

Be My Guest

In recent years many different businesses have begun to approach their clients differently. They are now labeling them as guests, which has been the norm in the hospitality industry for decades. Many restaurant chains as well as car dealerships and airlines have even taken to using this term.

A simple word like *guest* versus *customer* can make a dramatic difference in the way we perceive the people who pay our salaries. A customer is someone who makes a purchase. A guest, on the other hand, is someone we welcome with open arms and look forward to interacting with. A guest is more of a friend, someone we will treat with dignity and respect.

I'm not suggesting that you immediately begin calling all of your customer's guests. What I would like to introduce to you is the GUEST model of selling. GUEST is an acronym for a five-step sales process.

1. **G**reet your customer.
2. **U**ncover their needs and want
3. **E**xplain the product or service.
4. **S**olve their objections.
5. **T**ell them to buy.

Many sales-based organizations have their own sales model or structure. The GUEST model is designed to fit into most sales cycles. These five steps are the key components to all successful selling. The majority of sales people don't follow any structured process, preferring to allow the sale to flow naturally. I've heard objections, excuses, justifications and rationalizations for this, such as:

You can't follow a structured process.

Customers just take control of the sales process.

It takes too long to go through a process like this.

I'm too busy.

I've done it my way for years and I've been successful.

The list could go on and on. In fact, I could probably write a book just listing the excuses I've heard from salespeople. Here is the point. The GUEST process works. Ultimately, *you* need to take control of the sales process. If you don't, the customer will, which is what happens in approximately 80 percent of all sales transactions.

News flash! People will not buy from a sales person they don't trust, don't like, or who doesn't show confidence. I have known sales people with a tremendous amount of experience and knowledge who can't close the number of sales they are entitled to because they try too hard.

Here's a typical sales story. The customer is considering the purchase of a particular product. The sales person launches into a canned pitch about the products features and specifications. The customer asks some questions and expresses some objections. The sales person tries to overcome or defend the objections. The process ends with the customer saying, *I'll think about it*. Why didn't the sales person get the sale? The reasons are simple.

- The sales person did not ask the customer any questions.
- The sales person delivered a rehearsed presentation instead of focusing on the customer's needs.
- The sales person did not gather sufficient information to overcome the customer's objection.
- The sales person did not give the customer a reason to make the purchase!

The GUEST approach of selling addresses each of these issues. The key is to concentrate on the process rather the outcome. If you work through each step instead of trying to close the sale you will increase your closing ratio. Too many salespeople work hard to close a sale because they need to reach a certain level of sales to earn commission, their boss is hounding them to close a deal, or they haven't reached their sales quota. The result is a desperate attempt to get the customer to part with their hard-earned money. These customers feel threatened, manipulated, coerced and often don't make any purchase at all.

On the other hand if a sales person concentrates on the process the customer will be more relaxed, feel more comfortable and will be more likely to buy. In my workshops I encourage sales people to allow the sale to progress naturally. I instruct them to pay attention to their customers instead of focusing on closing the sale. This runs contrary to most sales training where the emphasis is on closing the sale or dealing with objections. My philosophy is that the sale will happen when you put all five components together in a relaxed, comfortable manner.

During the sales process the average sales person spends the bulk of their time in a non-active, passive role—waiting for the customer to ask questions and responding to objections. It's no wonder people aren't anxious to make a purchase.

The GUEST model of selling suggests investing most of your time asking questions to learn as much about your customer as possible. When done properly, this approach will eliminate many objections because it enables you to adapt your sales presentation to address what is important to each customer. Unfortunately, most salespeople either don't understand this or refuse to believe it. Most still feel that they have to skate quickly through the qualifying process to ensure they have enough time to deal with and overcome objections.

A business acquaintance of mine works in advertising. When I approached him to produce a training video he began asking me questions to fully understand what I needed and wanted in a video. Because he took the time to learn about my business needs, I immediately saw the value in this \$45,000 investment. Not once did I express an objection about the cost because he demonstrated the value while he uncovered my needs and presented a solution. He made sure that he positioned himself and his company as a problem-solver and a solution-provider.

Stop treating your customers like a pay cheque and view them as guests to your business. This may sound awkward and initially difficult to comprehend particularly if you have been accustomed to using aggressive selling tactics in order to close a sale. However, you will soon notice a difference in the way your customers respond to you. In return, they will be more willing to part with their hard earned money.

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