

MAKING FRIENDS WITH SELLING



A lot of us who are new to working for ourselves find selling uncomfortable. This is partly because the image of a salesman (and it's usually a man) is not a very positive one – someone slimy, ingenuine, and pushy.

On top of that in some countries like the UK, sales attracts a class prejudice – based on the idea that sales is something that unskilled people do.

But today the phrase “We’re all in sales” has never been more true. As more and more people work freelance, on contract or remotely, we have to sell ourselves into each project.

And in fact sales is a natural part of daily life as Dan Pink writes in his new book *To Sell Is Human*. Dan says we are all regularly engaged in what he calls ‘non-sales selling’. We sell our friends on going to our choice of restaurant, we sell our partner or family on our choice of holiday, we sell our children on doing what’s best for them, we sell motivation to the people we manage. Even flirting is selling!

Sales has changed

So selling is natural in our lives. Business-based selling is just one form of it. And as Dan Pink points out, this kind of selling today is very different from what it was, principally because the buyer is so well informed. Every buyer walks into a car showroom armed with reams of information off the internet – some of which the sales person might not even know! So even if you wanted to, you can’t rely on the ignorance of your customer to win you a sale.

While shopping for a kitchen recently, several of the high street brands tried to tell me the very same lie – that the other brands used thinner cabinets. In addition, one of the most expensive high street brands, Magnet, told me they were more expensive than Ikea because they are better build quality overall. And yet I knew that review sites such as Which? had rated Magnet’s build quality as inferior to Ikea and the cabinets are exactly the same thickness as most of Ikea’s kitchens. This kind of misinformation doesn’t win sales any more – in fact it loses them.

Sales is a conversation

It’s important to end the idea forever that selling is about conning buyers or even persuading someone to buy what you offer when they don’t need it. Instead, think of sales as a conversation first of all to determine if the person can benefit from what you offer and then if they can, to communicate the value it has to them.

Now this requires that you have some confidence in the value you are providing. And thinking about value in the right way is essential for this. Don’t think about what it costs you to deliver your product. And don’t think something like “I’m charging them a lot for what is just an hour of my time / what is essentially just a PDF / a simple app I created”. Think instead about just how much better someone’s life could be if they buy your offer. What if they come to your dating event and meet someone they really like? Or take your gratitude or decluttering course and make a major improvement in their quality of life? How much is that really worth?

Sales is about encouraging a decision

People are surprised when I am marketing a course that if they email me and ask if it’s right for them, I don’t automatically say yes – and sometimes I’ll even give an outright no.

I’m not interesting in mis-selling anyone. I am however interested in putting pressure on people to make up their mind. If they decide no, that’s fine, but I do not want anyone to lie to themselves by thinking “I’ll consider that later” and then going away and forgetting about it.

My biggest bugbear is people who ask, “When are you running it again?”. The problem with this question is that while it sounds like a practical scheduling issue, it’s almost always in reality a way for someone to lie to themselves. I have never once seen someone ask this question and then put the date of my next course in their diary. What they are really asking is, “Can I put off this decision for now and feel OK that I haven’t lost out?”. But they don’t think about the real loss – that they will stay stuck in exactly the same work-life situation for another 6 months or even a year.

So that’s why I use genuinely limited time offers and remind people of the deadlines. And I strongly encourage you to do the same. Making a purchase is often an uncomfortable decision. Think how long you might have deliberated before committing to buy an expensive suit or dress. It’s stressful! Even if you know you really love an expensive piece, it’s stressful to commit to spending the money! But if you know this item is in the sale and may not be there if you come back later, you are forced to decide there and then whether you are going to buy or not.

You owe it to the world to sell!

Ask yourself, “If the person I’m selling to agrees to buy, will his or her life improve?” If you know the answer is yes, you owe it to them to sell as effectively as you possibly can. Because you are helping them by selling to them.

Now go out there and sell!

