious about selling should be serious about learning how to do it more effectively.

Here, I think, is my most compelling observation about these great salespeople. What sets them apart is not some big thing. It's really more that they master the little things that can make a big difference. I want to share a couple of those with you today.

No Problem!

I don't know about you, but every time a salesperson says "No Problem!" I start to get worried. More often than not, it seems, some problem develops and I don't end up getting what I was hoping to get. I remember an experience, though, when a salesperson used a different strategy. It was a situation where what I was asking for was very reasonable, and there was plenty of time to get it done, and I think 99% of the salespeople in the world would have said "No Problem!"

"I'm 90% sure we can do that," is what this salesperson said. "But let me check to make 100% sure, and if I see any problem, I'll call you before the end of the day."

At around 4:00 PM, my phone rang, and it was the salesperson. "Mr. Fellman," he said, "I promised I'd call if I found any problem with getting you what you want when you want it. I checked with my people, and unless something completely unforeseen comes up, we'll have it to you then. And in fact, if it turns out that we can get it there sooner, will you be ready to take it?"

Think about what transpired here. First, the salesperson differentiated himself by not giving me a shallow, typical, salesperson response. Second, he implied that I'd only hear from him if there was a problem, but then he called anyway to confirm that everything looked good. Third, he qualified his response by saying "unless anything completely unforeseen comes up." Fourth, he presented an early delivery as a possibility without making a commitment to it, setting up the situation where he could "under-promise then over-perform."

Fifth, the last thing he said to me was: "OK Mr. Fellman, don't hesitate to call me if you have any questions between now and then, and you can be sure I'll be calling you if anything unforeseen comes up." As it turned out, he didn't have to call me with bad news, though he did call me the day after the delivery to make sure that I was happy.

To me, that's a story about six little things that added up to one big thing—a happy customer!

First Name, Last Name

We live in a casual society, and it seems very natural to use first names, both ours and the people we're talking to. There's an opportunity, though, to show greater respect and to *demand* greater respect by using both first and last names (ours) and title and last names (the people we're talking to). Take a look at the previous paragraph, and ask yourself whether the salesperson gained anything by calling me "Mr. Fellman" rather than David or Dave. To me, this is another of the little things that can make a big difference. You'll never go too far wrong giving someone more respect than they require, but you can go pretty far wrong pretty fast by giving them less respect than they think they deserve.

Another of the little things that great salespeople do is use their own last names, especially when leaving messages. I'd much rather have you be "John Smith from Full Color Printing" than "John from Full Color Printing" or "John from Full Color." To me, the use of your full name *and* your full company name promotes an image of professionalism. Granted, it's probably OK to be on a first name basis—both ways—with your regular and established customers. I think it's important, though, to err on the side of respect when we're talking about suspects or prospects or occasional customers. (You may remember that I think the idea of *demanding* respect is even more important for women in printing sales. See "A Feminist Perspective on Printing Sales, QP, August 2004, which you can also find in the article archives at www.davefellman.com if you don't save all your old copies of *Quick Printing*.)

Gone For The Day

I called one of my “selling owner” sales coaching clients at about 2:30 PM yesterday, and the person who answered the phone told me that she was “gone for the day.” Now, I’m not saying that it’s not OK for the owner of the business to take part of a day off, but I am saying that it’s dumb for whoever answers the phone to tell me that! What if I were a customer, calling to talk about an order—or even worse, a problem! If I’m at work in the middle of the work day, isn’t it reasonable to expect that my suppliers will also be working? Personally, I like dealing with hard-working people.

On the other hand, if the person who answered the phone told me that the owner was “out on sales calls,” I wouldn’t be offended. After all, that’s what I’d expect a hard-working salesperson—owner or employee—to be doing in the middle of the afternoon. I think you’ll agree that’s a little thing, and I hope you’ll agree that it could make a big difference. I hope you’ll also make it your business to find out exactly what the person who answers *your* phone would be likely to say if you or your salesperson was “gone for the day,” and make sure that it’s exactly what you’d want them to say!

Bottom Line

The bottom line for today is that little things can make a big difference, and I hope you’ll agree that many of these little things also come at a modest cost. It costs a lot to buy a new piece of equipment, but very little to do things like I’ve written about today. Both of those things can help you to increase your sales volume and probably your profitability as well.

So, while you’re “thinking big” about your business, I hope you’ll spend some time “thinking little” too!