

Eight Qualities of a Professional Salesperson

Dr. Tony Alessandra

In talking to people all over the United States, we have found that the term "salesperson" generates many responses. We seem to hear some of them over and over. A few of the most common are: pushy, high pressure, dishonest, huckster, hard sell...and it deteriorates from there.

The answers are quite different when we ask for a description of a professional salesperson. Then we hear responses that are a big improvement: thorough, honest, friendly, polite, competent and sincere.

The question is, what can you do to develop the qualities of a professional and how do you convey to others that you now possess or are developing those traits? The answer is simple, although not always easy. The first step is knowledge: becoming aware of the qualities of a professional, which is what you are doing as you read this article. The second step is action--making a commitment to apply this knowledge and follow through with your commitment.

No matter how nice a person we are, some of us still need to work on one or more traits, which will help us be more professional. Let's consider the key traits, which will make your contact with a client more conducive to a long-term business relationship.

IMAGE

It has been said that you never get a second chance to overcome a bad first impression. The first few minutes of a relationship are often the most important. People like to be right about how they "size up" others so it takes a lot more work to change a negative first impression to a positive impression in the first place. You will probably agree that those first few moments can often make or break a sales call. Creating a positive impression increases the probability that you and your products will be accepted.

Dress and grooming are only one aspect that forms first impressions (image).

Equally important are voice inflection, posture, personality style and attitude.

During one of our seminars a participant said, "People have to accept me for what I am. I'm not going to change just to make the other guy happy." If being unique and not compromising is more important than making a sale, fine. But that attitude may not be a very profitable one.

We're not suggesting you change who you are. We're assuming, because you're in sales, that you want to be accepted and are willing to work for it (this includes compromise).

YOUR ATTITUDE IS SHOWING

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "People don't seem to see that their opinion of the world is also a confession of character." In other words, if we think this is a miserable world to live in, then we live in a miserable world...and probably make it miserable for others to live in too.

Our attitudes are reflected in everything we do, including relationships with our clients. Our attitudes elicit different responses from our clients, so if we see them as jerks that can be manipulated, their responses will be entirely different than if we see them as fellow business people with whom we have a lot in common.

We can never be truly professional salespeople unless we develop a sincere respect for -- and healthy attitude toward -- our clients. Try thinking of them as valves through which your energy flows rather than as dams (obstacles) who will stop your progress. Only your positive attitude toward them will ensure the mutual trust, which is so vital to doing business successfully.

DEPTH OF KNOWLEDGE

In all sales positions, the company has the obligation to educate you about the specific product you are selling. The company operations manuals will provide you with technical skills and product knowledge. This knowledge however, rarely goes beyond that required to describe competently the product to a client.

We recommend that you set aside time on a regular basis during which you can deepen your knowledge (and hopefully your enthusiasm/love) of your field.

Your responsibility as a professional includes much more than learning elaborate descriptions. If someone were to say to you, "Tell me about the field you are working in," could you give them an interesting, in-depth explanation of how it started and where it is today? Perhaps you think that knowing the history or theory of your industry is not necessary for your day-to-day selling. The fact is that with an increase in knowledge comes an increase in confidence and authority. The result: longer lasting client relationships and more sales.

BREADTH OF KNOWLEDGE

It's also important to develop your ability to discuss a broad spectrum of subjects. Having depth of knowledge in your specific field without knowledge in a wide variety of topics puts an automatic limit on the number of people you can relate to and who in turn can relate to you. This is a serious handicap for a salesperson.

Anything worthwhile takes effort and this includes expanding your conversational horizons. A fast, concise and convenient way to know what's going on in the world is to subscribe to a weekly news magazine which will expose you to science, politics, the arts, international affairs, etc. It is not necessary for you to have an opinion on all the issues, but being informed on them and keeping up to date by scanning a good daily newspaper will give you confidence and expand your conversational effectiveness.

SENSITIVITY

No matter how great your conversational skills may be, your efforts will be completely wasted if you are not sensitive to your clients needs. It is crucial to be aware of your client's "silent messages" which often reveal the real meaning behind the verbal ones.

We recommend that you study body language and try to be empathetic. Observe

what people do with their bodies in different situations. Put yourself in their shoes so that you can be open to what's happening with them, but do it intellectually rather than emotionally.

For example, by studying body language and being empathic, you will be able to acknowledge when your client is too busy at the moment (foot tapping), and arrange to come back another time when they are more receptive.

ENTHUSIASM

It is literally impossible to be a top seller in your field without a contagious sense of enthusiasm. To prove this to yourself, try to think of one top salesperson you know or have heard about who does not have a genuine enthusiasm for themselves and their product.

Enthusiasm shows the client that you are sold on the product. Your enthusiasm, good eye contact and your overall sincerity will also tell your client that you're an honest person. This will motivate them to establish or continue a business relationship with you. They will become interested in you as a person. This is what you want, both for yourself and your business.

MATURITY

Maturity is a rather nebulous quality. It combines all the positive character traits we have already mentioned.

One of the things that distinguish a mature person is the ability to recognize the need to do things whether liking them or not. In addition, mature people accept responsibility for their actions. The result is they are willing to admit mistakes and suffer consequences as well as reap rewards.

Maturity means handling disappointments and setbacks without becoming self-destructive. These people know there are times when things won't go right and they know that those times won't last forever.

PROFESSIONALISM

Professionalism is a state of mind and conduct. It is not what you do; it is how you do it. There are many highly paid corporate incompetents as well as many very professional volunteers in every field.

Pride is the sense of satisfaction you have from knowing that you are important, worthwhile, in control of your destiny, and aware of and acting on your potential. Pride will make you stand tall even when surrounded by giants. Professionalism recognizes potential and is, therefore, not stung by small disappointments or undermined by larger ones.

Taking pride in yourself and what you do is the seed from which professionalism grows. It's the natural consequence of developing the other seven traits that we mentioned and vice versa.