

Segment Three: Selling...An Uncomfortable Proposition?

When a technical professional is willing to put forth extra effort, then eventually, they're going to increase their earnings in one of two ways. Either they're going to start earning more in their present environment, or they're going to be able to move on to an environment where they can earn more money. And, this idea of increasing your earnings as a technical professional takes us to our next topic of discussion. It's a topic that many technicians are not comfortable with, I know.

But there's an old saying in Texas that goes.....

"If you've got to swallow a bucket of frogs, you might as well start with the big one."

And, sometimes, the idea of "selling" can be a big frog for technicians to swallow.

And who can blame them? After all, it's not uncommon to find in our society that people who sell for a living are not often held in high regard. And, that being the case, technicians are often of the opinion that if they wanted to be a "salesperson"....one of those people.... then they wouldn't have become a technician in the first place. At a conference I attended some years back, there were about two-thousand people at the opening session. One of the opening presenters was a woman who worked as an engineer for a large communications company. When she described her job, she said that part of her responsibilities were to visit the customer along with salesperson to make sure they were "telling the truth" to customers. "After all," she said...."You know how salespeople are....."

I, along with a few others at the conference, cringed when she said that....but the majority of the people there just nodded their heads in agreement when she made that remark. Most of them weren't appalled like I was to hear a representative of a large, well-known communications company refer to her colleagues in that manner. But it bothered me a great deal. Because the way I see it, a person who sells and does it in a professional manner is just as much a professional as anybody else.....whether they work in the engineering department or the sales department, or the service department.

So I believe that a technician can, in fact, be a professional who is providing outstanding customer service and using their own best judgment, while part of their customer service responsibilities include selling.

There's that word again. Does it make you uncomfortable?

Maybe it does. And maybe no matter what form of it I use, it's still uncomfortable for you. I could say "Cross-Selling" and it wouldn't change the basic premise. I could say "Selling Up" and I'm still just talking about the process of selling. I could say "Add-on Sales", but what I'm still talking about is really "closing a sale" as we say. It all just says selling, doesn't it?

When we present our workshop on-site for service organizations, I often ask for a show of hands on two questions. The first question I ask is "Has anybody here ever had a negative experience with a salesperson?"

Invariably, hands shoot up all over the room as soon as I ask the question..

Then I ask another question, which is: "Has anybody here ever had a pleasant experience with a salesperson?"

When I ask this question, it takes more time, but eventually, everybody in the room, after they've had time to think it over, raises their hand and admits that they've had a pleasant experience when with dealing with a salesperson.

How about you? Have you had what you consider to be a negative experience with a salesperson? And, after giving it some thought, can you recall any situation you would label as positive?

It's likely that you can....which brings me to the third question I always like to ask when we're discussing the subject of selling at our workshops. And that question is simply "So what was the difference between the people you felt left you with a negative feeling, and the people who left you with a positive feeling after the sale was closed?"

When people think about the answer to that question, they usually have some difficulty providing a specific answer. It's apparent that there was something different about the two kinds of experiences, but it's hard to put the explanation into specific terms.

Well, we can help you put things into specific terms by comparing two lists.

These lists are the result of surveys. And in these surveys, people were asked about the terms they usually use to describe salespeople, then they were asked about the terms they would tend to use when describing a professional. Here's our first list. It contains the top six terms people commonly use to describe salespeople.

1. Pushy.

This one is at the top of almost everybody's hit parade. Salespeople can sometimes be downright pushy. And when they are, we don't like it.

2. Phony.

It's no surprise that this one appears often near the top of the list. People often say that one of the things that bothers them the most about salespeople is that they're an easy-to-spot phony. If they think that changing who they are in some way will result in a closed sale, then that's who they'll become....for the moment. Then they'll switch back to being themselves or somebody else on a moment's notice if that's what it will take to get a signature on the bottom line, or get a yes from a customer.

3. Sneaky.

Is this one on your list? When people use this term to describe a salesperson, they aren't saying they're flat out lying, but maybe they're practicing some "creative avoidance." You realize you've been dealing with a sneaky person when you suddenly find yourself blind-sided by something you didn't even think about when you were saying yes.

4. Dishonest.

Yes, it's true. Sometimes people are just dishonest. They'll lie, then say whatever they need to say to cover it up. They'll twist things around when confronted, or hang on for dear life to a seemingly insignificant point in order to defend themselves when a deal goes sour.

5. Slick.

Man, when salespeople are slick, they're really slick aren't they? They're like Teflon. Nothing that's charged against them can stick. You just can't catch them in a direct misrepresentation. You know things didn't go as planned or promised, you just can't tie them directly to the problem.

6. Desperate.

Have you ever felt like this was the case when dealing with a salesperson? The reason it may have happened is simple.

Often, salespeople work on a draw against the commissions they plan to earn during a given time frame....say a month or a quarter. If they've been drawing a salary against their commission for a long time and they're behind in the game, it can make them appear as desperate. They know they've got some ground to make up and that time is marching on. They might even be at risk of losing their job if things don't turn around in a hurry. And that's why they come off as desperate.

So, that's the list that I like to say describes the terms people usually use when they're describing "typical salespeople."

1. Pushy

2. Phony

3. Sneaky

4. Dishonest

5. Slick

6. Desperate

And, now, here's the list that was the result of surveys on people's opinions of professionals.

1. Competent.

Most of us don't have difficulty agreeing with this one. The ideas of competence and professionalism seem to go hand in hand. When we consider some one to be a professional, it follows that they will be competent at their job, whatever it may be.

2. Honest.

I think it's interesting to note that while dishonesty doesn't come up on the typical salesperson list until the #4 spot, honesty is #2 on the list for professionals. This simply says that most people are willing to quickly accept the fact that a professional is honest.

3. Knowledgeable.

Part of this ties in with competency, but it goes deeper than that. Professionals are trusted not only to be competent in their specific area of expertise, but also knowledgeable of their industry or business as a whole. We often feel that we can get good advice from a professional on how to get information on something that's related in some way to what they do.

4. Dependable.

When a professional makes a promise, we can count on them delivering on the promise...or if something beyond their control goes wrong, we can count on them to make things right. That, for most of us, is dependability in a nutshell.

5. Caring.

Now, I don't want to get all syrupy, touchy-feely and huggy here, but when consumers are asked to describe professionals, one of the common responses is that they care about their customers. And that's part of their professionalism.

6. Flexible.

One of the things people like about professionals is that they can "roll with the punches" when necessary. If something comes up and it means that plans, scheduling or procedures have to be adjusted, then the professional can handle the change.

So there are our two lists. And, when you look at them....

1. Pushy

2. Phony
3. Sneaky
4. Dishonest
5. Slick
6. Desperate

And....

1. Competent
2. Honest
3. Knowledgeable
4. Dependable
5. Caring
6. Flexible

The different ways in which "typical salespeople" and "professionals" are perceived by society is apparent.

And, by the way, when you look at the two lists, can you understand why some technicians are resistant to the idea of selling? After all, if a technician's concept of somebody who sells is pushy, phony, sneaky, dishonest, slick and desperate, can you blame them for not wanting to be "one of those people?"

No, you can't. A technician doesn't want to be pushy, phony, sneaky, dishonest, slick and desperate. Nobody wants to be that kind of person. Not a technician, not a service manager, not the owner of the company....nobody.

Imagine this.....A technician is asked to be more involved in selling. On the outside they may be nodding their head and agreeing. At the same time, an inner voice is saying to them...."What? You want me to be a pushy, phony, sneaky, dishonest, slick and desperate person? No thanks....I'll pass."

And the reason we said that kind of thing can be going on is because of a person's concept of salespeople. And that's something we want to focus on directly in this segment....the idea of concept.