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Let's not Lose Sight of the Importance of Benefits

One of the first things you learned as a salesperson was to describe your products and services in terms of their features and benefits. For over 70 years, those words have been part of the salesperson's world. Our research concludes that the terms were first coined by a guy named A.H. Strong in 1936.

But they have survived the test of time. And the reason for that is quite simple—they work.

Yet, most salespeople in service-oriented businesses, particularly sophisticated businesses such as yours may be, tend to spend more time talking about features than benefits. It happens all the time.

The question, of course, is why? The answer is more complicated than you might think.

Features are facts. They describe the product. Features tell us the attributes, characteristics, specifications, and traits. Features tell us what it is, what it does, and how it works. When we talk about features we can demonstrate our knowledge and explain what we know. It feels good to talk about features. It is safe to talk about features. Often it is easy to talk about features.

Unfortunately, the client doesn't care that much about features. The client cares more about what the product or service will do for them. The client wants to see the value. The client needs to know how it helps. The client wants to know the **benefits**.

Benefits are what close deals. If features answer the question: "what," benefits answer the question: "so what?" Put simply, features are about us—benefits are about them.

Research shows that the more questions you ask, the more success you enjoy. That is because more questions get you more information. More information leads to more needs. And when we understand needs, we can do a better job in including benefits when we present.

In our Consultative Selling Skills program, we talk about the **specific benefit**. Generic benefits talk about the value of our products and services. Specific benefits talk about how it addresses the needs of this specific client and how our recommendation will work for them. That is what really matters. And that is what the client wants to hear.

One final thought. Sometimes when we make benefit statements, we feel like we are "selling". It makes us uncomfortable so we don't do it. Look at it this way. It is not so much that you are selling as you are consulting. You are helping. You are advising. You are giving the client an opportunity to *buy*, as opposed to being *sold*.

And by the way, gang, we are salespeople. So if we sound like we are selling once in a while, that is OK.