



**MORE Powerful Marketing Minutes**  
50 New Ways to Develop Market Leadership

## **Book Excerpt**

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Consultative Selling Traits**

In today's markets, customers are looking to sales people to provide advice, guidance, and information about the organisation's products and services.

As a result, sales people and sales managers need to take a longer-term perspective of the sales cycle so that the selling process develops customer loyalty and enhances customer relationships.

Sales people today have to be advisors, counsellors, problem solvers, and consultants. Consultative selling combines the sales person's personality traits and selling skills with their interpersonal and relationship building skills. This attractive package increases the probability that customers will want to buy from this person, and reduces the amount of time that sales people spend with those less likely to buy. As mentioned in *Succeeding in Sales*, customers also have to believe that the sales person (and the organisation behind them) is honest, trustworthy, knowledgeable, professional and reliable.

In other words, the sales person needs to become a resource for the customer – a resource that can be relied upon, and called upon, whenever the customer needs information, help, guidance, advice, or simply mere confirmation that they are doing the right thing.

The key traits for becoming successful in consultative selling include:

1. **Belief** – It is not good enough just to believe that your products or services are the best, or the best suited, for a particular prospect or customer. The consultative sales person has to be willing to personally recommend a solution to the customer's specific needs, wants, or desires. And they have to stick by their recommendation. From the customer's perspective, they are dealing with the individual first, and the organisation second. Hence, they are looking for clues that the sales person truly believes in the recommended solution and are willing to put their credibility on the line for it.

2. **Listening** – God gave us two ears and one mouth, and a successful sales person should use these in that proportion.’ In other words, a good consultative selling person will listen to the customer twice as much as they talk. You cannot give good advice if you have not asked the right questions, listened fully to the responses to those questions, and conducted the proper follow-up questioning that gets to the depth of the customer’s particular situation.

3. **Responsibility** – One of the first things I learned in my first job out of college was “If it touches you, it’s your responsibility.” Customers want partners in developing unique solutions for each situation who will take personal ownership in ensuring that their end of the transaction is delivered fully as promised. Order-takers fill out sales forms and submit these into the organisation for someone else to fulfil. Consultative sales people close deals with customers and then monitor (or become involved in) the fulfilment process so that all promises made to the customer are fulfilled 100 per cent of the time, on time.

4. **Understanding the buying process** – A good consultative sales person understands that while they are going through their own selling process, their prospect is going through their own buying process. Hence, it is critical to understand what role or roles the prospect is playing (initiator, influencer, decider, buyer, user), and who the other players in the buying process might be. Each of these roles is likely to have different buying criteria, and thus the consultative selling person must be able to identify all the criteria and all the people involved in the buying decision making process.

5. **Understanding the customer’s objective** – Not just the ‘big’ objective being sought, but also the objective of each and every meeting or phone call. Knowing where the customer is in the buying cycle (information search, short listing, evaluating, deciding, purchasing) allows the consultative sales person to focus on the customer’s specific needs at each point of contact, and also to avoid the mistake of trying to close the sale at the wrong time.

6. **Understanding the customer’s prior experiences** – With your organisation, with competitor products, with yourself. These experiences form the foundation for how the customer views this series of interactions.

7. **Helping** – In consultative selling, we are aiming to help solve the problems of others, or to help them capture opportunities available to them. A good consultative selling person will have a strong desire to help others. He or she will be focused on the customer’s situation, and in developing solutions that are tailored for that person or organisation. The focus will be on the customer, not on one’s own products or services.

8. **Creativity** – Particularly in problem solving and developing unique solutions to each situation. Creativity differentiates the successful sales person from all others.

**9. Being a value-adder** – By delivering information, offering guidance, providing reassurance, being a sounding board, and in all other aspects of the relationship with the customer. There is no ‘beyond the call of duty’ in consultative selling. It is your duty to ensure that both you and the organisation that you represent meet all needs of the customer. Nothing is ‘outside the scope’ of the consultative sales person’s job description. If you bring value to the prospect/customer, particularly value that will help them translate this into additional business or profits for themselves, then you are providing a winning service.

**10. Making the customer a winner** – Ensuring that the customer wins, at least in their mind. Your success comes in winning an order or, hopefully, in developing a customer for life. Understanding the buying process, and the customer’s objectives (points 4 and 5 above), will allow the consultative sales person to also understand how the customer will determine and evaluate victory. Help them achieve this ‘victory’ and the sale will be yours.

As before, these ten traits are not the be all and end all of successful consultative selling – but they are a good place to start.

Good luck, and good selling.

**KEY POINT:**

Sales people today have to be advisors, counsellors, problem solvers, and consultants.

**TAKING ACTION:**

What can you do on a regular basis to upgrade your selling skills?

Are your sales people ready and willing to put their own reputations on the line when recommending your products and services? Why or why not?

How well do you understand the buying process of your prospects and customers? What steps are needed to make improvements in this area?

Where can the selling process (which is the buying process from the customer’s perspective) add value to the customer? Are you placing enough emphasis and resources in this area?

*This Chapter is excerpted from MORE Powerful Marketing Minutes by Steven Howard.*

**The Author**

*Steven Howard is a Melbourne-based marketing consultant, author, conference speaker, and Non-Executive Director in both the profit and non-profit fields.*

*Visit his web site, [www.howard-marketing.com](http://www.howard-marketing.com) for valuable information and links on marketing, customer retention, branding, and corporate image management or*

*to sign up for his free weekly newsletter The Monday Morning Marketing Memo and his marketing blog.*

*He is a positioning specialist, whose 30-year marketing and sales career in Asia and Australia has covered a wide variety of fields, ranging from consumer electronics to publishing and from a national airline to personal financial products.*

*He is President of Howard Marketing Services, which provides consultancy and project management services in the areas of Marketing Management, Product Development, Positioning Strategies, Customer Retention Strategies, New Product Launches, Event Management and Brand Management.*

*He consults on a regular basis to companies in the financial services, industrial products, consumer products, restaurants, petroleum, publishing and hospitality fields.*

### **Contact details**

**Phone:** (61-3) 5428-1388

**Fax:** (61-3) 5428-1399

**E-mail:** [steven@howard-marketing.com](mailto:steven@howard-marketing.com)

**Website:** <http://www.howard-marketing.com>

**Blog:** <http://www.howard-marketing.com/marketingblog>

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