

# LET'S TALK SELLING

## Empathy as the Key to Building Relationships

Dear Friends:

It went fast, but we are already half way through the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter. And for many people out there it has been a challenging year.

But for the first time in a long time, we are hearing more and more optimism in the marketplace. Many of our clients think things are getting better. Not everyone, of course, and we still hear many people saying the worst is yet to come, but from our perspective, things are looking more encouraging. The fourth quarter may just help salvage the year for many of us.

The common term we hear often is that "*flat would be just fine.*" Duplicating last year's results would be good enough. That certainly offers perspective as to what kind of year is has been. But we have seen more activity lately and our business tends to be a leading indicator. That's a good sign.

With all that in mind, as the summer winds down, we thought it would be a good time to re-examine why Buyers buy. And in these times, the need to demonstrate *empathy* stands out above everything else.

Enjoy what is left of your summer and by all means keep those cards and letters coming.

Regards,

Almost 50 years ago, a wonderful piece of research was published in The Harvard Business Review. David Mayer and Herbert M. Greenberg spent seven years researching the selection process for salespeople in the insurance industry. Turnover was extremely high and they investigated the flaws in the process.

The research revealed that two "basic qualities that any good salesperson must have (are) empathy and ego drive." They described empathy as "*the central ability to feel as other people do to sell them a product or service.*" Ego drive was defined as, "*the personal desire and need to make the sale...because he [sic] has to.*"

The publication appeared in 1964. Since that time dozens of similar studies confirmed that the salesperson's ability to demonstrate empathy is critical if they are to build meaningful relationships. The ability to connect, to understand the customer, to see things from their perspective, to "get" them is the key variable in building the kinds of relationships that drive the sales process.

As David Maister, the well known and highly regarded champion of selling professional services says: "*customers don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.*"

Now this does not mean that other behaviors aren't important. As you will see on page three, the research suggests that there are many key attributes our customers demand from us. But many people believe that empathy is the most important behavior, and with that in mind let's look at ways to demonstrate this behavior throughout the sales process.

### Opening

Any salesperson with his or her salt will tell you that the rapport building, chit chat, small talk, etc. gets the sales call off to a good start. But the empathic salesperson knows that this isn't always appropriate. Some people want to get right to business. Others aren't comfortable with small talk. Know your customer and respond accordingly.

(continued...)

# Empathy as the Key to Building Relationships

Showing interest in their non-working life and remembering previous discussions helps. "How was the graduation?". Showing respect for their time, making sure you know what *their* agenda is, and demonstrating that it is *their* meeting are all ways to demonstrate empathy.

## Needs Development

When you are asking questions and determining needs, it is all about the customer. Make sure the questions focus on them and that they don't appear self-serving. Set the stage for questioning so they know why it is important.

Be sensitive when you ask challenging questions and never, never let your questions appear manipulative.

## Managing Resistance

When you encounter resistance empathy becomes even more important. The customer has every right to object, and by acknowledging the objection you once again demonstrate that behavior. Seeking elaboration and restating or reframing the objection keeps you in that mode.

And if your answer focuses on the customer's needs, the entire objection resolution process provides you with the opportunity to show the customer you are aware of how they feel and want to work with them to address their needs.

Can you say empathetic?

**Webster defines empathy in a simple powerful way:**  
*Understanding and entering into another's feelings.*

**Another definition he provides is:**  
*Putting oneself into the psychological frame of reference of another, so that the other person's thinking, feeling and acting are understood and, to some extent, predictable.*

Listen, listen and listen some more. What better way is there to "feel as other do" or, as Webster says: "Understand and enter into another's feelings." And let your customer know you are listening as you review the needs. When you demonstrate to a client you understand what they hope to accomplish you come across as empathetic. And you go even further when you are sensitive in reviewing less obvious needs, or needs they don't know they have.

So the consultative selling process in so many ways provides you, the sales professional, with the opportunity to demonstrate that you understand your customers, that you "get" them and that you are there to help. It lets them know, yet again, that it is all about them. And that's what usually results in sales success.

## Other behaviors we need to consistently demonstrate

Empathy is certainly a key behavior; one that many sales professionals consider the most important. But there are other behaviors we need to demonstrate as well. Let's not forget them.

### **Credibility**

Don't let the Maister's quote detract from the importance of credibility. You need to know your stuff and you need to ensure the customer of that. Do your homework, be up to date with what's going on in the marketplace, know your products cold and demonstrate your understanding of their needs.

Meet those deliverables. Be responsive. Go beyond and above expectations. Demonstrate your professionalism. Make it clear that you are a valuable resource and can be a trusted partner. Put simply, do your job the way it is meant to be done.

### **Sensitivity**

In many ways sensitivity is a subset of empathy. But it goes beyond that. You need to be aware of the customer's situation and respond accordingly. Be cognizant of how much time they have. Know what to discuss and what not to discuss. Be cautious with questions. Pay attention to their position in the company. Be aware of their risk tolerance. Don't ask for too much too soon. Be in control of your emotions when they push back. Focus on them. Sensitivity is a key behavior that must be demonstrated all the time.

### **Affability**

People buy from people they like. They buy from people who make them comfortable. Too often we overcomplicate the sales process. If they like you, and enjoy being with you, they are more likely to buy from you.

So do what you can to make the customer feel good about you as an individual and comfortable working with you.

Empathy and sensitivity make you more likeable, more affable. But so does your willingness to listen, let them talk, focus on areas of interest to them, respect what they do, and support their efforts.

Be that person who brightens up the room when you enter it as opposed to when you leave it. If you weren't likeable you probably wouldn't be in sales. If you can't put people at ease, you'd be doing something else for a living. Leverage those strengths all the time.

### **Trustworthiness**

When you put all the behaviors together they impact trust. And we all know that customers have to trust us to do business with us. Previous newsletters have focused strictly on this critical behavior as we explained how trust is dependent upon other behaviors like credibility, sensitivity, empathy and likability.

But trust is inversely proportional to the risk factor. As the risk increases, it becomes harder to trust you. The job of any sales professional is to make it safe for the customer to buy, and to do that we need to minimize the risk of doing business with us.

Trust can take a long time to build and a few seconds to destroy. Don't be the person who doesn't tell the whole story. Avoid at all costs manipulative selling approaches like "under promise and over deliver." It is a lot more straightforward to promise and deliver—simply do what you say you will do.

Be a straight shooter. Don't play games. We don't respect that guy who says, "It's easier to ask for forgiveness than permission." Nobody wants to do business with him. He just doesn't get it.

Simply put, demonstrate integrity, do what works best for the customer, tell it like it is and you will build the kinds of long term trusting relationships that are critical in accomplishing your sales goals.

# Public Workshops



The Baron Group, Inc.

57 Wilton Road  
Westport, CT 06880

Phone: 203.227.7907  
Fax: 203.221.8411

[info@barongroup.com](mailto:info@barongroup.com)

**We infuse consultative selling with creative problem-solving skills, elevating your relationships from vendor to trusted partner, and boosting results**

**We're on the WEB**

Visit our enhanced website

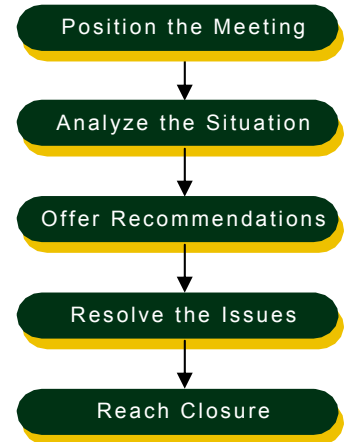
[WWW.BaronGroup.com](http://WWW.BaronGroup.com)

## Consultative Selling Skills

**At the conclusion of this two-day course, participants will be able to:**

- Understand the connections and similarities between problem-solving and selling in order to transform the sales call into a problem solving opportunity.
- Determine both the obvious and not so obvious needs of their clients.
- Use state-of-the-art skills to determine needs, including: questioning, listening, interpreting understanding non-verbals and paraphrasing.
- Provide recommendations with benefits linked to specific client needs.
- Present ideas in addition to products and services as answers to client needs.
- Resolve objections using a problem solving mentality.
- Apply facilitation techniques in selling situations.
- Plan and follow-up their sales calls in a professional manner.

Two-day Seminar including materials: \$1,400 per person\*



© 2008 The Baron Group, Inc.

**Schedule for balance of 2008:**

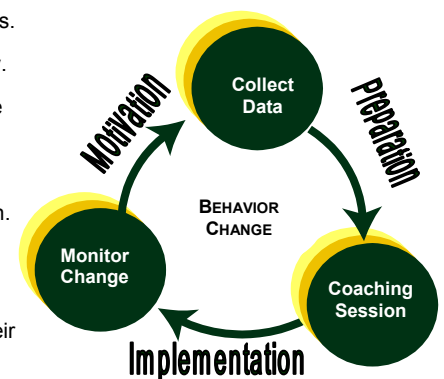
- September 11-12
- December 4-5

## Coaching for Improved Sales Performance

**At the conclusion of this two-day course, participants will be able to:**

- Observe their salespeople in selling situations with an understanding of what to look for and how to capture key points.
- Give feedback in a balanced, helpful, and non-threatening way.
- Offer a salesperson ideas as to how to be more effective in the selling role.
- Manage the resistance salespeople demonstrate when a manager suggests changing or modifying their sales approach.
- Gain commitment by getting the salesperson to develop an action plan.
- Apply the process in other situations to help people grow in their jobs.

© 2008 The Baron Group, Inc.



Two-day Seminar including materials: \$1,500 per person\*

**Schedule for balance of 2008:**

- September 25-26
- November 6-7

\*We offer a professional discount of 10% if two or more people register from the same company.  
All seminars are conducted at The Baron Group Training Center in Westport, CT.  
Call Francine at 888-226-9503 or e-mail [info@barongroup.com](mailto:info@barongroup.com) for more information.