

## Are You Open to Getting More Sales?

Isn't it curious that sales, the lifeblood of every small business, is so damn hard to get right? You started your business because you believed you could make or do something that other people wanted, but then you struggle to find a way to talk about it with them so they're moved to say, "How can I get some of that?" You want so badly to connect with prospective customers. You want so sincerely to experience your salespeople connecting with them. And it hardly ever feels like there's enough connection going on, enough excitement about the product or service you're so invested in, and enough prospects turning into customers.

If you want to turn that around, first think about building a sales system in your company. Then consider this rarely appreciated notion: Sales is not about closing. Closing is an 'old school' idea that may work for those 'hard-core' salespeople, but it leaves everyone else feeling like everything that just happened was 'wrong'.

**Sales is about opening.** It's about facilitating prospects with **care** in opening about what they really want and need. It's about giving them room to feel what they're feeling. Of course, prospects want things like product knowledge, insight, and solutions from the people they buy from. But, if you want your sales process to feel both meaningful and fun, and maximize your lead-to-sale conversions, you have to learn how to give your prospects **an opening experience**.

Fortunately, the problem and the solution are one and the same. People—all people including prospects—speak in **symbolic expressions**. A symbolic expression is a 'shorthand' people use to capture a set of experiences and the meanings they associate with those experiences.

Let's look at an example, a symbolic expression may be: **"We've made some mistakes in hiring."** It means something very specific to the prospect that he or she isn't sharing. If you receive those words, without entering your prospect's reality, you'll create **horizontal or superficial movement** in your sales conversations. When you assume you understand people—when you really don't—you leave them feeling disconnected from you, *whether they're conscious of it or not*. Horizontal movement is what happens in most sales conversations. It looks like this:

**Prospect:** We've made some mistakes in hiring.

**Salesperson:** Hm, how many employees do you have?

Prospects express something that has meaning to them that they're not revealing, and the salesperson barely registers it and then changes the subject. The more prospects experience that you're not curious about what they mean—again, whether they're conscious of it or not—the less they'll feel your interest in *them*. Your interest in *them*—your willingness to enter their reality—is the most meaningful gift you have to give your prospective customers, whether they buy it or not. *Because, most likely, no one else is interested in their reality and they're starved for it.*

Every symbolic expression is an opening opportunity, an opportunity to help prospects open up about what they really want, what they really need, and how they are really feeling. Opening opportunities create vertical movement in a sales conversation that takes people on a journey that is new, real, and alive. Here's what vertical movement looks like:

**Prospect:** We've made some mistakes in hiring.

**Salesperson:** Oh, what mistakes?

Sounds simple, but if you were to listen to recordings of your sales calls or those of your salespeople, you'd be shocked to find out what a tiny fraction of the time that level of 'contact' is happening. If you start orienting your listening to hear the symbolic expressions/opening opportunities offered by people in conversations—whether they're with your prospects, employees, friends, or your spouse—you'll begin to see how much people say that's a door to a deeper level of what's *really* living in them. When you can hear these expressions, try asking questions like:

- What do you mean?
- Can you tell me more about that?
- When does that most often happen?
- What's that like for you?

With practice, you'll start to connect with people and enjoy your sales conversations in ways that would have never happened otherwise.

One thing you're likely to discover in the process, though, is how often people **deflect** or avoid answering the question you've asked. When people answer a different question than the one, you're asking, notice it and find a way to ask the same question even a slightly different way—with as much real **care** as you can muster. Just because people aren't accustomed to someone being interested in them doesn't mean it isn't worthwhile learning how to enter their reality and connect with them there. They may

be surprised and even a bit uncomfortable, but they'll appreciate it, whether they express it to you or not.

If you're not satisfied with the sales results you're getting—if you and/or your salespeople aren't connecting with enough of the prospects you get in front of—then do yourself a favor and assume there's something you're not creating in your sales conversations. Connecting with prospects means putting your reality aside long enough to meet your prospects where they are. Everything you want to accomplish in your business depends on it.