



The five-step motivated sequence provides a good way to organize an effective sales presentation that will close the deal.

of and skills for persuasion that we've already discussed are the key strategies that you will use when selling someone something. To maximize your sales potential, we suggest that you first, analyze the sales situation, and second, plan your persuasive sales message using time-tested strategies that, to paraphrase Donald C. Bryant, help you adjust products and services to people and people to products and services.

Sales skills are important leadership skills. We've noted that to lead is to influence others through communication, and often leaders need to sell ideas and methods. So, as we discuss the principles and strategies of sales, keep in mind that leaders sell ideas—whether informally and one on one, in groups and teams, or when speaking to many people. Sales involves more than simply selling a product.

Developing Your Sales Message

We've discussed several strategies for organizing presentations. Some organizational strategies, such as topical or chronological organization, are best suited for informative messages. Most sales presentations are organized using the problem-and-solution pattern. The five-step motivated sequence (which, as we noted, is a form of the problem-and-solution approach) is a good overarching organizational strategy to consider for sales presentations. Catching attention, establishing need, satisfying the need by offering a solution, visualizing the benefits of the solution or describing how the need will not be met if the solution is not adopted, and identifying a specific action to take is a good formula for structuring a sales presentation. Communication consultant Granville Toogood reminds his sales clients that when making a sales pitch, you need to connect with the customer's needs. As Toogood puts it,²⁴

- You're not selling soap. You're selling sex.
- You're not selling perfume. You're selling love.
- You're not selling cars. You're selling excitement.
- You're not selling jeans. You're selling adventure.

The suggestions for organizing a sales presentation we describe below are based on the motivated sequence.²⁵

HOOK YOUR LISTENER A good salesperson does more than merely get a customer's attention; a good salesperson is able to "hook" the customer to gain and keep the person's focus. How do you do that? You must know your customer's interests, needs, and hopes and adapt your message to address them. And, in most cases, you have to grab your listeners quickly. To hook them, ask them an opening question that is based on what you suspect they may need ("Are you interested in a car that costs less yet looks expensive?") or addresses a fear they may have ("Would you like a car that will protect your family if you have an accident?"). Television, radio, and Internet sales pitches spend considerable time simply trying to hook you to get and keep your attention. Unless you hook your customers, they will undoubtedly get away.

IDENTIFY THE CUSTOMER'S KEY ISSUE After hooking the customer, you need to address what he or she needs or wants. Knowing your customer's interests, needs, desires, fears, and hopes is essential for making a sale. How do you find out what your customer likes and needs? Ask. After you ask, you have one more task: Listen. An effective sales message doesn't begin with the salesperson immediately extolling the virtues of the product. First, ask questions that qualify your customer. To **qualify** a customer is to identify whether the customer can afford the product or service you are selling and to learn how to best approach the customer. Does the customer have a family? If so, would he or she be motivated

terms & definitions

Qualify to identify whether a customer can afford a product or service and to learn how to best approach the customer.

by appealing to concerns for their safety? Is the customer most interested in a low price? Knowing what the customer wants can help you customize your message to your customer.

It's also important to have a positive relationship with your customers. Joe Girard, the number-one car salesman in the United States for eleven years in a row, would send over 13,000 cards to his customers. He'd wish them everything from happy birthday to happy George Washington's Day. The message on the front of each card was simple. It said, "I like you." He sold twice as many cars as whoever came in second place. Customers identified with Joe; they liked him. And they came back to buy more cars from him.²⁶

If you already suspect what the customer's needs are, then you can directly identify how what you are selling meets the needs, solves a problem, or addresses an issue that concerns the customer. Your knowledge of what your competitor has to offer and what the customer needs and your ability to briefly and quickly get to the heart of what the customer wants will increase your chances of making the sale.

To identify the customer's needs or issues, you may need to ask specific questions (unless the customer explicitly tells you what he or she wants). Here are some possible questions to ask to help identify a customer's need:

- What do you like best about what you are currently using?
- What would an ideal product look like?
- What do like least about what you are currently using?
- What is missing from what you're currently using?
- How many of these do you use each week?
- What are the key things you're looking for in a new . . . ?
- If you bought our product, when would you need it delivered?
- What could we do to get your business?

MAKE THE RECOMMENDATION After you have analyzed, or qualified, the customer, you'll want to note how your product or service addresses the issues you've identified. Although you don't need to ask for the sale quite yet, you need to describe what you're selling and link your product or service to the the customer's needs. Especially if you're selling several models or versions of the same product (such as a car, a computer, or an insurance benefit package), you'll need to direct the customer to a specific recommendation. If you have over a dozen different models, select one or two that you think are best aligned with your customer's needs. Having too many options can be overwhelming for both you and the customer. If you've understood what your customer's concerns are, you'll be in a good position to begin to steer your customer to a recommendation that is best for him or her.

When making your recommendation, explain and demonstrate how the product works. Provide a step-by-step overview of what the product does. If appropriate, let the customer try the product. Most grocery stores know that one way to sell cheese is to give away free samples. Letting your customer use the product to experience the benefits may be your most important sales tool.

STRESS BENEFITS, NOT FEATURES All customers are interested in the benefits of what you're selling to them. This next point is essential: *You must stress the benefits of what you're selling, not just list the features.* What's the difference between a feature and a benefit? A feature is simply a characteristic of whatever the product or service is. For example, if you say, "This computer screen is very bright," you're describing a feature of the product. A benefit is a good result or something that creates a positive response in a customer. Rather than simply noting that the computer screen is bright, you could describe a benefit of the bright screen: "This means that you won't experience eye strain or headaches, and you can get your work done more quickly." Describing a benefit is a customer-centered way of helping the customer visualize the positive things that will happen to him or her if he or she buys what you are selling. Table 13.4 provides additional examples of features and their corresponding benefits.

A skilled salesperson can quickly assess how to describe a product or service in terms of the benefits the customer will receive. Stressing benefits helps the customer have a positive

TABLE 13.4 Features and Benefits

Customer Features

This floor is a no-wax floor.

If you sponsor this concert, your company name and logo will be listed in the program.

This ergonomically designed chair will keep your back straight.

Customer Benefits

Because this is a no-wax floor, you will never again have to get down on your hands and knees to scrub another floor.

Sponsoring this event promotes your company and lets everyone in the community know how much you care about supporting the arts. People will view your company in a positive light, which will increase your sales and maintain the goodwill of your customers.

This ergonomically designed chair will eliminate backaches, increase your productivity, and give you more time to spend on more pleasurable tasks.

feeling about what he or she is buying. To help the customer experience the good things that will happen if he or she makes the purchase, it's not enough to just state a benefit—you'll need to provide evidence. Testimonials from satisfied customers, demonstrations, and evidence from unbiased sources such as *Consumer Reports* are helpful in documenting the truth of your claims. You have an ethical responsibility not to promise too much or make a claim you can't support. By realistically identifying the benefits, you'll increase your credibility and have the best type of customer—a repeat customer.

MAKE THE CLOSE Every good salesperson knows the most critical part of making a sale is the close. The close is when you ask for (and ideally get) the sale. Most closes involve summarizing how the product or service solves a problem or meets a need, cogently listing the benefits, and then asking for the sale.

Some closes use the "yes technique." A salesperson using the yes technique asks the customer a series of questions to which the answer is always yes. If, for example, the customer has already disclosed that he likes a particular model of car, the color of the car, and the features of the car, the salesperson asks a series of questions to which the answer is yes:

Salesperson: "So, Mr. Affolter, you like the Oxford model the best?"

Customer: "Yes."

Salesperson: "And you like the cobalt blue?"

Customer: "Yes."

Salesperson: "You also like the cruise control, satellite radio, and GPS system, right?"

Customer: "Yes, I do."

Salesperson: "So if I can get the Oxford model, in blue, with the features you like, and we can agree on a price, will you buy the car today?"

Customer: "OK, yes."

The yes technique is based on the principle that "It's better to get a message out of someone than to put one in him or her." Get the customer to state what he or she likes and to reach no other conclusion when asked to make the purchase than that the correct answer is yes.

RESPOND TO OBJECTIONS Textbooks have a way of presenting models or specific strategies that make it seem as though all you need to do is follow the suggested sequence of steps or specific prescriptions and you'll be successful. When attempting to sell something to someone, you'll soon discover that it's usually not quite that easy. In most sales situations, the customer is not likely to simply say yes or "I'll take it" after you've hooked the person, identified the issue, made the recommendation, stressed the benefits, and provided a closing. Customers will likely have questions, concerns, and objections to the claims you've

made. How you respond to those will often determine whether you get the sale or not. Consider the following suggestions.

Some customers may not explicitly state what is bothering them. For example, they may not say, "I don't have enough money to buy what you're selling." So, you need to "listen between the lines" if the customer says something like "I'm not sure I'm prepared to buy this product now" or "Buying this product doesn't fit into my plans right now." If price appears to be the objection, suggesting a payment plan spread over a period of time, directing the customer to a less expensive option, or reconfiguring the product so it costs less may be what you need to do to respond to the unspoken issue of price. The more you can remove hidden agendas, the more likely you are to be able to address the specific concern. Open-ended questions such as, "What questions do you have about this product?" or "Is there something that I could do today that would help you make a commitment?" can help you find a customer's underlying objection. The closer you can get to a customer's real objection, the more likely it will be that you can address it and get the sale.

How do you determine a customer's real objections? You listen, observe, ask good questions, and listen some more. If you can find the true objection and then successfully address that objection, you've got the sale.

If a customer says no, or, "I'll need to think about this," or "I'm not sure I'm ready to decide today," do your best to listen and see if you can identify what it is that is keeping the customer from saying yes. Keep the conversation going. By asking follow-up questions, exploring objections, listening for clues, and observing nonverbal behavior, you may be able to successfully respond to a rejection. Once the customer has left or hung up the phone, it's less likely that the person will return (although some customers simply need more time to ponder the options). You're more likely to get the sale if the customer is physically present or if you are in contact with the customer. We don't encourage such high-pressure tactics as, "This is a one-time offer, only good in the next hour" or "You must decide today." It's also unethical to claim that the product is the last one left when there are more in the back room.



"If they don't like our proposal I'll show them the kittens. Everybody likes kittens."

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Ethics Is Everything

According to Barbara J. Krumsiek, chief executive and chair of the Calvert Group Ltd., an investment firm, ethics is everything when it comes to leadership. When asked what she thought the most essential lessons students should be learning in college, Krumsiek replied,

Weave ethics and responsibility through every course. Every single course should have an ethical component. I think the notion that ethics is a code of conduct or a set of rules or a set of principles is one of the big culprits in the meltdown. Ethics is how you think about things when it's not written down.

I tell Calvert people you make decisions every day, hundreds of them, that have ethical content.

We couldn't possibly write codes of ethics to cover everything you do. So therefore, you're going to have to do the right thing. I'm counting on you to do the right thing.²⁷

Although ethics will permeate all aspects of your work life, your ethical obligation is especially important if you're trying to persuade someone to do something or sell them something. You have an ethical responsibility to present information that is honest, accurate, relevant, and on point. As Krumsiek's comments suggest, ethics is an element in every communication action—it's implicit in every communication and leadership action you undertake, especially when you're sharing information or persuading others.

A customer may ask you something about what you're selling that you don't know. *If you don't know the answer to a question, say so, and find the answer quickly.* Promise to get back to the customer with the answer by a specific time or date. Be sure to keep your promise.

One maxim that has served salespeople well is "Underpromise and overdeliver." Don't promise more than you know your product or service can offer, and work to provide even more than the customer expects. Although customers generally do not like surprises, they are usually delighted when what they've purchased surprises them with more than what was promised.

One of the biggest sales mistakes new salespeople make is talking too much after they have made a sale. Once the customer has made the decision to buy a product or service, don't keep describing additional benefits.

Relating to Others: Making Special Presentations

Besides informing and persuading others, you may be called on simply to introduce a speaker, present an award, receive an award (because you're such a good leader and communicator), or make a toast. In these special presentation situations, the audience has certain expectations of what you may say. When introducing someone, for example, it's assumed you will extol the virtues and credentials of the person you're introducing. Toasts are expected to be brief yet interesting.

Introducing Others

The ultimate purpose of an introduction is to arouse interest in a speaker and his or her topic and establish the speaker's credibility. When you are asked to give a speech of introduction for a featured speaker or honored guest, your purposes are similar to those of a good opening to a speech: You need to get the attention of the audience, build the speaker's credibility, and introduce the speaker's general subject. You also need to make the speaker feel welcome while revealing some of the speaker's personal qualities so that the audience can feel they know the speaker more intimately. There are two cardinal rules for giving introductory speeches: Be brief and be accurate.

- Be brief. The audience has come to hear the main speaker or honor the guest, not to listen to you.
- Be accurate. Nothing so disturbs a speaker as having to begin by correcting the introducer. If you are going to introduce someone at a meeting or dinner, ask that person to supply you with biographical data beforehand. If someone else provides you with the speaker's background, make sure the information is accurate. Be certain that you know how to pronounce the speaker's name and any other names or terms you will need to use.

The following short speech of introduction adheres to the two criteria we have just suggested: It's brief and it's accurate.

This evening, friends, we have the opportunity to hear one of the most innovative mayors in the history of our community. Mary Norris's experience running her own real estate business gave her an opportunity to pilot a new approach to attracting new businesses to our community, even before she was elected mayor in last year's landslide victory. The Good Government League recently recognized her as the most successful mayor in our state. Not only is she a skilled manager and spokesperson for our city, but she is also a warm and caring person. I am pleased to introduce my friend Mary Norris.

Finally, keep the needs of your audience in mind at all times. If the person you are introducing truly needs no introduction, do not give one! Just welcome the speaker and step aside.

1532 1st Lane
Edinburg, Texas 78541
July 5, 20XX

Mr. Joseph Castillo
InnoTech Associates
817 Freddy Gonzalez Drive
Edinburg, TX 78539

Dear Mr. Castillo:

We appreciated the customer service training program you provided to our company last month. This letter is intended as a follow-up to that training and to thank you for your time and attention to detail.

The training was effective and productive. Our customer service agents have greatly increased morale and motivation when interacting with customers. We have seen great results from your training just in the last month.

We are considering a telephone etiquette course as a follow-up to the customer service training you provided. We were impressed with your demeanor, training style, and attention to detail, and would like InnoTech Associates to conduct the training program. If you are interested in providing us with a training program in customer service telephone etiquette, please contact me.

Once again, thank you for your interest in helping our employees work to improve their customer service skills. You have taught us some invaluable lessons and our company and workers are grateful.

Sincerely,

Sylvia Rodriguez

Sylvia Rodriguez
Training Department Supervisor
PemCo Inc., West Call Center
Phone: (956) 989-3347
Fax: (956) 989-3300
srodriguez@pemcowest.org

FIGURE 14.2 Sample Business Letter

- *Explaining the bad news rather than simply stating it.* For example, an explanation of a hiring decision might be, "Because of the extensive pool of applicants, we have chosen to place someone in the position with ten years of experience who will need minimum training to begin."
- *Closing with a goodwill message that reinforces a positive relationship with the recipient.* For example, you might close with a statement such as, "With your excellent academic record and ability to put others at ease, we have no doubt you will be successful in finding a position with another organization."

USE A STANDARD FORMAT When developing a business letter, you also need to consider the format. A common format for correspondence is the full-block, or standard letter style shown in Figure 14.2. Although organizations may have their own preferred correspondence

TRH Incorporated

TO: Kay Marquez, Service Manager
 FROM: Stephanie Ramos, Local Store Marketer
 DATE: May 17, 20XX
 SUBJECT: Opportunity for local ad campaign

TRH has been offered an opportunity to participate in a local advertising campaign in conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce's "Local Tastes" program.

"Local Tastes" is an annual program featuring community restaurants and other businesses, including a two-week mailer campaign and events at local stores. This campaign culminates in a well-attended day-long event at the convention center featuring products from each participating business.

Participating businesses will be featured on a front page of the mailer, get a 30-second spot with a local news outlet, and be given a booth with banner at the "Local Tastes" event on July 3.

I think this would be an excellent opportunity to get the company recognized in the community and interact with the Chamber of Commerce as well as work with other businesses in the area.

Please respond by May 25 with a decision regarding participating in this event. I need to respond to the Chamber of Commerce and turn in a deposit by June 1.

cc: Juan Brown, Managing Partner

FIGURE 14.3 Sample Memo

CLOSING Most memos don't require the standard signature you would find in a letter or other correspondence. It is helpful, however, to include notation of any attachments and a list of people who received copies of the memo. When considering who within the organization should receive copies of your memo, keep in mind that in most companies this can be a highly political issue. Send copies only to those who need the information.

Progress and Activity Reports

A **progress report** gives updates on the status of a project. Figure 14.4 shows an example of a progress report. Most project reports are generated by a company that has been contracted to do a particular job or provide a service. In such cases, it is appropriate to submit project reports at regular intervals to communicate the project's status and keep all personnel on task.³⁶ Although the format for project reports varies depending on the project, the policies of the organization providing the report, and the requirements of the client or customer, all reports should maintain the same format for any particular project. Progress reports may contain information about whether a project is within budget. If you anticipate going over budget, mention that and discuss some possible reasons and solutions. A progress report should also include information about how the work is progressing—what has been completed as well as what is anticipated. If you expect you may not complete the work on schedule, discuss this in the progress report and explain what arrangements need to be made to complete the project.

terms & definitions

Progress report a report that outlines for a customer or a client the status of a project.