

Dear Sales Professional

On serving customers, balancing work and life—and being a good listener—an open letter to the newest member of the sales team.

One of our companies added a new sales person this week and while his experience in sales is limited, his technical knowledge is a perfect fit. For him, and for every young person new to the world of business development, I offer this open letter to the new sales professional:

Today you begin your career as a sales professional, a title used with full intention. The business world is littered with sales *people*—the sorry many who wander from customer to customer, empty of purpose and full of hollow hope that an order may land in their lap.

A sales *professional* is quite the different sort and my wishes for you, numbered as they are, begin with some that you may soon understand.

Many would suggest that the goal of a sales professional is to close orders. I disagree; winning new business is not a goal itself. It is a result; one of serving your customers and prospects with integrity and of helping them to further their interests. In doing so, you will build friendships and earn trust that will serve you for life. When you place your customers' interests above ours, the orders will come.

A mentor once told me that a sales professional will win more business by asking the right questions than by providing the right answers. Ask deep, thoughtful questions of your customers and then patiently and attentively listen to the answers. You don't sell; customers buy. And buy they

A mentor once told me that a sales professional will win more business by asking the right questions than by providing the right answers.

will, if they know you care enough to listen.

Listen to the questions posed by your customers and don't just answer the question, but consider and address the reason behind it. Don't ever feel embarrassed to tell your customer

that you don't know an answer when you don't. You will win much more respect by saying "I don't know" than you ever will by making something up.

You have the ability to set the pace of the relationship with the customer. The more quickly you respond to them, the faster they will to you. Return their voicemails and emails expediently but before you send an email, be sure to read it at least once, and if you find yourself wondering whether or not you should fire it off, you shouldn't.

Firm appointments beat cold calls, and cold calls beat sitting in the office. If I have to track the number of sales calls you make every day, I hired the wrong person. Arrive for your meetings prepared, and if you dress a notch or two better than your customer, you will send the message that you respect them enough to do so.

In time, you will win a deal of which you thought you had no chance.

Celebrate with humility.

You will lose one you thought was a sure thing. Bounce back quickly, dust off, get back in the game and don't ever blame the customer or tell them they made a mistake in buying from someone else.

When it feels like you've never worked harder and customers have never ordered less, you're in a

drought. It happens to all of us sooner or later. Work even harder, plan even better and make even more calls. We will stand by you so long as you stand by our customers.

We will always give you the benefit of the doubt when it comes to whether you deserve the commission on an order. All we ask is that you remember we did. There will be days when we ask you to do something for the good of the team even though it takes you away from working your territory. Those are the days to appreciate your base salary.

Every dollar we spend on travel is one that we can't invest in supporting you with innovation or marketing, so spend the company's money as you would your own. You deserve a hotel room that's clean, safe and quiet, but search for value, and if you need to unwind after a crazy day, feel encouraged to expense a beer or two when you're on the road.

As you seek out the juiciest apples and the choicest corner butcher shop in your territory, remember that chancing a one-of-a-kind restaurant in lieu of a cookie-cutter chain makes life way more interesting. May you experience the anxiety of driving through a snow storm and the joy of climbing a backroad observation tower or driving through a state park when you're running ahead of schedule.

Tell the truth. Keep your word. Smile.

Above all, know that you have our respect. While no role in our business is more important than any other, we have no business without our customers, and we have no customers without you. Let today be the first of many more when together we proceed with the quiet confidence of knowing that, as we go about our work, we are serving our customers and the world in ways much bigger and more important than ourselves.

Gratulatione Utinam Fortuna! ■■



MATTHEW KIRCHNER
Managing Director, Profit360
mkirchner@profit-360.com

