

There are countless books and articles on the selling process. Generally speaking, if you apply the principles you will see improvements in your performance. However, very few sales books address the most critical aspect of the selling process, which often preempts the discussion of features and benefits and closing techniques. This aspect of selling has a process all its own, and if you're not aware of it, even the most accomplished sales professional will miss an opportunity to close the sale without realizing what happened.

Customers buy YOU before they buy anything else you have. Customers do business with whom they like because what they're really buying is a unique business relationship with you. The company you represent or what you sell can help secure a meeting, and many lead to negotiations. Still, if the customer is not sold on your credibility and finds no value in your professional brand they will not buy from you. Period.

Here are three make or break qualities a customer is looking for in your professional brand.

**Customers buy or do not buy based on first impressions.**

You must pass the look test! Everything about you speaks to the customer before you open your mouth. Your first impression gives the customer an instantaneous sense of confidence or uncertainty. A professional outward appearance is a must, but your presentation skills and your ability to sync your energy level with the customer's creates immediate harmony and trust. You must nail the first impression because much of a customer's buying decision has nothing to do with your actual product or service. It is true indeed, you never get a second chance to make a first impression.

**Customers buy or do not buy based on your association with other customers.**

Customers often want to know who else buys from you, but this can be a slippery slope. Name-dropping to a prospect without knowledge of how the prospect feels about your current customer could be a deal killer! If the prospect thinks your customer is an idiot, they are likely to view you the same way. Make a habit of asking customers if they know others who would be interested in what you're selling. It's much easier to convert these warm leads into sales because they've already bought your customer's credibility.

What if the prospect is truly a cold lead? Customers buy your knowledge of key opinion leaders in the industry, and your understanding of the competitive marketplace. As you better understand the social dynamics that influence your industry, customers may see you as a greater asset because we all naturally gravitate to connected individuals who can provide resources to help us advance.

**Customers buy or do not buy based on your ability to speak their language.**

Common language is familial in life and most especially in business! Apart from of your appearance or network, what gives you immediate professional credibility is when your customer feels you are one of them. Learn and incorporate industry jargon, slang or acronyms in your sales conversations. This builds customer confidence that you understand the industry and challenges they face.

Common language also allows customers to let their guard down. Ask lots of questions about the business, but also ask personal questions to get to know them as people. Finding common personal interests can be a stronger bond than your

business interest. The more skilled you are at finding a common language with your customers, the better the quality of your relationships, you obtain key information to help solve their problems, and ultimately you close more sales.

Chances are you won't win favor with every prospect, but long before you ask for a customer's business it's critical to know what they're really buying. You!