

PAINTING the big picture

A kinder, gentler breed of sales professionals



In the fall of 1992, Alec Baldwin changed the face of sales. In the movie *Glengarry Glen Ross*, Baldwin portrayed Blake, a hard-hitting salesperson sent to turn around a group of failing reps. Baldwin's portrayal formed an archetype of success that salespeople are being held up to even today. This classic quote from the movie sums it up best, "You want to know what it takes to sell real estate? It takes *brass balls* to sell real estate."

This attitude is so pervasive. Sales managers don't want nice guys and gals on their teams. They want "aggressive, go-getters." They want people who are "hungry." They want "closers." They want "hunters." I don't know about you, but these don't sound like positive character traits to me. Would you buy from Alec Baldwin? Would you respect him?

When you make a major purchase do you like to be sold, or do you control your buying decision? Do you want to buy from a guy that can sell "ice to Eskimos," or buy from a professional who actually listens to your issues and helps you solve a problem? I would choose the second salesperson. Modern salespeople aren't closers – they're problem solvers.

Customers don't want to be persuaded or cajoled. Actually, the moment they feel a salesperson is trying to persuade, motivate or sell them, they become far less willing to believe whatever they have to say. They tune out. Great sales professionals understand this fact intuitively. Their goal is *not* to persuade, but to *reinforce* the value of their service and how it solves problems.


Reinforcing value is the mantra of the modern salesperson. Before a customer ever calls a salesperson, they do research online. Customers today are extremely well-educated, and they aren't looking to be sold. When they call a salesperson, they expect to have a meaningful business conversation. They want to clearly understand

how the product or service works. Why it works. Who else it has helped, and how they overcame their challenges. What is the best practice for buying and implementing the product, and what are the risks and benefits. They expect the salesperson to answer all of these questions and more.

The interesting twist of customers today is they don't expect to meet salespeople face-to-face to make a decision. Customers are skeptical. They aren't buying based on the relationships they have with salespeople, they are buying products and services that help them grow their business. Salespeople are adapting to this new reality, and learning how to communicate value without having personal relationships. This is a new skill set for the modern salesperson, because they have to build trust and demonstrate value from arms length. This requires salespeople to have deep integrity, superior communication skills, deep product knowledge and a commitment to help their customers. They have to embrace all of the tools at their means in order to serve a very busy, very skeptical customer that is intolerant of persuasion and coercion.

To live up to their customer's expectations, salespeople are sponges of knowledge. They learn from their organizations, their colleagues, their customers and on

their own. And they distill all of this knowledge, and translate it into a language that is easy and meaningful for their customers. I would describe great salespeople as painters. They paint pictures in their customer's minds of how the solution solves their problems. They apply their knowledge in a way that makes their products and services tangible for their customers. Their paintings help customers buy.

The sales archetype Alec Baldwin portrayed in *Glengarry Glen Ross* does not work. He bullies his customers, he bullies his colleagues and he wins at the expense of others. That is the exact opposite of modern salespeople. They aren't bullies. They are problem solvers, and amazing ones at that. I am in awe of how great sales reps are able to connect with their customers, and the commitment they have to help them succeed. That is the type of a salesperson I want to work with, and the one that I would be happy to buy from. 

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