



Target Selling Insights Handling and Solving Problems

Handling and Solving Problems

The identification of and evaluation of alternative solutions and the selection of the best option(s) for their resolution.

Why is this skill important?

Problem solving is at the very root of professional selling in today's very competitive market place. We define problem solving as the identification of and evaluation of alternative solutions and the selection of the best option(s) for their resolution. In today's world of professional selling we are first and foremost problem solvers. Today's best salespeople are NOT in the business of pushing price or pitching product.

1. Using problem-solving as a sales tool is first and foremost a mindset. In today's world of selling the best, most effective, and best paid salespeople are problem solvers. They are not pitch people, data dumpers, or closers.
2. Today's best and most effective salespeople are problem solvers who see themselves as business partners/helpers for their customers.
3. You need to listen as intelligently and capably as you can. However, we need first to learn how to ask the right questions, because those questions will allow our prospect to tell us what their biggest problems are. We need to develop an ability to ask what we call agitation questions, not pure situation questions. Not like, "how many outlets do you have" but questions like "what are some of the biggest challenges you have in your 32 outlets?" You should already know how many outlets these people have before you ever make your sales presentation.
4. You need to know how to apply your product in order to solve problems. There is a big difference between a data dump and presenting a product by showing how to apply your it in such a way that it solves your prospect's problems. The bigger the problems, the bigger your opportunities.

The best thing you can do is to make sure you make your presentation in such a way that you break it up into two phases, completed at two meetings with your prospect. In other words, you meet your prospect and qualify the prospect in order to determine specifically what their problems are. Then, you make an appointment to come back later when you have had an opportunity to think through the best alternative solutions to their problems. Only at the second meeting do you really make recommendations about solutions that are appropriate to your customers' situations.

There is an excellent five-step problem solving process that includes the following steps:

1. State the problem, as you understand it.
2. Get feedback, ensuring that you understood the customer's problem accurately.
3. Apply your solution by recommending certain products or services that are relevant to the customer's problem(s).
4. Involve the customer and ask feedback questions about the solutions you have developed.
5. Confirm understanding and agreement that the problem is solved by the solutions you have recommended.

There are ways that you can get better at problem-solving but you have to be willing to work at it. As you can see, the problem-solving involves a variety of skills, ranging from qualifying your prospect well to listening and probing for information and knowing your product and service line well enough to apply the most appropriate solutions.

What are skills associated with Handling and Solving Problems?

Someone who has mastered skills associated with Handling and Solving Problems:

- Sees him or herself as a partner or collaborator with his or her prospects.
- Approaches sales as helping his or her customers solve issues that are problems for them.
- Invests in the process of gathering extensive information from his or her prospects about what, when, why, and how they want to buy.
- Takes time to reflect on information he or she has been given in order to apply the most appropriate solutions to his or her prospect's problems.
- Asks for feedback and refines solutions he or she has recommended until the prospect is truly satisfied with the solutions.

How do you develop your own skills in Handling and Solving Problems?

- Don't push anything too quickly—as long as your prospect isn't pressing you for an immediate solution. Give yourself time to think carefully and consider the prospect's problem in a little more detail.
- If you are dealing with a strange or difficult problem with your customer, you may want to consider having someone else who is a better problem solver go with you on your second customer visit—the one where you recommend solutions.
- Before you go about solving your prospect's problems or biggest difficulties, you should issue what we call a summary statement at the end of your qualification step. Basically, you say something like this, "based upon what you are telling me, your biggest problem is this and you would like to solve it in this way. Is that correct?"

- Once you have stated the problem as you understood it, get feedback from the prospect that your understanding is, in fact, correct and that you have interpreted it the way that they articulated it and meant it.
- The best way to present a solution or solutions is to RECOMMEND them. Use the word RECOMMEND—as in, "I recommend that you consider the 679BD model, and that you add the F upgrade package to give you additional functionality."
- Make sure that you make recommendations for solution(s) in terms that are meaningful, important, and beneficial to the prospect.
- Position yourself one notch above your competition.
- Continue to position yourself as an expert whom your customers can trust. With trust, you sell value; without trust, you only sell price.
- As you have throughout the sales process, present yourself as someone who has a burning desire to serve customers well and solve their problems.
- Continue to make the customer feel important, not stupid. Any problem they have is important to them.
- Pay special attention to small details and take those details out of the hands of the customer. Force yourself to handle the details, and you will get good at it.
- Involve the customer in the particular application that you recommend—whether that is picking the product up, experiencing the product, having them push buttons, or sit in a sofa if you are in the furniture business, or drive a car—the list is endless. Involve the customer in the way you are recommending that you and your company solve their problem.
- Ask feedback questions, such as, "How does it look so far?" "Does this look like it may be a solution to your problem?" "Does this look as if this might work for you?" As long as you are getting positive feedback, you know that the solution you are recommending is correct.
- At any point in time when you ask a feedback question and you get a neutral or negative response, stop, because what that means is that the problem solution that you are applying or recommending is off target!
- Make sure that you confirm whatever understanding you reach and that you get full agreement that the problem is solved.

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Activities

Activity 1: Changing Your Mindset

The major point of this lesson has been to look at sales as a process of understanding, handling, and solving problems in collaboration with your customers or prospects.

1. How is this mentality different from the way you have been working?
2. Up to this point, what has your attitude about selling been? How did you approach your customer?
3. Does this collaborative approach seem like a good one to you? Do you think you can make it work for yourself? Why or why not?

Activity 2: Applying What You Know

Make a list of three recent customers to whom you successfully sold a product or service. With what you learned in this lesson in mind, write your thoughts about EACH customer—now that you've been through the sales process with each one:

1. What do you remember about the customer's situation? See if you can phrase the customer's needs in a problem statement—such as, "The problem as I saw it was that the customer's motor pool wasn't big enough for the volume of business at peak season, but is too big during slow seasons."

- 2. What are three to five key statements that the prospect or customer made about his or her problem situation? Things like, "I am frustrated and reaching the end of my tether," "I've got a budget of \$60,000 and two weeks to fix the problem," "I'm scared of committing too many resources here when I need them elsewhere." Note anything that tells you something about your customer's mindset.
- 3. Write down what solution you recommended for each customer.
- 4. Based on what you wrote above, see if you can come up with at least one more possible solution that would have worked to solve each customer's problem.

Activity 3: Lessons Learned

What are the three most valuable things you feel you learned in this lesson?

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

What are three things you think you are already good at related to Handling and Solving problems?

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

What are five concrete action steps that you can take toward being a better problem solver for your prospects and customers?

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

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