

Creating Customer Empathy

by Diane Emo

(NAPSA)—If you own, run or work for any of the approximately 23 million small- to mid-sized businesses in America, chances are, you want more sales. So, how do you make it happen? By showing customers you care. In this world of impersonal interactions and instant communication, there's enormous value and differentiation in creating empathy for the customer's situation.



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Sales training often piles on facts, figures and details that can turn a salesperson's brain into a mish-mash of disconnected information with no

context. So, keep it simple. Train salespeople to be empathetic, consultative professionals by building on the things they already know. They know how they expect to be treated as customers—because we are all customers, right? They know how they feel when people treat them unfairly or push them into a decision. They know when someone is really listening to them, not pretending. So, start with a customer context as a way to build your story.

Here is a three-step path toward building customer empathy in your sales teams.

1. **Listen for emotion** to find customer pain points: An interesting thing happens when salespeople ask questions: customers talk. What's going on here? How long has that been going on? What have you tried so far to fix it? Here's the secret: listen for emotion in their words—*disappointed, frustrated, angry, tried repeatedly, no response*. Then, repeat the customer's exact words to confirm their pain point. "It sounds like you're pretty *frustrated...*" Pain points are the issues or problems that are significant enough for the customer to make a change—and buy from you instead.

2. **Teach a simple consulting model** for value-based conversations focused on the customer's pain points. I write 3 columns on the whiteboard labeled "What I heard (pain point)," "What we will do (solution)," and "That will help you (value)." Then, I ask the rep to give me one of her customer's pain points. For example, "What I heard



Companies with a feel for empathy can be better able to encourage customers.

is that the odor in your restroom continues to be a problem, even though you've asked your service to fix it. *What we will do* is use a disinfectant that kills the germs causing the odor. *That will help you* have a restroom that consistently smells good for your customers and employees."

3. **Feel, felt, found** is still a good formula for moving people from objections to closed deals. When a customer states an objection, try this:

- **Feel.** Say something like, "I understand how you feel." This lets customers know you heard them express their feelings, can relate, and understand why they feel the way they do. The customer feels validated instead of ignored.

- **Felt.** With a response such as, "Other people I've talked to have felt the same way," you tell the customer the issue is not uncommon. He or she is not alone. It can be resolved. This also sets the rep up to position a way to positively address the issue and move on.

- **Found.** "They found the situation improved right away after making the decision to ____." Convey the idea that people get positive results and improvement after choosing your product or service.

The last step is to ask for the deal! Help your reps find a simple closing statement that works for them. My favorite: "OK, let's get the paperwork signed so we can get started right away."

If your sales team keeps these tips in mind and your customers in their hearts, then you may find more sales on your books.

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