



By Sue Thompson

Let's face it: sales professionals have a difficult and even daunting job. Competition is fierce, dollars are tight, and those who make final decisions are frequently unwilling to meet with yet another vendor for a product or service that is in place and working just fine. Simply getting a foot in the door is a terrific challenge! I have a lot of respect for the drive and talent required to exhibit patience, perseverance, and enthusiasm, build a relationship, and gain someone's business.

So don't blow your opportunities by presenting yourself in a way that invites resistance or dismissal. Check yourself on the following irritating behaviors that can sabotage sales and annoy those of us to whom you wish to offer your product.

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Too Familiar

You don't always have to be so formal as to call everyone "Mr." or "Ms." with their surname, but to act as though you are an old pal hooking up after a long separation is usually inappropriate. Shake hands firmly, give your name, offer your business card, and have a conversation. Don't try to ingratiate yourself until you gauge whether your contact is into that kind of repartee or not (more later on gauging responses).

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Implying Previous Decisions Were Bad

Don't cluck your tongue and comment on how unfortunate it is that your potential client purchased this model or that system. You don't know anything about their decisionmaking style, and you certainly don't know what their constraints and issues were when they were buying. For all you know, someone high up in the company was holding a



- 3** gun to his or her head to help a nephew trying to get a start in sales. You don't gain others' confidence by telling them how foolish they are.

Creating a Sense of Obligation

Just because a company once purchased from your company, or you and your contact know each other from a professional organization, or your kids go to school together, doesn't mean they owe you their business. Keep it professional. They have a choice and you must assume they have good reasons for making their choices. Your job is to find out what's important to them and see if you can meet a need.

Cell Phone/PDA Etiquette

For goodness' sake, turn off your cell phone! If you are waiting on a particular call, tell folks as you begin a meeting so that you don't turn *them* off by checking every ring to see who's calling. Even better, become familiar enough with your phone's voicemail system that you can create a quick message while you're walking in the door, telling callers you're in a meeting for an hour. Do not check your email during the time someone has agreed to meet with you! Both distractions create the impression that you have other, more important people to deal with. It's a relationship killer.

General Business Etiquette

If you need a refresher course in basic manners, get it. Your personal habits announce your character, and the goal is to minimize behaviors that can be offensive to others. I hesitate to even mention some of the truly gross habits that business people exhibit, but they in-

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clude (forgive me) loud and obvious mucous-producing sniffing, adjusting one's clothing in inappropriate ways, blowing one's nose in a napkin at a lunch meeting, along with the equally distressing chewing and talking at the same time. Etiquette is not dead—it is more important than ever in a world where people frequently do not care about how they offend others with immature, self-serving behaviors and attitudes. You will stand out if you act with courtesy and grace!

Not Knowing Your Business

If you're just learning, inform your host right up front that you are very new at your game. Most people will appreciate your honesty and work with your learning curve. When you don't explain, you risk creating the impression that you are wasting their time with a stream of "I don't know" or "I'm not sure" or "I think." If you are new and the company is already your client, you should come prepared, knowing the details of the contract. He or she may not know every point, particularly if they oversee multiple agreements. It makes sense that you, the provider, hold the knowledge at your fingertips even if they don't. When you ask a client, "Now, what's in our contract about that?" their response can rightly be, "Don't you know?" I've known executives who have dismissed sales representatives, telling them to come back once they're familiar with the current contract.

Pushing When Told There's No Interest

For some sales reps, "I'm not interested" seems to be a signal to go on about how much money can be saved, how many companies use the service in question, etc. Look, most folks realize you want their business and most understand that you want a chance to show your product. But at any given time of year, decisionmakers receive numerous calls regarding specific products or services and they may not be in the mood to expend the time and energy it takes to switch. Saving money is not always the issue. Respect what they tell you—otherwise, you are indicating that you do not respect them. So why would they want to do business with you?

Leaving Voicemails Without Explaining Who You Are

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I immediately delete messages from people I don't know who tell me to call back but leave no information as to the nature of the call, and other business people tell me they do the same. I think some sales professionals believe such a message will be intriguing and we'll feel compelled to call and find out what it's about. We've all got a lot of phone calls to answer from people we already know who call regarding issues with which we're already familiar. For the most part, potential clients are not going to follow-up with a caller who plays this game, and if they do only to find out you're offering a sales pitch, they'll write you off permanently. The same goes for unsolicited emails from those who pretend as though they are responding to a request. This just insults the intelligence.

Crying the Blues if They Choose Another Vendor

Your business contacts usually weigh several options. All of the vendors they are considering most likely audit the use of the current product or service, produce numerous reports, and create detailed proposals, just like you do. So do not lose your cool if they decide against you. Try to find out the reasons and move on. Twice in my career, I have been rudely chastised by sales people who were angry that I did not select their product or service. In one case, I was scolded as though I did not know what I was doing and, in the other, berated by the salesman with how much he had done for me and how ungrateful I was. All of the other sales professionals who had hoped for my business expressed their disappointment but wished me the best and asked me to keep them in mind should circumstances change. Guess who I crossed off of my list forever?

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Clueless Regarding Personalities

I am constantly amazed that people who *must* deal with others, particularly strangers, all day long take no interest in finding out how to communicate effectively with differing styles and personalities. My favorite system is a simple view of four personality types that helps me to "speed read" people based upon a number of sensory clues, and while everyone is unique and styles are not always obvious, it gives me quite an edge in quickly understanding how some folks would like their information. My style, for instance, may be chatty and easygoing, but it is crazy-making for someone who just wants unemotional, unadorned information. Why would I deliberately create resistance by not even taking the time to find out how to effectively present my case? It's a sign of respect to attempt to see things from another's point of view. If you have no opportunity to receive training in this area



Sue Thompson is the resident expert at www.SetFreeLifeSeminars.com. You are invited to send her your own business pet peeves.

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