

“Can I help you?”

By Better Faster Biz! Editorial Team



Over the last 50 or more years, this has been an opening question used by millions of retail sales people. Initially, perhaps for only a short period, it worked effectively, but gradually, it became less effective.

The reasons for its growing ineffectiveness are myriad but perhaps were part of the reasons why it was effective initially:

- a) There were huge number of sales assistants available in retail shops
- b) There was limited display space in small retail shops of the 1950's and onwards
- c) There was a need for the shop owners to attempt to engage and sell their limited range of goods to the customers
- d) There was a need to provide a level of service to the small flow of customers
- e) The fact that customers had been used to this 'level of service' in the past and therefore customers were willing to respond to attention provided by the sales assistant.

By the early 80's the situation was changing and the style of retail shop, in terms of size, in terms of self-help, in terms of "supermarket" status, meant that this level of service was disappearing, in favour of shelf fillers for the majority of retail. However, for the higher end products, a much more relaxed and service orientated environment was being introduced, although the same question seemed to be in use right through to the 90's and beyond, especially in "high-end" retail, notably fashion.



By the late 80's a revolution was occurring especially in the Ladies fashion industry - organisations like Zara were changing the retail fashion experience. Instead of the customer shopping twice or three times a year for their fashion clothes, and on many occasions not buying and leaving with the statement, "I'll think about it!" - Zara was getting the shopper to visit much more frequently, up to 6 or 8 times a year, and to make decisions much more frequently, because their ranges were that much smaller, turnover was becoming much higher and thus if the lady did not make the decision to purchase on her first visit, the item was highly unlikely to be available on a future visit, even if that was within the same week.

These "changes" brought about by Zara have meant that their customer has learned to accelerate their own buying decisions, by handling their own buying objections - including the "What if I don't buy it now?" Zara shop supervisors are even tasked with spending a certain amount of time on the sales floor during the day to ask the customers, why they returned some clothes to the rack, and what differences in the product would have changed their minds and led to a purchase.

Added to that, the "on-line" revolution that has taken place, has meant that the 'shopper'/the 'buyer' is now more informed about their choices, the prices, and availability, than ever before. These days, the question to "help us" sounds rather hollow, as if the item is not on display, the store probably does not have it. So the shop assistants maintain a role to direct those potential customers who are unfamiliar with the layout of the shop, to the various required locations in the store.

These changes in the retail arena may have little interest for us other than academic, as we are only involved indirectly, as the profile of most of the companies who are in business today, has also changed dramatically in the same time frame.

Many organisations these days make something or at least assemble it for sale, then package and distribute etc. before endeavouring to speed it through the sales channel. Whereas in the past there was perhaps only a sales team, for many people in these remodelled organisations, they have a client or customer facing role, including marketing, customer service, brand management, technical support, etc.

So, for organisations in the large B-2-B marketplace, where does that leave the individuals of the "sales team". Their job is to "SELL" the products and services, after all. They should be making "cold calls", and "warm calls" and "follow up calls" and "sales calls" and "repeat purchase calls" but the very growth in communication tools has actually had the opposite effect for most people involved in sales - it can make it more difficult to get through to the potential buyer. And when one does get through to the buyer, they have wide knowledge from in-depth resources and thus are better informed, and more used to negotiating etc.



But, can we more effectively prepare the B-2-B sales executive for the role that they must play in the current market place? In a word, “yes” it is possible. Whilst many organisations have developed “improved sales skills” for their sales teams, the ideas have typically not been understood by many people involved in the sales process and fewer have actually found a positive use for these skills.

The first steps for anyone in a sales environment is to understand that their approach to the buyer *should NOT* be any of the following:

- a) Seeing every buyer as a prospect
- b) Meeting every potential buyer, assuming that they have a “problem”
- c) Spending their time looking for resolution/solution to that assumed “problem”
- d) Spending too much of their time “talking”
- e) Not really listening and being impatient to continue talking
- f) Spending no time to actually “understand” what the buyer has said
- g) Failing to confirm that “understanding” with the buyer
- h) Being far too quick to give an extensive product presentation
- i) And quite possibly ignoring any or all of the “buying” signals.

This could have a different conclusion depending on where we wish this to appear but for the moment I have chosen the following conclusion:

Once the members of the sales team have learned that the foregoing are neither useful, nor effective approaches, then we are able to support them with new ideas which meet the latest buyer demands:

Briefly, we can demonstrate to your sales team that the following will be far more effective in the longer term:

- 1) Gaining an Optimal Mindset
- 2) Effectively Prospecting (including cold calling with integrity)
- 3) Building truly Trusted Relationships (most sales people are not much trusted)
- 4) Leading Positive and Effective Conversations
- 5) Understanding and harnessing Buying Motivators
- 6) Reinforcing Differentiation and Being Unique (even if your product is not)
- 7) Handling Objections (towards Closing)
- 8) Communicating Unique Buying Propositions
- 9) Using a Modern Approach to Negotiations
- 10) Understanding how to Accelerate Buying Decisions



BETTER FASTER BIZ!

These new ways of selling are available now, and can be effectively adopted by your organisation following a development programme run by Better Faster Biz!

Want to know more? Email to contact@better-faster-biz.com