

Sales Is Not A Sprint, It's A Marathon

Successful salespeople know that the sale is as much about the relationship as it is about the product or service.



How many shops or suppliers can make one call and land a new customer? I'm guessing zero. Selling materials, tools or time on machines...these are big ticket items and not an impulse buy. The salesperson needs to understand that, even if they are selling the greatest product or service available, a strategic relationship and trust is required before money changes hands.

I was reminded of this at a PMPA Northern Ohio Chapter meeting when I was having a great conversation with Dana Kalchoff, the owner of Comturn Manufacturing LLC in Cleveland, Ohio. Dana shared a story about the National Acme Co. and Henry Ford, saying, "Henry Ford came to Cleveland to meet with the National Acme Co. to obtain some screw machines. He desperately needed the equipment but did not have the funds to purchase at that time. National Acme provided Henry Ford the machines he needed, and Mr. Ford was so appreciative that the Ford Motor Company bought their screw machines exclusively from the National Acme Co. That relationship proved to be very profitable over time for both companies." What an incredible example of a relationship built on trust.

Dana put it concisely when he said, "The relationship between a shop and a supplier is like a marriage — if you keep working at it, it can last a long time." If you think about it, shops and suppliers both have limited resources, which means investing the time to forge a relationship where trust has been earned benefits both parties and both bottom lines.

The Human Aspect

I was talking with my colleague, Miles Free, and he pointed out that salespeople bring the human aspect to the relationship. And he is right. Think about

artificial intelligence (AI) and the disruptive potential it has on our industry. The marketers can automate emails and use AI to help craft messaging, but the salespeople have the opportunity to be authentic and develop the human relationships. It may be a business-to-business relationship, but the true power is in the human-to-human interactions. As Miles states it, "AI can't out-human us."



Building Relationships

I asked Klaus Miller, vice president of sales, Absolute Machine Tools, how he sees the role of the salesperson. Klaus responded, "Sales in this industry isn't all about expecting to sell something each time you walk in the door. Rather, what you should expect to be doing daily is supporting, resourcing and problem solving for your customers." Klaus noted

that he built his customer base over years of cultivation, building relationships and providing solutions when he connected with them. Klaus added, "My advice would be to put yourself in the customer's position. If you were the customer, would you purchase a product that can cost as much as a high-end automobile or even as much as a house from a salesperson you just met, even if you've had a long-term relationship with their employer? I believe it takes time to earn trust, especially when it comes in the form of hard-earned money."

There are numbers and quotas to be met. I get it. But how much easier would it be to make those numbers once you have invested time in getting to know your customer, their needs and finding solutions to their challenges? Build the relationship, earn that trust and you can win the race. **P**

Carli Kistler-Miller, MBA has over 25 years of experience with operations, event/meeting planning, marketing, writing and communications. Email: cmiller@pmpa.org — Website: pmpa.org.