

# *Sales talk*

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**S**ales talk. What is it? It is more than you talking. Sales talk takes two. It is not a monologue. It is a dialogue. It is a customer-centered exchange of information that begins and ends with the customer whose needs must drive the conversation.

You have a sales approach you use consciously or unconsciously every day. How open are you to looking at your sales talk up close? If you are open, these lessons can help you assess yourself, spot your strengths and weaknesses, and change your sales talk. You will tap into your natural skills, leverage your knowledge, and sell more by creating compelling dialogues with your customers.

You are probably thinking, “But I already do all that.” And it is likely that you do. But how are you keeping up with the changes that are occurring everywhere around you—with your customers, your competitors, your markets, and your own organization?

Relying solely on product knowledge or technical expertise doesn’t work in today’s environment. The Internet is a free and convenient source of knowledge, giving customers more information than ever before. Salespeople face a tough business climate in which they need to win all the good deals that are out there. In this environment, products—once the key differentiator—are the equalizer. Instead of talking about products, your role is to communicate a message in which you add value, provide perspective, and show how your features and benefits apply to and satisfy customer needs.

Most salespeople use a model for selling that has been the predominant model for decades. It primarily relies on the old, tried-but-

# *Create a dialogue*

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**I**f you were to ask 100 salespeople you know whether their approach was *customer*-centered or *product*-centered, what would they say? Few, if any, would boast about selling “a box.”

Most salespeople believe that they know their customers’ needs. They believe they are positioning solutions, not products. They believe they are customer-focused. These beliefs are the biggest obstacles keeping them from making the changes they need to make in their Sales talk.

Selling styles run the gamut. There is a sales style continuum. At one end of the continuum is generic product selling, basically a monologue, a “product dump.” At the other end is consultative selling, an interactive *dialogue* that focuses on the specific needs of the customer. 100% on either end is impossible. All salespeople are somewhere in between.

Some salespeople are charismatic sellers who rely on their interpersonal skills and charm. Others are technical experts, substantive in content but weak in customer focus. There are the “killers,” always rushing to the close, often at the expense of the relationship. These characterizations of sales types are extreme, but they set the context for thinking about how salespeople approach sales.

The majority of salespeople today use a combination of approaches. They want to be liked, they want to be credible, they want to close, *and* they want to meet the needs of their customers. But for most salespeople, this amalgamation has resulted in a *quasi-consultative* approach at best. While quasi-consultative salespeople

identify customer needs and are productive, they fall short of what they could accomplish.

Salespeople who are at the consultative end of the continuum create efficient but robust dialogues with their customers that enable them to connect and learn more with each conversation. The dialogues are active, with balanced exchanges between the salesperson and the customer. What they do looks easy and sounds like common sense, but it is far from simple and it is not common practice.

The line between quasi-consultative selling and consultative selling is fine, but if all other factors are basically equal, the line means the difference between winning business or losing to a competitor. It can be the difference between being viewed as a technical specialist and being a trusted advisor. With relatively equal competitors, it is the sales talk of the salesperson or sales team that makes the difference between winning and losing business.

Here are ways you can create a robust dialogue:

***Assess your sales talk:*** How interactive are your sales dialogues? What is your give/get ratio?

***Commit to do something different:*** Ask more probing questions.

***Stop thinking in terms of educating customers:*** Think more about educating yourself about your customers.

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***“Increase your sales dialogue to increase your sales results.”***