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Differentiating Yourself—A Key to Success in the Selling Role

One of the most insulting comments we hear from our clients too often is that “you guys are all alike.” We haven’t heard too many salespeople say they feel good about hearing those words. So with that in mind, this week’s tip looks at that issue.

Whether we like it or not, the reality is we are all selling commodities today. That is not to say that what we offer is a simple, unsophisticated product. Of course, that is not the case. But most people will tell you that your competitor’s claim to offer similar products at similar prices with similar back-up and similar anticipated results. Hence we are really selling commodities—at least from the client’s perspective.

So, given this reality how can we differentiate ourselves? Here are five proven ways to make yourself stand out from the competition:

- 1.) **Confirm every meeting in writing.** Whether it’s a letter or e-mail, confirm the meeting, the agenda, the time allocation and anything the customer needs to know to be ready for the meeting.
- 2.) **Ask the *client* for their agenda** at the start of each meeting. We find that the most common mistake salespeople make is forgetting to get the client’s agenda. If they have one, and the usually do, they will be annoyed or even resentful if they don’t have the chance to express it.
- 3.) **Prepare the client for questions.** Everybody asks questions. Too many do it in ways that are disingenuous, sometimes manipulative. Buyers don’t like to be questioned. Be the person who lets the client know questions are coming and why it is in their interest to answer them.
- 4.) **Review your understanding of the clients’ needs.** Questioning is probably the most important skill salespeople use. But the most important step in the selling process is reviewing your understanding of the clients’ needs. Take the time to demonstrate to the client that you understand their needs. Whether it is at the end of a meeting, in a follow-up letter, part of a proposal, or the way you start your presentation, this is a great way to show how you are different.
- 5.) **Offer specific benefits.** Generic benefits mean little to clients. These apply to everyone. What matters is what *specifically* is in it for this *individual* client. That is the definition of the specific benefit. You clearly differentiate yourself when your solutions and presentations are customized and highlight specific benefits.

So there you are, five ways to differentiate yourself. Try a couple you haven’t yet attempted this week. See what happens. You may be surprised.