

Necessary Condition #5 – The Right Approach Priorities

By Charles Fifield, MBA

When a salesperson commences a face-to-face sales interaction, certain call priorities must be the central focus of the early interpersonal exchange. First, the salesperson must be ready, willing, and able to satisfy the prospect's human or relationship wants in order to earn the opportunity of later fulfilling business wants. In other words, developing a basic level of a positive working relationship is the door to a productive sales approach.

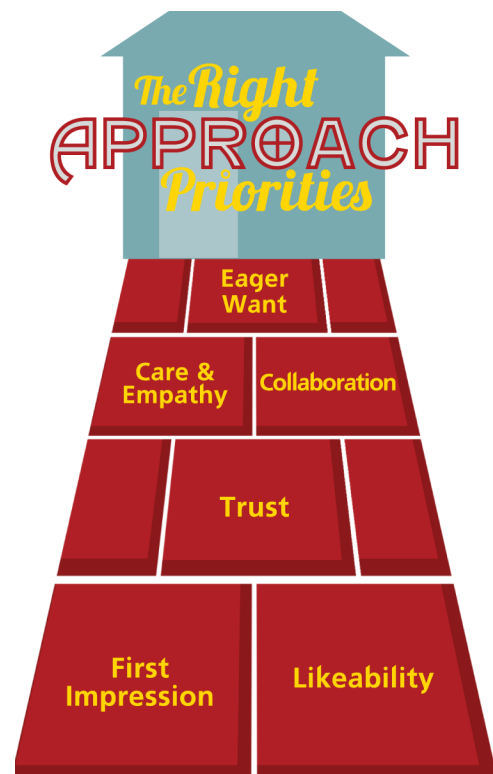
In the beginning, the salesperson must be sensitive to the fact that prospective buyers naturally have fears that must be effectively managed. One common buyer fear is "being sold." Most people want to avoid the sales process. On the other hand, people generally enjoy the process of buying. Also, people are generally not eager to pursue a course that will necessitate material changes in their everyday behavior. In the minds of prospects, sales representatives too often personify these fears when they commence a sales interaction. As a result, the buyer may begin the exchange on a defensive or evasive note.

What six integrated skills are vital to a salesperson's getting off on the right relationship approach?

1. Gaining a *positive first impression*
2. Being *likeable*
3. Developing *trust*
4. Demonstrating *care and empathy*
5. Engaging *collaboratively*
6. Finding the buyer's "*eager want*"

First Impression

You never get a second chance to make a good first impression. With every new sales interaction, you are being evaluated. During a time of usually less than fifteen seconds, the buyer is forming opinions that are very difficult to reverse.



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This assessment is primarily based on several non-verbal factors, including the salesperson's body language, general demeanor, mannerisms, and how one is dressed. The first impression is so extremely important that it has been estimated that as much as an 80% correlation exists between the first impression and the sales call's outcome. Some useful tips would include: be on time, be warm and engaging (smile), be confident (overcomes fear), be at ease, and be prepared to initiate a relationship on a personal basis first and then initiate the business connection.

Likeability

One key relationship factor is a salesperson's perceived likeability. Simply stated, people want to do business with people they like. Tim Sanders in his book, *The Likeability Factor: How to Boost Your L-Factor and Achieve Your Life's Dreams*, identifies four key elements that determine one's likeability:

1. *Friendliness* – your ability to communicate liking and openness to others
2. *Relevance* – your capacity to connect with others' interests, wants, and needs
3. *Empathy* – your ability to recognize, acknowledge, and experience other people's feelings
4. *Realness* – the integrity that stands behind your likeability and guarantees its authenticity

Mr. Sanders examines how likeability brings out the best in others. This buyer assessment is usually incorporated into the recommended brief small talk or rapport-building exchange that precedes the diagnostic or investigative phase of a sales call.

Trust

A critical sales call element is the cultivation of trust. Prospective buyers are seeking to do business with salespeople they believe are trustworthy. Trust is not something easily defined but academic research suggests there are core building blocks of trust that one can build. To cultivate or create trust, salespeople must be willing to let go of fear, be willing to adapt, and take risks connecting with a prospect.

Being deemed to be trustworthy is a combination of many perceived personal qualities. There are four perceived qualities that seem to be consistently tied to trust through research, and can be referred to as the four C's:

1. *Competency* – adequately or well-qualified to provide assistance
2. *Credibility* – being believable or trustworthy
3. *Comfortable* – creating in others an emotional state of well-being or feeling safe

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4. *Commonality* – having certain valued attributes in common

Trustworthiness is shaped during the course of the buyer-seller interaction; a process with three critical inputs:

1. *Engage* – confer with prospects in a warm, open, and friendly manner in a mode of managing, not reacting to circumstances
2. *Listen* – seek first to understand before being understood and work to ensure that the buyer talks for the majority of the interaction; listening ensures that the focus is on what's important (the desired state) to the prospect
3. *Validate* – work to validate, not pontificate, ideas or possible solutions with third-party references, standards, and norms

Care and Empathy

Zig Ziglar, a highly regarded motivational speaker, says, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care...about them!” Our recommended method of selling must encourage prospects to share their thoughts and feelings. The three most important words in today’s highly effective selling are nurture, nurture, nurture. In his book, *Secrets of Closing the Sale*, Ziglar states three principles that may simplify the selling or communication process for the salesperson:

1. Selling is not telling, selling is asking.
2. Listen so the customer will talk, talk so the customer will listen.
3. Selling is transference of feeling – for your product or service.

Collaborate

To achieve the desired buyer-seller working relationship, it is important that the salesperson lead the process in a joint decision-making manner. This is frankly easier said than done for most successful sales agents. Since one of the most important personality characteristics of highly successful salespersons is a strong ego-drive, collaborating (versus competing) can be an inherent dilemma. Competitive or win-lose thinking is a burden to the desired win-win relationship state, and will produce needless sub-optimal and wasteful results. Our goal is for the buyer to realize a winning or value-adding outcome. By doing so, we win as a consequence.

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Eager Wants

After successfully bridging the beginnings of a relationship, the salesperson must artfully progress to the next critical phase of the approach, i.e., defining the prospect's eager want(s) or hot button(s). This process should be a continuation of the recommended collaborative communication approach, which is really a diagnostic-focused approach. Picture a physician conferring with a patient during the course of a regular physical examination. The salesperson must identify the implied wants and then "mine," using well-designed open, closed, confirming, and summary questions, to gain an understanding of the buyer's explicit wants. These concerns should dominate the balance of the initial meeting's interactive exchange.

Summary

It is vitally important for sales agents to recognize and learn how to responsibly manage the perceptions and feelings that play such an integral role in a sales meeting's success or failure. Perception may not be everything, but in relationship building, it does play an enormous role in determining whether or not one has a chance of getting started. There are several priorities or essential ingredients to getting off to the right start buyer-seller relationship recipe:

1. Open with a positive first impression
2. Work to be likeable
3. Understand how to be trustworthy
4. Demonstrate a caring and empathetic attitude
5. Engage prospects in a collaborative manner
6. Know how to ask the right questions in order to quickly locate the prospect's "eager wants"

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About The Author

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Chuck Fifield is a Senior Lecturer for Baylor University's Hankamer School of Business, Marketing Department and serves as the faculty coach to Baylor's Sales Team and Uproar Music and Entertainment Group, a student managed business. He joined the faculty at Baylor University in 2001, where he has also taught in the Graduate Business School (Operations Management), the Management Department (Negotiations and Conflict Resolution) and the Economics Department (Principles of Macroeconomics). Chuck has taught or guest lectured at other Texas-based Universities in the fields of sales, international business, money and banking and finance/investments. Professor Fifield has conducted sales research and training for several organizations, including most recently State Farm Insurance. Prior to joining Baylor, Chuck was a financial consultant for nearly thirty years to businesses located throughout the U.S. He owned and operated several financial service businesses in the fields of securities, real estate, oil and gas and insurance.