



The Reluctant Sales Person: Approaches That Work for Helping Techs Sell

Editor's Note: This is part two of a two-part series.

Last month we covered the basics that you, as a technical expert, must master to fulfill your sales responsibilities. That surely did not convince you that you really can sell. After all, you were hired for your technical expertise. Well, this article provides more ammunition for your consultative selling arsenal. Face it, having sales skills that complement your technical abilities makes you a more valuable employee. By developing these skills, you will dramatically increase your worth to the company. So, let's get to it!

I must confess that as much as I love consulting and speaking, I loathe thinking of myself as a salesperson. But the reality of life is this: If I don't sell, I don't eat. So I developed a model to make the process more palatable. There are millions of sales approaches complete with catchy acronyms. My approach is not that creative, but it does work. There are three simple steps: Assess, Educate and Recommend.

■ **Begin with Assess.** This first step is intentionally non-threatening for you and the client or prospect. Because you are already there on a service call or for some other technical consultation, take the time to talk to the clients about what's going on in their business environment. Ask them about what's happening in their industry. Ask them about what's going on with their competitors. Here's a checklist of possible topics for your assessment. Be sure to customize this list so that it is tailored for your clients.



Assessment Checklist:

- 1) What is going on in their company (e.g., potential mergers, upcoming layoffs, future expansion)?
- 2) What other vendors are they using? For which products and services?
- 3) Who are their biggest competitors?
- 4) Who are the up-and-coming people in their company? In their industry?
- 5) What trade publications do they read? (Get a copy!)
- 6) What are their future technical needs?
- 7) What needs are pressing at this moment in their organization?


Using a structured format will help you get comfortable with the idea of building a consultative relationship with your clients. As you get more comfortable with the idea and the process, you will have less of a

need for this much structure. But it's a great way to get started.

Once you have started gathering data, begin plugging it in. Go back to work and discuss your client's needs with other members of your team and people from other departments. Using a cross-functional approach enables you to get a broader range of options and solutions. Once you have generated a full range of ideas, you will be able to have deeper conversations with your clients. You will be able to offer ideas, suggestions and ultimately the additional products and services that address their issues.

■ **The next step is Educate.** You are responsible for educating your clients and their organizations about technical issues. This means more than providing service, mumbling new instructions and giving them a packet of information. Instead, create opportunities to do short, on-site training sessions that explain the ins and outs of your products. This is a great opportunity to introduce related products and services. But remember, this is an educational forum that you are creating. So, don't lean too heavily into the sales realm.

The educative phase of the process also presents opportunities for you to partner with your colleagues. Ask experts from other departments to work with you to create short training sessions. By pooling your expertise, you build greater credibility for your entire company. Clients will begin to see you as a resource for many different needs, not just toners, printers or copiers. When they begin to favorably change their opinions of the enterprise, they will be inclined to buy more and give referrals.



■ **Educate is followed by Recommend.** Notice, I did not say “close the deal” or “ask for the business.” We who sell reluctantly (but don’t perceive ourselves as salespeople) would never use such terminology. Instead, we use our expertise and influence to make informed recommendations to our clients. Because we have, by using thorough assessments and education, elevated our status from mere technician to trusted business adviser, our recommendations are given serious consideration. Make sure that your recommendations are targeted. They need to reflect your intimate understanding of the client’s current and future business needs.

There are times when we let our egos get overly involved in the process of recommending services to clients. If they say

“No,” “Later,” or something other than a resounding “Yes! I’ll write the check NOW,” it is not a personal affront. The clients may need time to mentally process the recommendation. They may want to speak with other decision makers before committing. They may not see the value in the recommendation. Whatever the reason, don’t take it personally. It has nothing to do with your worth as a human being. They will not take away your birthday because you didn’t get this one. Keep persevering! Work on building stronger relationships. Sooner or later something will pay off.

We began this series of articles looking at your attitude about selling. It’s obvious that in order to be successful at the business development process, you have to do the mental work first. Get over

your reservations and get on with the process. Begin the process by refining your communication skills. Remember to work on listening, speaking and writing. All three of these communication tools are valuable in the sales process. Once the basics are covered, you can skillfully move to my three-step approach: Assess, Educate and Recommend. This process is deliberately simple. It focuses more on relationship building than on closing a deal. Consistently using this approach will get you dramatically different results! **R**

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