

Think Like A Winner!

I've come to realize over the years that one of the keys to success in printing sales is simply to think like a winner. Most printing salespeople don't, they think of themselves as "second class citizens" who have to take a subservient role to their customers and prospects. I can't tell you how many times I've heard salespeople talking about "finding an excuse to call on a customer."

Hey, you don't need an excuse. Granted, you do need a reason, but as I tell my Sales Coaching clients, "I want to sit down and talk with you" is reason enough! That's the way winning salespeople think, and experience has shown that their customers and prospects generally respond pretty well to that attitude, especially when it's coupled with the sort of knowledge and professionalism that also defines the winners in this business.

Know Your Objective

The starting point to this sort of confidence is to always know your objective—your *specific* objective. Obviously a salesperson's general objective should be to sell a lot of printing and make a lot of money, but there are specific things you need to accomplish along the way.

For example, in the early stages of prospecting, your specific objective is to find companies that seem to be worth pursuing, which means that they buy exactly the kind of printing you want to sell, and enough of it to make the pursuit worthwhile. The winner goes into this stage of the selling process thinking "OK, I'm going to evaluate 5—or 10, or 25, or 100—companies every week, and I'm going to be very happy if one out of every three or four of those companies looks like it's worth pursuing."

Winners know that not everyone is a real prospect, and they don't want to waste their time and effort on people and companies which are unlikely to provide a solid return on investment. They also know that it's important to be looking at new "suspects" every single week. Some of the real winners do that because they want to earn even more money. Others among the winners do it because they don't want to make *less* money, and they know how fragile a customer relationship can be in the modern marketplace. Winners know that it's possible to lose a customer for any number of reasons, ranging from quality or service failures to pricing situations to things that are absolutely not the fault of either the salesperson or the printing company. Winners sometimes lose the battle, but they rarely lose the war!

Middle Stage Objectives

I think most printing salespeople would agree that the most important middle-stage objective is to get that first appointment. The winners tend to approach this objective differently than the others, though. First of all, winners don't beg anyone for "just a few minutes of your very, very valuable time." Winners offer to spend some of *their* very valuable time with printing buyers!

One of my clients has become a true believer in this philosophy, and just last week he had his first opportunity to employ a response we'd prepared for the middle-stage prospect who says he or she is too busy to meet. "So am I," my client said, "I'm up to my ears in work this week, but I do have some time available next week. How does your schedule look for next Thursday morning?" There was silence on the other end of the line for just a moment, and then the prospect said "Yeah, I guess that would work."

To me, that's just another example of how confidence breeds confidence. I remember back when I was a little kid, being told that dogs can smell fear on you. Printing buyers can smell fear too, but it's a whole different situation when they sense confidence instead.

That's Why...

As I said earlier, "I want to sit down and talk with you" is reason enough to call to ask for an appointment, at least from the salesperson's perspective. From the buyer's perspective, though, there may need to be more of a reason. OK, that's why winners are always prepared to tell the buyer why he or she *needs* to agree to the meeting.

"Mr. Jones," a winner might say, "I'm offering to put all my years of experience to work for you, and I think it's pretty reasonable to predict that I'll be able to save you some combination of time, aggravation and money in dealing with your printing. I can't imagine that you really want to spend more time or money on printing than you have to, and if you've ever faced any aggravation with this part of your job, I'm pretty sure you'd like to avoid any more in the future. I'm very confident that I can help you, and that's why I think you need to take the time to meet with me."

One caution...even spoken with confidence, a strategy like this doesn't always win the day. Just as a winner knows that not every suspect will turn into a real prospect, he/she also knows that there's no strategy in selling that works every time. If a confident strategy works one out of three or four times, though, that's significantly better than the "wishing and hoping" strategy most printing salespeople seem to embrace, which might work one out of ten times at best.

Negotiating Value

Another area in which winners operate differently is when a customer or prospect raises a price objection. As I've written (*Negotiations And Love Songs*, *QP*, February 2002), there are three things up for negotiation any time that happens: value, cost and price. The winners address a negotiation in exactly that order, and the first thing they do is explain—confidently!—why they're worth more money. "Sure, there are printers with lower prices," a winner might say, "but I want you to consider that price is only one component of value, and quality, service, consistency, reliability, and all the other factors that underlie exceptional performance are all part of the equation too." Then they go on to discuss specific ways in which the customer or prospect may pay more, but he or she will get more.

Now, here's the real key to making this strategy work. Another of the things that winners do is ask questions with confidence. They're not in a hurry to make a *presentation*, they're much more interested in a *conversation*—and the goal of that conversation is to learn about any aggravation the customer or prospect has encountered with printing in the past. "If you've got problems," the winner thinks, "I'll have opportunities, because I'll be able to position myself as the solution to your problems."

Working Hard And Smart

Winners are generally hard workers, and they're generally smart workers too. They're not too smart for their own good, though, which is a characteristic I see far too often in printing sales underachievers. There are salespeople who are always looking for shortcuts, and the truth of the matter is that there are very few shortcuts in selling.

The winner's attitude goes like this: "If I work smart, there are ways to accelerate the decision-making process. If I work hard, too, I'll find more opportunities to do that than my competitors will. There's a danger, though, in trying to work too smart, or not hard enough. So I won't cut any corners." Most of the winners I've met know that working hard and working smart go hand in hand. In fact, a salesperson I greatly respect once told me that "there's no way to work so smart that you don't have to work hard too—at least, not if you really want to make a lot of money!"

So, do you really want to make a lot of money? If your answer is yes, you can probably take a big step toward that goal by staring to think—and act!—more like a winner!