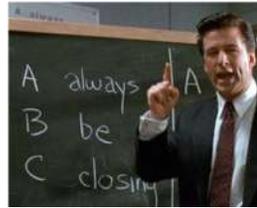


The Meet-and-Greet: Building the Relationship

You and I have both read the same thousand books about how to close each sale, how to increase conversions, how to maximize each transaction.



After reading all this, it isn't surprising that most retailers put all their emphasis onto the close of the sale, almost to the detriment of the opening. They look at each sale as an individual transaction while neglecting the big picture.

Lifetime Value

The big picture is the Lifetime Value of your customer. Do you know what it is? Have you calculated it?



Let's start with this simple question ... How long is somebody typically in the market for what you sell?

For toys we figured about 12-14 years per child. If you sell basketballs it might be the age of 40, but if you sell golf clubs it could be 70 or 80.

Now multiply that times the amount your average customer spends each year.

When you look at a customer through that lens it changes your approach. It isn't a transaction you're conducting. It is a relationship you're building.

Long-term relationships never start with, "Can I help you?"

Making a First Impression

It is far easier to close a sale if you first open it properly.

To build that long-term relationship with your customer, you need to make a good first impression. It sets the stage for the rest of the relationship.



It starts with your website and phone-answering skills. That's where people first begin to interact with your business.



Look at your website. Does it create a positive impression of your store? Does it send the signal that you are a place worth visiting? Does it look inviting and friendly?

If not, change it.

Listen to the way your team answers the phone. Do you have a script? Are they following it? Are they smiling when they talk? Are they asking questions, listening, and repeating things back?



If not, it is time to do some more training.



Look at your front door. Is your store sign readable from the road? Are your hours posted visible to the passerby? Do you have an "Open" sign that is obvious? Do people know what kind of business you are?

These are all the minimum expectations customers have of your front door. Anything less and you're making a poor first impression.

You can boost that impression with a few simple tricks such as making extra sure your front area is the cleanest sidewalk, curb, landscape, driveway, parking lot in town. If parking is a problem, you could offer valet parking during your peak hours. Having an open door or a doorman can also raise the bar.



All of these things seem minor, but as they say, you only get one chance to make a first impression.

Make the best one you can.

The Greeting

Now the customer is walking through your door. Her expectation is that someone will greet her with a sincere, "Hello." Her fear, on the other hand, is that a salesperson will pounce on her immediately and not leave her side.



If you are that store with the pouncing salespeople, you have a whole slew of people who won't ever shop your store including most men and all introverts. They aren't ready for that kind of interaction.



The best way to up your game in greeting customers is to use the approach taught by Bob Phibbs, aka The Retail Doctor. He says you should grab a prop in your hand (such as a clipboard), walk up to the customer, and say ...

"Hello. Thanks for coming in today. Take a look around. I'll be back in a bit to check on you."

This approach gives the customer what she wants—a sincere greeting—while also giving her space to breath and chance to take in her surroundings.

Those customers who are afraid of the pounce will appreciate this approach. Those who have questions and are ready to ask will ask right away anyway. (You earn double points with them because they perceive you have dropped a very important task just to spend some time with them.)

You can raise the bar even farther by offering to hang up their coat if you're in a cold-weather climate, or offer them a beverage if your store is one people visit for long periods of time.



The Approach

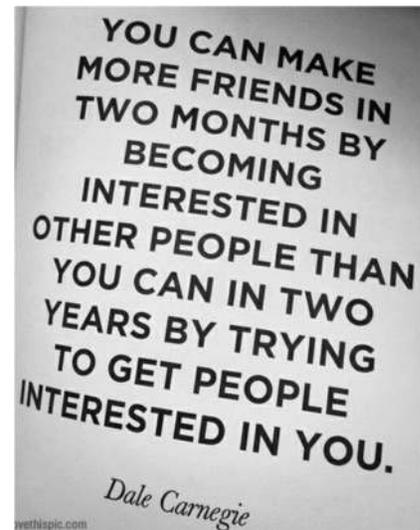
Once you circle back around to the customer, the courtship dance begins. Too often we start too strong here, too. We get right into the shopping mode by asking what they need, why they came, etc.



It is all about relationship-building.

The best approach is to get to know the customer first. Get her into a conversation, preferably about something other than the products you sell. Get her talking about her two favorite subjects—herself and her kids.

Look for a point of contact.



A point of contact is anything you can use to start the conversation. It could be an article of clothing such as really cool shoes. It could be the colors of a local school or college. It could be through the children she brought with her. Find the point of contact and make a connection.

The benefit is that this is less pushy which keeps the customer from putting up her defenses. Plus it gives you something to discuss the next time she visits.

Once the conversation gets rolling it will eventually turn to why she came in. If you practice your conversational skills well and ask a lot of open-ended questions, she'll tell you exactly why she came in and what problem she is trying to solve without you having to ask her directly.

That is a new level of trust in the relationship.

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Get Her Name

One critical piece of information you want to get during your conversation and relationship-building is your customer's name. It helps solidify the relationship when you know and call the customer by name.



The easiest way to do this is through conversation. Make the point of contact. Get her talking about herself and her kids. Then politely introduce yourself. If you've been attentive and friendly, she will reciprocate.

(Note: if you can't get her name through normal conversation you can always look at her credit card or get it when you sign her up for your email newsletter.)

The Sale

Once she has explained her reason for being in your store, you walk her over to the product she needs (*never point her and let her go on her own*). This gives you time to ask the qualifying questions such as ...



- **"Why are you looking for that particular product?"**
- **"What are you hoping to accomplish?"**
- **"What level of solution do you need?"**



If you own a garden center, for instance, you might ask ...

"How green is your thumb?"

to find out if she is a beginner or advanced gardener.

As she answers these questions, get into the habit of repeating back her answers.

This helps you in three ways:

1. It builds trust because she knows you are listening.
2. It helps you clarify the problem she is trying to solve.
3. It gives you more time to think of the best solutions.



Curate

Once you know the problem, you have to curate the solution. You have to eliminate choices for her. Pick the two or three best solutions—no more than three—and lead her to them.

Always lead with the best solution, regardless of price. Always.

It isn't Good, Better, Best. It is Best, Better, Good.

"Because you said this ... let me show you this ... "



Lead with the best solution because it builds trust. It shows you were listening. It shows you care. That's what friends do.

It is always easier for her to back down to a lesser solution than it is for you to try to upsell her to a better solution. Plus, even if the best solution wasn't in her original budget, she may be willing to adjust the budget for a solution like that.



More importantly, if you sell her a subpar solution when a better solution was available, you'll undermine the trust and the relationship you've been trying to build.

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This will be one of the harder skills for your staff to master, because we tend to sell from our own pocketbooks.

If your frontline staff doesn't have the means to buy these solutions, they'll have a hard

time selling them.

One way to overcome this problem is to remind your team of the Lifetime Value of a customer. The relationship depends heavily on your ability to solve the customer's problem.

Show them how problem-solving leads to trust, trust leads to repeat visits, repeat visits lead to better sales, and better sales lead to higher incomes.

The Long-Term Relationship

Notice that everything here is about the relationship. Your goal with every new customer is not to try to sell him or her as much as possible today but to build the kind of relationship that pays off time and time again.

The Lifetime Value of a Customer should be at the top of the mind of all of your team, and the purpose behind every interaction you have with a customer.



On average, loyal customers are worth up to

10 times

as much as their first purchase.

~Marketing Tech Blog~

Another way to think about it is ...

Every transaction should be about solving the problem well enough to earn the next transaction.

When you take this approach to Meeting and Greeting your customers, you'll build the relationships that pay off for years, even decades.

Remember, the goal is not to maximize this sale, but instead to maximize the long-term relationship. You do it by following these steps.

- **Make a Good First Impression**
- **Find a Point of Contact**
- **Get Her Name**
- **Ask Qualifying Questions**
- **Repeat it Back**
- **Curate the Selection**
- **Build the Relationship**

(Note: for tips on how to better Close the Sale, check out the eBook "ASSUMPTIVE SELLING" in the FREE RESOURCES section of www.PhilsForum.com.)

Phil Wrzesinski is the former owner of Toy House and Baby Too, at one time the largest independent, family-owned toy store in America.

*Toy House was named "One of the 25 Best Independent Stores in America" in the book **RETAIL SUPERSTARS** by famed retail consultant George Whalin (Penguin 2009).*

Phil takes what he has learned in a lifetime of high-level independent retail and helps other indie retailers and small businesses find their success.

*You can learn more about Phil and his programs, including links to other **FREE RESOURCES** at www.PhilsForum.com.*

