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Is Poor Follow-Up Costing You Sales? (Or... Do You Even Know?)



By Carolyn West Price

It never ceases to amaze me when a customer with good intentions to spend money with a company can't get a response from that company or professional sales person.

I recently had the occasion to be contacting professionals in a certain industry--starting the research process for a purchase that would certainly have interested most sales professionals in that industry. I contacted four different salesmen at four different companies in the industry via email and phone messages; each sent a single email back saying he would get back to me shortly. Not one has yet. Despite my frustration and the precious loss of time (I was on a deadline for the purchase), it occurred to me that perhaps they preferred to deal with men or just were so busy they did not want the business. So, I tried two women in the field. I even explained to each at how I had been "dissed" (as the kids would put it), and I was assured that each of them would treat me differently.

As odds have it, one of those two neglected any follow-up also. The

other one, however, followed-up without being pushy. Guess what—not only did we do the research with the only one out of six who bothered to take me seriously, but she got the sale.

While my husband tries to explain to me that everyone has a different sense of urgency, and that not everyone is as "anal" as I am, I explain back that good manners and follow-up are just essential to being successful—to getting the sale—and vital to building and maintaining business relationships that reflect well on the professional. It just seems to make sense to me—if you get a call today, return it the same day or at least by the next day for sure. If you're traveling, have someone else from your office do so for you or use that cell phone from wherever.

If someone wait days or weeks...or blows the prospective customer off by not contacting him or her at all, what kind of impression does that make, not only on the individual sales person but on the company? And, not only is this poor impression worthy of negative word-of-mouth marketing, you flat out miss the sale. What could affect your bottom-line more than that? (Are sales people in your organization losing sales for you?)

Unlike other columns, I'm not even referring to the ups and extras of

relationship building—the warm fuzzies, like handwritten notes or invitations to networking events. In this case, I'm just suggesting that if you want business, do the basics—return calls and follow-up. If you say you'll send information or do something for a caller, do it. And, be sure it is in a timely enough manner that you convey you are interested, albeit not desperate, in servicing that customer.

Why start a relationship with a potential customer making that person feel unappreciated or unwanted from the start? You can be sure that his or her money can be spent with your competition. Mine was!

So the next time you get a call or email from a prospect and the golf course is calling your name...think twice. How long does it take to flash a quick email or make a phone call to at least acknowledge the inquiry and specify a time the next day when you can talk in more detail? Then...do it! Sales will increase most likely, but at the very least, people will not be left with a poor impression of you and the organization!

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